



Wheathampstead History Society

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Latest news

- **Photographs of Germany in the Great War** – an exhibition of photos by Käthe Buchler will be at the University of Hertfordshire Galleries from 21 March to 5 May.
- The Hertfordshire Association for Local History will meet on 19 May at Tewin Memorial Hall. There will be short talks in the morning, then lunch, the AGM, and the **Lionel Munby Memorial Lecture** which is about ritual and folklore in the British Isles.
- Next meeting: Wednesday 18 April. After the AGM, Philp Sheail will give a talk about **The 3rd Earl Cowper's Grand Tour: 1756 – 1760**. The Cowpers owned Panshanger and large areas of land around Wheathampstead. For details, please see our website.

Notes and Queries



In the early 1900s, Wheathampstead was a largely nonconformist village while the local board school, St

Helen's, was a Church of England school. The 1902 Education Act abolished school boards and transferred their duties to the new local education authorities. As a result, church schools received public funds for the first time. This enraged nonconformists and other radicals who objected to the idea that they should contribute to the upkeep of Anglican schools. The National Passive Resistance Committee was set up and encouraged people who disagreed with the new Act to refuse to pay the part of the rates that was spent on church schools.

Wheathampstead nonconformists were enthusiastic "Passive Resisters". By November 1904, 70 children had been withdrawn from religious education lessons at St Helen's and a group of notable members of the community withheld a portion of their rates. Prominent among these was the Congregational minister, Reverend E. C. Morgan, who also withdrew his son from school. Other local Resisters included shopkeeper F. C. Wootton, O. N. Odell, Julian Pearce, Mrs. Taylor, Mrs. Roberts and Ann Salina Pearson.

Goods were seized from those who would not pay the rate and local auctions were held to sell the seized items. In many cases, the auctioneer was sympathetic and tried to rig the auction so that the owners could buy back their property. The auctioneer would not knock down the items until the sum reached matched the sum needed to pay the debt. The auctions were lively affairs with supporters of the Passive Resisters being heckled by supporters of the church school. Shouts from the floor included "You should send your kids to school if you object". The auctioneer replied "They object against the principles of the rate". Cries of "yes" rang out from supporters.

The auctions became regular events and at the end of each auction the Reverend Morgan, the self-appointed leader, would propose a vote of thanks. He said that no one regretted more than he that such a course had to be undertaken, but they could not conscientiously pay for the rate collected for the school. Not only did they protest against the Education Rate in that locality, but it was also for the notorious way in which the Education Act was carried out in Wheathampstead and which aroused local scandals. The nonconformists were going to persist until they had driven clerics out of education once and for all. At the end of the meetings a copy of the obnoxious Act was burnt amidst the cheers of the audience.

Source: Herts Advertiser 1905
Terry Pankhurst