



## News and events

- Our **next meeting** will be on **Wednesday 21 May** when Mark Pardoe will talk about **“The picture postcard; an eyewitness to history”**.
- The **HALH Spring Meeting** will be on **Saturday 17 May** at the Dagnall Street Baptist Church in St Albans. The main speaker is Dr John Morewood, President of the Arc and Arc, whose subject is **St Albans and Western Hertfordshire in the seventeenth-century: civil wars – trials and tribulations**. Free for HALH members, £2 for visitors. Details at [www.halh.org.uk/spring-meeting.html](http://www.halh.org.uk/spring-meeting.html)

## Stuart Bishop

The frontage of The Reading Rooms has become a familiar sight in the High Street but this early 19<sup>th</sup> century listed building has had many different occupants. It seems likely that it was a carpenter's shop in its early years and we know that it was a Reading Room set up by the Church of England Temperance Society from 1883 to early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Bulletin 12, July 2018) when young Henry Riddell opened his saddlery. Next came a harness maker. From the start of the First World War to the late 1940s, it was a draper's, then a hardware shop. In 1964, Stuart Bishop opened his men's outfitters, an establishment that is fondly remembered by many Wheathampstead residents today.



Stuart was born in 1919 in Tottenham. At the end of the Second World War, he was married and working for his uncle who owned a large shop in North London selling ladies', gents' and children's clothing and also offering a tailoring service. Wanting to start his own retail business, Stuart began to look for suitable premises and, in his own words “came across Wheathampstead ...and with the sheer beauty of what I saw, I decided there and then that this was the place for me, irrespective of its business potential”.

Having moved to Harpenden with his wife Monica, he opened a small outfitters shop in rented premises at 20 High Street Wheathampstead in 1962 but found the village to be a

very “countrified and close-knit society” where he was not welcomed. However, by pulling out the shop's awning when it rained, he encouraged people to shelter under it where he could engage them in conversation. They would look in the shop window, come inside, and see what was on offer. He also introduced a laundry and dry-cleaning service and the business began to grow.

After barely two years, he was told that Barclays Bank needed the premises as their manager's office. Fortunately, Mr Bentley, the ironmonger at 36 High Street, wanted to give up his business and, after some difficulty, Stuart bought the premises with a mortgage from Barclays. The building was in a dreadfully neglected condition with damp, rotten timbers, woodworm and dry rot which he treated with chemicals from Murphy's with whom he had a contract to supply all their industrial overalls.

The new shop flourished, offering men's and boys' clothing, school uniforms, a tailoring service, dry cleaning, shoe repair and dress hire, as well as acting as agent for coal orders. From the viewpoint of one small boy in the 1970s, it was “a vast clothes shop over two floors ... packed to the rafters with socks and clothes from underwear to fitted suits”. Queenie East from The Folly worked there for 19 years “with never a cross word spoken”.

All went well until parking restrictions were introduced in the High Street. Custom collapsed and Stuart very nearly went out of business. To survive, he opened an additional shop in Southdown in 1967.

Mr Stuart, as he was known, was a founder member of the Horticultural Society, donated a sports trophy to Wheathampstead School for the best all-rounder, and attended most village functions. He retired in 1988.

Stuart died on 6 June 2019 soon after his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday; his mother had lived to the age of 103.