

# **THE HAREFIELD HERALD**



## **AUTUMN 2014**

The occasional Magazine of  
**Harefield History Society**

4th Issue

SINCERE THANKS TO ALL OUR SPONSORS FOR THEIR  
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36 High Street, Harefield UB9 6BU  
Tel: (01895) 822297

web: [mylocalfuneraldirector.co.uk](http://mylocalfuneraldirector.co.uk)

e-mail:  
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# EDITORIAL



**WELCOME** to the fourth edition of 'The Harefield Herald' and once again I hope you will find it interesting and enjoyable. If you do not then the remedy is in your hands – just write me a piece for inclusion in number five. It is a forum for members to air their views.

We have had quite an active year with visits to Broadcasting House, both new and old, to Bentley Priory and recently to Rochester in Kent. All these outings are featured in this edition and my sincere thanks go to the contributors for their articles; not to forget Will Spencer for his beautiful sketches of some of the places. It very much makes this magazine YOUR MAGAZINE and that was indeed my original intention.

Once again Rosemary Causton has done a truly excellent job in producing the journal, forever patient when I ask for something to be changed, added or deleted and quite honestly without her input we would not have it. It does get fairly widely circulated so many people can see that we are very active in keeping history alive in Harefield. Thanks also to our sponsors for their continuing support.

I looked up my closing remarks in the first editorial in 2011 and I quoted Abraham Lincoln's annual message to Congress in 1862. He said "**We cannot escape history**" It is still the aim of this Society that we do not.

**Gordon Isaacs**





## SOCIETY OUTING TO BENTLEY PRIORY

*by Susan Hewlett*

Not daunted by a very wet February afternoon a party, from the Harefield History Society, visited the RAF Bentley Priory Museum. We entered via Sir John Soane's grand entrance hall decorated for Frederick Gordon when he bought the house in 1881 as a hotel. The

house we see today reflects Soane's Georgian design full of geometrical aesthetics and symmetry. Part of the ground floor and basement, previously called the "Dungeons" in RAF speak, are all that the "Museum" has been allowed to use for that purpose, but it came as part of a Planning Agreement with the new owners who have been building on the surrounding parkland. The site has a long history of change, being built and re-built as different owners took Bentley Priory on. A Priory did exist, but the second owner, James Duberly, knocked it down.

Members were given an informative and lengthy talk about the house and its occupants before the tour proper began. That gave time for us to study the hall and admire the patterned ceilings, which were uncovered during the renovation, and were given the history of the striking Spitfire and Hurricane windows which have been installed. A "multi-media presentation" in a



*The Ops Room*

room designed for that purpose, described Sir Hugh Dowding's role and the part he played in the Battle of Britain using modern advances in radar and especially his system of getting intelligence and information to the Groups he devised that would then signal

the various wings to take to the skies. This was then shared with those working in the flight control room and is a tribute to the behind-the-scenes staff especially the women staff.

We admired the rotunda where the Olds' portraits are hung which pay tribute to various airmen and where possible have their photographs and medals alongside. The other RAF room – the Ballroom – featured a sky-scape with its ceiling complete with clouds, contrails and very delicately painted Spitfires, Hurricanes, Heinkels and ME109s. This room and the rooms which were Queen Adelaide's bed and drawing room both faced south with a wonderful view over the parkland and Wembley beyond. On a clear day, not on this day, the South Downs are visible in the distance. Queen

Adelaide is remembered in another room, sumptuously decorated in rich reds and real gold leaf and overlooks the Spitfire and Hurricane on the front lawn. Our knowledgeable guide also touched on the issue of fire damage and restoration in the staircase area. This had been lit from a glass dome above and had been virtually destroyed by fire when the rest of the building was nearing completion. Here too on display was the Battle of Britain lace which is a stunning piece of work made by women at a time when there was no longer such a demand for parachutes at the end of the war. The material was used to make identical laces for display at several different RAF bases in the UK and overseas and one was especially made for the monarch.



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The visit was concluded with thanks all round, to Gordon for his organisation, and to the volunteer museum staff for sharing their knowledge of this famous site. Several of us succumbed to the temptations of the shop. The museum has only just opened to the public and we wish it and its staff every success.



## History Society Award Scheme for HAREFIELD ACADEMY



The fourth **'Keeping History Alive'** Award was won this year by Ocean Gregory and the presentation took place at the Academy's Annual presentation Evening in January. The picture below shows her with the award, standing between the chairman and Helen Walls, Head of History.



**Ocean's citation:** "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?"

History depicts the events of how the world came to be in existence, it gives us explanations to events from the past and can be used to understand the present day.

The winner of this award demonstrates consistent hard work and high level responses which show her true ability for the study of

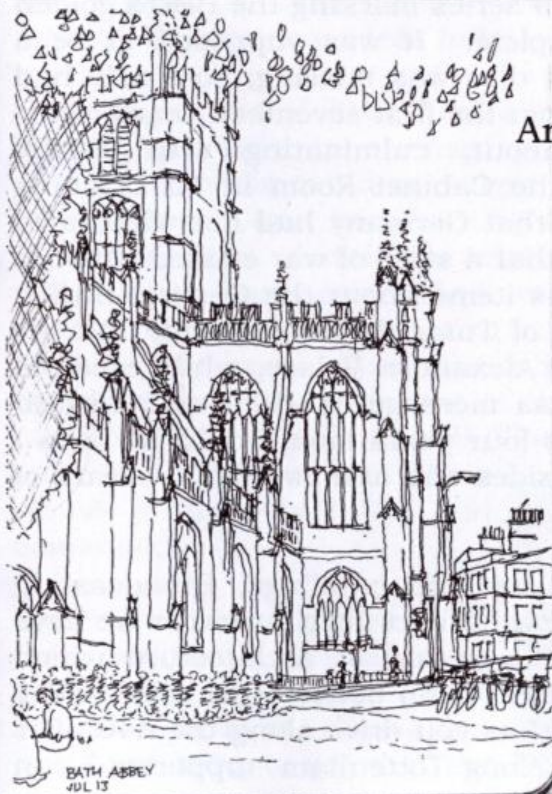
History. She challenges, questions and inquires to ensure that she has a thorough and deep understanding of all topics. She has always had a passion for history and where others have struggled she has found her ability to write with flare and confidence. She retains information and uses it to challenge viewpoints put forward in class.

She is a worthy winner of the award.

We are happy to continue our association with the Academy and glad that it is producing such meritorious winners.

Such a one is Bobby Moore, who won the award in 2013. I am delighted to note that he has won a place at the Queen Mary University to read modern and contemporary history. Good luck to him and it is a great pleasure to think we may have played some small part in influencing his choice of subjects.

Well done Bobby.



Another page from

the Sketch Book of

**Will Spencer**

A welcome reminder

of our trip to

**BATH in 2013**



# Reflections of a trip to the BBC -

by Lee Hermitage



## VISITING AUNTIE

Thinking about it, I've almost certainly got the BBC to thank for sparking my interest in history. I would have been about six years old when my Dad came home one day with a bundle of records. One of them, an old heavy vinyl issue, had a shiny gold cover, with "BBC 1922 - 1972" printed along the top, and a giant coat of arms beaming out concentric circles with the motto "*Nation Shall Speak Peace Unto Nation*" underneath it. The record (compiled from a Radio 4 series marking the BBC's golden anniversary) wasn't even complete. It was supposed to be a double album, but the second disc was missing, so I only had material covering the period from the first seventeen years of the BBC's existence to learn about, culminating with Neville Chamberlain telling us from the Cabinet Room in 10 Downing Street on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939 that Germany had not withdrawn their troops from Poland, and that a state of war existed between us. But I was hooked by news items about the General Strike, the rise of Hitler, the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb, and the first television broadcast from Alexandra Palace, while excerpts from George V's first Christmas message in 1932 and Edward VIII's abdication speech barely four years later would be lines I can still recite to this day as sides one and two of "50 Years of Broadcasting" got played to death.

In an area surrounded by many fine buildings, Broadcasting House is one of a number of beautiful art deco survivors we have in and around London. It's a period of architecture which fascinates me. To my mind, there is no better sight than seeing the Hoover Building illuminated as you drive along the A40 after dark, while despite being a lifelong Tottenham supporter I can



only say that the fantastic preservation of the facades of the two mid-1930s stands at Arsenal's old Highbury Stadium which form the shell of the flats now built on their former ground was a job exceptionally well done. And I've been telling myself for ages that I really MUST get around to pencilling in a trip to Eltham Palace. I would consider myself quite a regular visitor to Broadcasting House. Over the last few years I've been fortunate enough to attend recordings of Radio 4 classics 'Just A Minute' and 'The Now Show' on a number of occasions. Many alterations and renovations have been made to the interior of the building over the last decade in preparation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century extension. I would have loved to have seen the Radio Theatre in its 1930s glory, I'd soon worked out on initial visits that the floor had been raised to the height of the original doorways. It's a shame that some of the friezes and art deco lights which surround the old doors are somewhat obscured, but I guess accessibility issues and modern technology (not to mention health and safety) dictate how the theatre now needs to be laid out.

Towards the end of 2012, I did a tour of BBC Television Centre at White City prior to its closure, and it was obvious that the needs of modern media could no longer be met by a building that was built to merely take broadcasting out of the black-and-white age. Of course, a lot of standard television production has now been moved up to Manchester, but it was incredible to learn of how the state of the art news gathering hub, which is New Broadcasting House, functions. The time when the three main television bulletins each day were one of the public's primary sources of news has long gone, and a 24-7 service which viewers can dip in and out of whenever they please is now expected and demanded.

While the overriding reason for the addition of the new extension is to serve broadcasting in the digital age, it is comforting to see that the



architecture of New Broadcasting House fits in nicely alongside its much older sister. The sweeping curves of its entrance effortlessly complement G. Val Myer's art deco masterpiece. As was mentioned by our excellent tour guides the idea behind its design was that the new building should be regarded as a protecting arm around the old, and in that respect it doesn't disappoint.

There could, perhaps, have been a bit more to see and do on the tour itself. Yes, I guess that the two buildings are first and foremost a functioning workplace for over six thousand people, but surely some sort of small museum could have been incorporated into the redevelopment of the 1930s building? Maybe even just a display area in the Media Café would have helped – after all the BBC has found enough room to put a small shop in there. It was a little disappointing that the only genuinely historic artefact which we saw on the tour was the set of microphones from which George V spoke about 'one of the marvels of modern science' as families up and down the country and beyond digested their Christmas dinner eighty-one years ago. (It was, however, interesting to learn that Rudyard Kipling prepared the initial Christmas Day broadcast – he and the King would pass away within seventy-two hours of each other in January 1936.)

There is little doubt that the BBC is an essential part of life in this country. We can't do without it, it's something we all use one way or another every day. For instance, my radio preferences are Radio 4 for news and a bit of entertainment, Radio 5 if I want to listen to a football match, Radio 2 to hear Tony Blackburn bash out the oldies on 'Pick of The Pops' on a Saturday, and most importantly of a weekday morning Radio London to advise me whether or not I'm going to be stuck in traffic on or around the Western Avenue! During the summer, I upgraded my old mobile phone to an I-phone. The BBC website homepage is set as my homepage, so whenever I use the internet function on the phone, it's the first thing I see. Helen and I aren't massive television watchers, and have never progressed any further than having a



Freeview box rather than Sky attached to the telly. Generally speaking, most of what we watch is BBC, their programming being of a better quality (we only half-jokingly refer to ITV as 'the Council Channel!') and if there's nothing specific we want to watch our rule of thumb is 'there must be something worth looking at on BBC Four', which more often than not there usually is. ITV's strength used to be the diversity of programmes "with accents" produced by the old local area stations and to my mind the gradual phasing out of their regional output over the last twenty years or so, leaving us with programmes which on the whole are pretty cheap and nasty has been a mistake. They're certainly not to my liking anyway. (Indeed, it's quite a refreshing nostalgia trip to see some of the older ITV programmes appear on various other digital channels now, and for the logo of the producing regional company such as Thames, Central, Yorkshire or Granada to flash up at the end of them).

Back in 1926, John Reith fought tooth and nail for the BBC's independence. During the General Strike, Churchill wanted to take control of the airwaves, but Reith would have none of it, and Churchill was left to produce The British Gazette instead to promote the Government's point of view and essential information during the nine day crisis. This no doubt sowed the seeds of their antipathy towards one another which we learnt about during the tour. As the BBC heads towards its centenary, Reith would no doubt have been utterly disgusted by the alleged behaviour of some of its past employees, but would be equally proud that the institution he shaped continues to educate, entertain and inform across the globe.

As for '50 Years of Broadcasting', well, in 1978 my Dad somehow managed to find another copy of it which DID have both discs, and the original worn out record was disposed of. I was finally able to learn how the BBC covered the Second World War and beyond. The closing track on the record is, appropriately enough, taken from the memorial service for John Reith who died in 1971. That second copy of the record also picked up plenty of nicks and scratches during its regular playing over the years, so I 'retired' it

(but still have it), having copied it onto cassette tape towards the end of 1999. Amazingly for such a relatively obscure record, I was able to obtain a further copy of it in near perfect and playable condition a few years ago. In 1997, '75 Years of the BBC' was issued (I have this both on CD and double cassette) to bring the story up to date. Roll on 2022, when I shall no doubt be anxious to obtain the centenary issue.

(P.S. – Is Angela Rippon EVER going to age???)

(Ed's Note: *Just to explain this last remark, - the ageless Angela flounced by us in Broadcasting House looking splendid in a bright pink jacket. - Hence Lee's remark!*)

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# Rochester in Summer Time

by **Chris Emerson**

*Photographs by courtesy of David Mercer*



*High Street*

Rochester is interesting and historic and worthy of more than a one day visit. There are many buildings, famous people, events and interesting places to see, and things to do. It is full of interest and really on our door step. It has history, religion, literature and a maritime tradition on the River Medway. It does deserve a higher place in our heritage. It is well worth a look. However a day was all we had and every moment had to be enjoyed.

It was a beautiful July day and the atmosphere was relaxed. This, of course, was possible because, again, everything was perfectly organised by Gordon. We are so lucky to have Gordon. He takes on the responsibility so that we can be perfectly carefree. Free of all cares and worries. In anticipation of a wonderful day we boarded the luxurious air conditioned coach on Harefield Village Green at 8.30 am. This was a Harefield History Society joint venture with our friends from Denham. We joined

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the commuter traffic on to the M25 and the M20. The journey was uninterrupted and we arrived at a central location that was convenient for the historic main street, Rochester Castle and the cathedral. There is much to see and do within a short distance.

Rochester Cathedral has been a place of Christian worship since 604 AD. In 1088 AD, Bishop Gundolf began building the present cathedral. It was based on the monastic principles of the Benedictine monks. This was the principle of hospitality. The pulpit and screen can be seen from the West Door. Monks gathered seven times a day in the Quire. A regular pattern of services are now presently scheduled each day throughout the year. Daily worship has been central to the life of the cathedral for over fourteen hundred years. Rochester Cathedral is England's second oldest cathedral after Canterbury..



*The Cathedral*



*Interior of the Cathedral*

The glorious Norman architecture of the nave and parts of the crypt make it an inspirational place to visit. The cathedral is blessed with some fine examples of late Gothic styles as well as the magnificent 14<sup>th</sup> century chapter library door.

Rochester Cathedral has a special place in the commemorations for the outbreak of WW1. A program of events is planned from this summer through to 2018.

Rochester Castle is strategically placed astride the London Road in Rochester. It guards an important crossing on the River Medway. This imposing fortress has a complex history of destruction and



*The Castle*

rebuilding. Today it stands as a proud reminder of the history of Rochester along with the cathedral and cobbled streets. Its Norman tower keep of Kentish rag stone was built about 1127 AD by William of Corbeil, the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was with the encouragement of King Henry 1. It consists of three floors above a basement and it stands 113 feet high. In 1215, the castle endured an epic siege by King John. Having first undermined the outer wall, John used the fat of forty pigs to fire a mine under the keep. This brought the southern corner of the castle crashing down. Even so, the defenders held on until they were eventually starved out after resisting for two months. The castle was rebuilt under Henry 2<sup>nd</sup> and Edward 1<sup>st</sup>. The castle remained as a fortress until the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

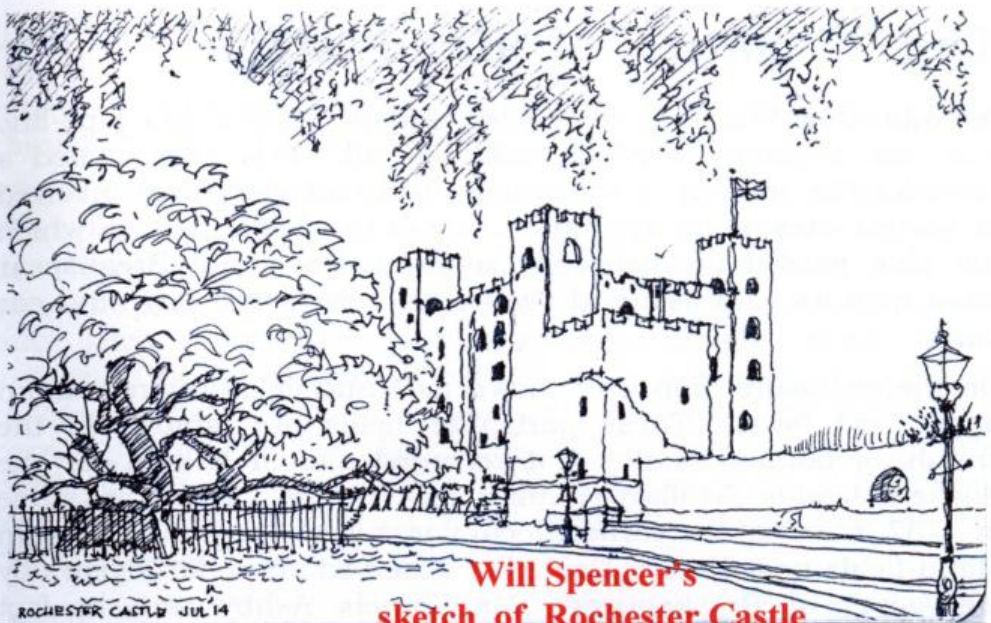


*Interior of the Castle*

One of Rochester's most famous connections is that with Charles Dickens. His family moved to Chatham when he was five years old. After moving from Chatham, he later returned to Gad's Hill in Higham. By then many of his novels were published and read around the world. However he died whilst writing his novel, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." Many of Dickens novels included references to Rochester and the surrounding area, where, today, two festivals are held in his honour. One of these is The Dickensian Christmas Festival.

The afternoon concluded in the tea rooms of the cathedral with the traditional summer afternoon fare, the cream tea. With little effort we made our way to the coach and we arrived back in Harefield with the evening ahead of us. It was a perfect day Gordon. Perfectly organised and brilliantly executed. Thank you, Gordon. This is from all of us who went to Rochester that perfect summer's day.





**Will Spencer's  
sketch of Rochester Castle**

This sketch shows a very ancient **Catalpa tree** in the foreground. This is also known as an Indian Bean tree.

## **The CENTENNIAL Anniversary of the beginning of the Great War in 1914.**

We have been quite active in remembering the fallen and the poppy field we planted alongside the Anzac cemetery proved a significant success. The front cover of this issue is proof positive of that and our thanks go to Denis Hughes who supplied the special poppy seeds and also took the cover photograph. He has also taken many other pictures of the poppies and several are featured in the 2015 Harefield Calendar which will be available to members at our October meeting. We presented jointly with the library a special History Day in August at the library and were treated to a most interesting and illuminating talk on the lead up to the war and its early days by Paul Croft. He will be back again on 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 to talk about Gallipoli on the centenary of the Anzac landings in Turkey. There is also a national movement to lay paving stones in commemoration of all the gallant winners of the Victoria Cross in the Great War and we can expect due reverence to be paid to Robert Ryder and Cecil Kinross, both Harefield born. Remembrance will continue in many forms so do look out for notice of such events.





# The 'treasure' of Maud-fields

**Introduction** You may remember that in 2009 a gas pipe-line was laid between Harefield and Southall. This necessitated a considerable amount of trenching. Archaeologists were involved at several sites along the route. One of the fields through which the pipe passed lay between Bayhurst Wood and Breakspears Road with its southern end against the track into Bayhurst car park.

On the enclosure map it is shown as Maud-fields (there was an upper and lower). These particular fields are famous in the annals of botany as the first recorded site in Britain for the Snake's Head or Fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*). John Blackstone in 1737 in one of the earliest local floras wrote that they grew 'In Maud-fields near Ruislip Common, observed above forty years by Mr Ashby of Breakspears'. Mr Francis Ashby was in fact Blackstone's grandfather. John Blackstone was a London apothecary who had become fascinated by botany and used to spend much time visiting his widowed mother and grandfather at Breakspears. Maud-fields were in the estate of Breakspears and were inherited by John Blackstone from his mother. Presumably this would have been part of the area under the care of the huntsman/gamekeeper, Robert Mossendew, whose memorial is on the outside of Harefield Church.

**'Treasure'** Prior to the gas-pipe trenching, the field was stripped of its top-soil and the opportunity was taken by two metal detectorists to scan the area. Not finding any 'treasure' they were happy to donate their trophies to me. To these were added the few bits I had picked up.

The 'haul' included: four sherds of blue/white decorated pottery and one piece of thick white (all modern) and a single rim of red ware; seven buttons (some with traces of gilt but all modern); a single decorated, copper hinge fitting of unknown date; a single rusty horse shoe; a large nail; and the base of a modern shot gun cartridge.

**Lead** However, perhaps the most interesting finds were



three lead musket balls, five pieces of lead sheet approximately two inches square, and nine small lumps of lead. Both the musket balls and the lead sheets were whitened by lead sulphate through lying so long in the ground, but not the lumps.

One musket ball was of nominal three-quarter inch diameter. The other two were of nominal half-inch diameter (but not exactly the same) and showed the line of casting around the middle. The pieces of sheet lead had clearly been deliberately marked and cut out. Their whitened surface suggested a similar period in the ground. One is tempted to think there is a connection, such as of casting more balls, but this is hardly likely to have been carried out in the field. The lumps of lead were presumably of a different date, but why they were there is a mystery. Unlike iron, lead has only specialised uses such as pipes and musket balls/bird-shot.

**A connection?** Modern shooters of game use shot-guns, firing cartridges full of small pellets, of which a base was found as noted above. Guns originally were large, cumbersome and used in warfare. With the development of lighter models at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century they became suitable for hunting. Muskets fired balls of lead such as those found in Maud-fields. The memorial to Robert Mossendew, who worked for Mr Ashby until 1744, shows him carrying a musket. Although muskets continued in use until the first-half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is tempting to imagine that the musket balls retrieved during the pipe-laying had been fired by him during the course of his work.

**Colin Bowlt**



*Finds from Maud-fields included – musket balls surrounded by pieces of whitened lead sheet (upper centre); buttons – lower centre; copper hinge? (between buttons and horseshoe).*

# **Winter & Spring Programme 2014/2015**

**22<sup>nd</sup> September 2014**

Eileen Bowlt

From Reservoir to Lido!

**27<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

John Buxton

The Development of the Mediaeval Parish Church

**24<sup>th</sup> November 2014**

Nick Hardey

The Three Bs –

Brooklands, Barnes Wallis & the Bouncing Bomb

**26<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

David Wadley

London's Newest Railway

**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2015**

Ian Smales

Irregulars of the British Army

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015**

Keith Piercy

Putting Harefield on the Map

**27<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

Annual General Meeting

Followed by something interesting!



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# HAREFIELD HISTORY SOCIETY

Meetings on the fourth Monday monthly  
from September to April (except December)  
at the Park Lane Village Centre, Harefield,  
commencing at 8pm.

**Chairman:** Gordon Isaacs (01895 825501)

**Secretary:** Lorraine Piercy, (01895 822371)  
Hillside,  
Park Lane,  
Harefield,  
UB9 6HR

**Treasurer:** Janet Williams, (01895 820304)