

# Harefield History Society

## NEWSLETTER No. 1

September 2020

Staying in touch with members and friends of the Harefield History Society around the world.

### The Harefield History Society

The society was formed at a meeting in January 1980 by an enthusiastic group of local Harefield residents. The first chairman was Tim Ashby who lived at Hope Cottage on Church Hill.

It seems that they got off to a flying start because by the time their first newsletter was published (1<sup>st</sup> July) they already had 45 members and had held three meetings, been on two outings and had taken a walk around the village guided by a local photographer, Reg Neil (of whom more later).

They also had a trip to the Abbey at St Albans and the nearby Roman remains scheduled for later that month and a programme of nine meetings already booked for the following season.

The original newsletters ran for over 20 years with several different editors. The last issue that I have found, no.44, appeared the Autumn of 2002.

The newsletters we replaced by the Harefield Herald in 2011 which begs the questions, what happened in the nine years between 2002 and 2011. Were there more newsletters after no.44?

(All the newsletters and Harefield Heralds can be found on the society website).

### Editorial

The idea of reintroducing a newsletter for the Harefield History Society was conceived at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic as a way of letting people know that we still exist and that we remain active notwithstanding the sad fact that we only managed to hold two meetings in 2020 before everything was closed down. In fact, our usual meeting venue at the Village Centre was already out of action at the time of the February meeting due to the library refurbishment and it was thanks to the good offices of our vicar, Martin, that we were able to meet in the Church Hall. Now, we don't even know when or where we will be able to meet again. Nor, for that matter, do we really know how many members will feel able to come even if we are assured that it is safe to do so. We would be very pleased to hear your own opinion on this matter.

Even during the early days of the lock-down when the world seemed to come to stop for so many of us, interest in our local history continued apace. Many little research projects begin with an inquiry through the website. Perhaps a childhood memory of a visit to Harefield or a photograph found in a drawer has led someone to seek us out on the Internet, to send us their story and to ask for help. Some of those stories and the research that followed can be found elsewhere in this and future issues of this newsletter.

If you have a story to tell or a questions to ask, please send it in.

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## The Search for a Great Grandparents Grave

In April 2020 we received the following email from a lady called Eileen:-

*I was born in a prefab at Mount Pleasant ("down the hill") in 1951, where my parents already lived with my brother, moving to Chapel Row (opposite the hospital main entrance) in the mid 1950s. My mum and dad had married at Harefield Church in 1945. My dad worked for over 25 years at the Bell Works until his death in 1973, my mum worked at the hospital.*

*Until I left Harefield in 1970 I rode horses at Breakspear Stables, also at Harefield House next to the Church, attended dance classes at the Hall in the High Street, went to the village school of course, to the fairs and events held on the Common, village cricket, and generally freely roamed the Harefield woods (picking bluebells!) and the local area along with my friends. My brother went to speedway at the area next to Taylor's Meadow and was a boy scout. My dad played in the Bell Works FC and later was a referee.*

*In recent years I have been researching my family history and of course there are several Harefield connections. My great grandfather was the publican at the Fisheries and one of his sons was publican at the Kings Head close to the school. My mother lived at both pubs when a child. Great grandfather and great grandmother are buried in the churchyard, although sadly attempts I made some years ago to identify quite where were unsuccessful.*

In a subsequent message we learned further details of Eileen's Grandparents.

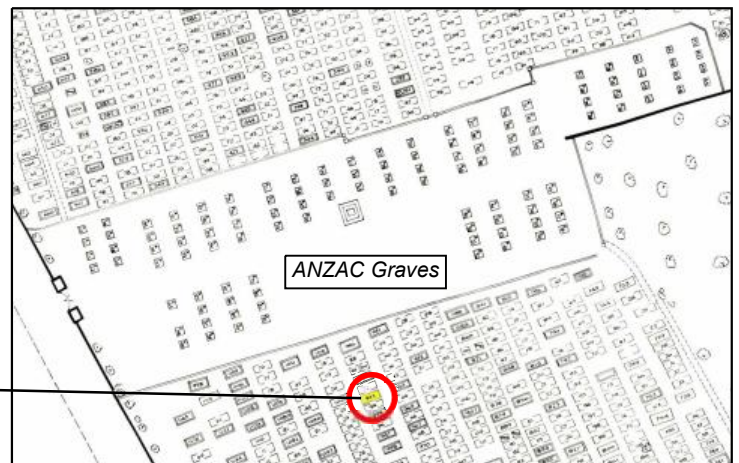
*Great-Grandfather was Oliver Jonathan Webster b. January 1858 d. March 1933 (publican - probably at the Kings Head, exact date not known!). Great-Grandmother was Alice Charlotte Helen Webster nee Heathcote b. 1865 - d. 23 September 1955 at Ravensdene, Belfry Avenue. My dad (d. 1973) would tend the grave at St. Mary's and I remember him telling me it was kerbed. If so there may or may not be a headstone. When I tried to find the grave location in 1990 (by letter to the vicar) I was told that areas of the churchyard were rather unkempt and maybe the grave was underneath overgrowth. I have a suspicion the grave is 'at the back' somewhere, near to the remains of Harefield House, but am unsure why I think this. Any help gratefully received! OJ and Alice had several children so I would think that there was a marked grave, not just a plain burial.*

With what turned out to be naïve optimism I set off one sunny afternoon to search the churchyard for the grave using the information supplied as a guide. After about an hour I realised that this was not going to work.

I would have to try a different tack. I have a photograph of a 1962 plan of the churchyard with all the graves that were then in existence, marked with numbers. I then discovered that Robert our programme manager, has a list of all the burials at St Mary's with the plot number of the grave. Mr and Mrs Webster's grave is in plot 993. All I had to do was find that plot!



The whole churchyard



Even with the map it was tricky to locate.



The Webster's grave is nearest to the camera.



Close-up of the well weathered inscription

## A Dip into the Archives

For many years the History Society had a wooden filing cabinet which stood in the vestibule just inside the sliding doors to the Village Centre. When I joined the society and started looking into the archives for photos of Harefield, I was told that the cabinet only contained documents and that anyway, the key was currently lost but would probably turn up eventually. Just before Christmas 2019, after several efforts over the years to find the key or to obtain a replacement, I was given permission to break the cabinet open. As expected the main contents were indeed documents but I also found a large stash of colour slides, the work of the late Reg Neil. I had already seen some of Reg's slides which were stored in the main archive cabinets in the back room, but the new find nearly trebled the quantity in our possession.

One of the problems with colour slides is that you cannot examine them meaningfully with the naked eye. You need a viewer or projector to see them properly. That is, unless you have a scanner. So, I took the slides home with the intention of, one day, finding the time to scan them, a task I knew would take very many hours. Little did I know that the opportunity would arrive so soon, thanks to the dreaded Corona virus pandemic. All the slides are now safely scanned and most have been indexed as far as is possible thanks to helpful notes left by Reg Neil. However, there are still many images where the information is incomplete or missing. So, dear reader, are you able to help me with the following two pictures, please.



This photo was taken in 1994 at Black Jack's lock and is of four members of the "Tidy Harefield" group.

The four people have been identified, from Lt to Rt, as **Bob Marjorams**, **Tom Hillier**, ?????? and **Reg Neil**.

(I guess there must have been someone else there as well to take the photo.)

Does anyone recognise the third gentleman, please?

This photo was taken in 1992 and is one of a sequence at this event. It is labelled "Bridle Walk" and I believe it was the official opening of a new bridle path.

Do you know anything about this event? Which bridle path and where was this photo taken?

Also, do you recognise any of the people in the photo? Were you there?



*Watch out for more images like this next time*

## Found in the Archives

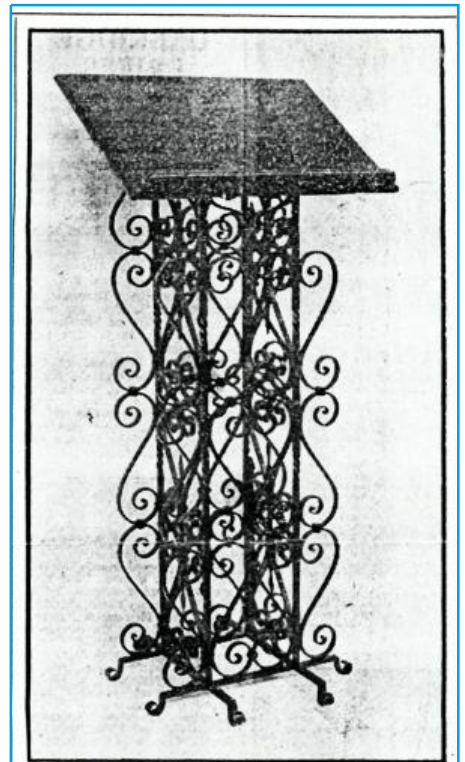
It's great fun working through the archives. There are so many odd snippets of information. One such that caught my eye is a newspaper cutting (Uxbridge Gazette 28/8/1954) and a transcription of letter (dated 2/7/1990) written by the former head teacher of our local school, Mr A.R.Higginson to a Mrs.S.Lyall, former dinner lady. It concerns the lectern pictured in the newspaper cutting.

*The lectern is dear to my heart. When the LEA decided in 1953 to give each school head a grant in order to buy some kind of memento of the Coronation I decided to use the small sum allocated to buy something not only beautiful but indestructible. While pondering the matter I recalled the wonderful wrought iron grilles in St.Albans Cathedral, especially that enclosing the tomb of Humphrey of Gloucester. It was made in 1275 and it still looks as though it has just left the anvil.*

*Perhaps you remember that Pat Barry who then lived in Harefield had opened up the old Forge which still stood in one corner of the Green and used it to enjoy his hobby, which was decorative iron work. It grew into more than a hobby and because he could no longer cope with it all as a part time occupation, he persuaded an old smith who was already in his eighties to emerge from retirement and take up work again.*

*I asked Pat if he would make a simple lectern, explaining that we had very little to spend. He agreed at once, and designed the superb piece of craftsmanship you see in the photograph. It is hardly a simple affair but I think he rather liked the thought that he and the old man, Ashford, could contrive an object which would endure for centuries. That's how the lectern came into existence.*

*The Uxbridge Library invited me to put it on exhibition in their premises, Old John Miles, then the Chairman of the Education Committee, implored me to arrange with the Vicar that the lectern should be consecrated, and, as a lay preacher, asked me if he could himself perform the ceremony. That is what took place in Harefield Church. The lectern was seen by a person who called at the school and valued it at about a couple of hundred pounds. As he was a professional valuer one could take his word. I thought it worth more. It would be very interesting to have an expert opinion about it nearly twenty years on. The skill of the smith is astounding. Notice the tapered ends of the scrolls and the use of metal collars, marvellous in their perfect fit instead of welding or rivets. If it has been painted I hope black was used. A bright colour would be glaringly inappropriate. Well that's the story.*



**T**HIS wrought-iron lectern or tribute could the village pay —Harefield School's permanent memorial of the Coronation—has been creating a great deal of interest at Uxbridge library where it is on view this week. Headmaster Mr. R. Higginson, explained to a reporter that he was anxious for the school to have something which was of Harefield and wrought-iron work was one of the old village crafts.

“Mr. P. G. F. Barry submitted the design of the lectern, and asked to be allowed to contribute his offering to what should become Harefield's lasting and lovely tribute to the Queen. This generous gesture resulted in the glorious piece of craftsmanship you see today.”

Does any know whether the school still has the lectern? Is it still in use?

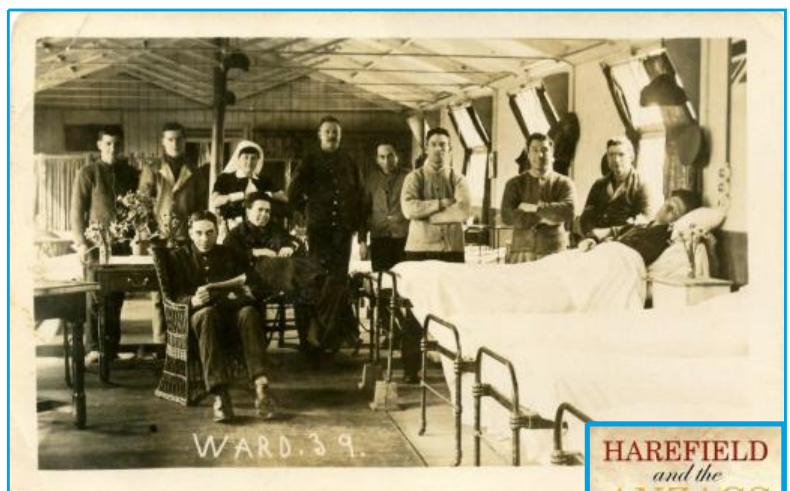
## New Acquisition

Here is an ANZAC postcard just found on Ebay. It has a message written by a patient in Ward 39 and dated 28/4/1919. The card must have seen sent in an envelope because it is not addressed and there is no stamp.

Dear Sister

*This is a few of the patients in my ward. You will be able to pick me out as I am the only one in bed. I get dusted the same as the furniture now. It's not much of a photo I look like a sick black fellow. You can see now Mess. Tapscott & Chipp have improved. I am sorry to hear Miss Thorne is still being troubled with her arm. If I come alright you will most certainly see me at Devonport.*

Regards to all. Your very sincere friend George Reidy



**HAREFIELD**  
and the  
**ANZACS**



Letters Home

Fiona Young

If you didn't hear about or missed the opportunity to see the book about the ANZAC soldiers who were treated in Harefield during WWI, then here is a reminder. It is called "Letters Home" and tells their stories through the correspondence they sent to their friends and families back home.

You can read more about it on this website ([www.harefieldandtheanzacs.co.uk](http://www.harefieldandtheanzacs.co.uk)).