



**News from the Clock Tower**

The season has started and we have already had record numbers climbing the Tower! The remarks in the visitors' book show people from all over the world and their appreciation of this ancient monument.

We are now selling a range of pictures (some framed), cards, pens, binoculars and the new 3-D tourist map (see photo) which the Society helped fund. There is also some tourist information on hand. This is particularly useful on Sundays when the Tourist Information Centre is closed.

We welcome some new Clockateers, but more are always needed.

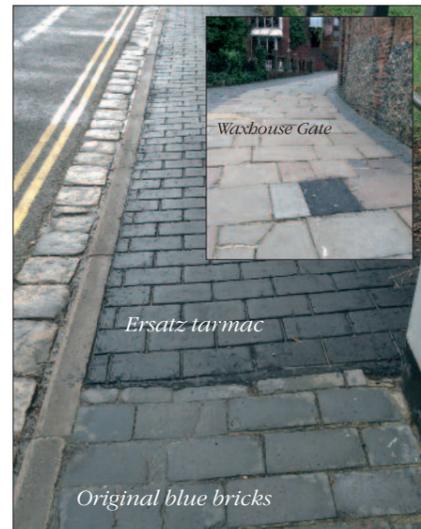


**Editors' note:**  
Would it not be a good idea if the TIC was open on Sundays during the summer, say between 11 and 3 pm? It is one thing to be saying the city is promoting tourism, e.g. the Visitors Partnership, inventing new logos and so on, but we know that tourism is alive and well on many Sundays. Cost is an obvious factor. Perhaps weekday opening hours should be amended like we have seen elsewhere.

In order to avoid any possible confusion or misunderstanding members are respectfully asked that, should they be involved in any meeting or activity where they declare they are a member of this Society, they make it clear that their attendance and any opinion expressed does not necessarily represent those of the Society's Committee. The Committee can always be contacted for advice, information and update on any matter by any member. Equally, the Society wishes to make it clear that when it is consulted about any item this should not be automatically deemed as leading to consent.

**A good experiment in New England Street, but still ersatz!** This must not be used to replace St Albans' existing distinctive blue-brick paving.

Despite a Council promise never to use tarmac to repair the damaged York stones in Waxhouse Gate, this has happened!



**Forthcoming events**

**Monday 22 June**  
**Retailer of the Year Gala Evening**  
8pm Club Batchwood. Tickets £6 (includes refreshments) from the Tourist Information Centre early June.

**Sunday 28 June**  
**Larks in Victoria Playing Field**  
It is Larks in the Park time again. The Society will have its gazebo stall. Call by and enter our picture competition. Have a fun afternoon and enjoy a wide range of sports, entertainments, attractions, music, food and drink. 12-5 pm.

**Saturday 26 September**  
**Autumn coach visit to Salisbury**  
Chance to visit the cathedral, the Close (with Arundells and Mompesson), an original 1215 Magna Carta with the new 2015 exhibition.

**Tuesday 13 October**  
**Annual Awards Evening**  
The Maltings Arts Theatre, 7.30 for 8pm. Members and invited guests only. Wine and canapés - FREE.

**Litter Picks in Verulamium Park**

Tony Mason, who represents the Society on Verulamium Park Forum, invites members to support Jessica Chivers' 'Litter Pick' initiative. Jessica does a good job in organising each 'pick', and her monthly 'little and often' approach is to be applauded.

Meet Jessica Chivers at the top of the Causeway (King Harry end) at 10.30am on:

- Saturday 13 June 2015
- Saturday 11 July 2015
- Saturday 15 August 2015

Pickers, bags and gloves will be provided.

**Margaret Morgan** sadly died at the end of April. Margaret was a long-standing member who served on the Committee, attended speaker meetings and went on many of our visits with her husband, Michael, who was also a past Treasurer. Both were regular Clock Tower volunteers. The Society offers its condolences to Michael, his family and friends.

**Membership Matters**

**To join or renew membership**

Subscriptions remain unchanged and are renewable on **1 April** each year.

Individual Member	£10
Family (2 or more)	£15
Pensioner/Student/Unwaged	£7
Residents' Associations	<b>No charge</b>
Corporate Membership	£50

To join or check payment details please contact the Membership Secretary, Bryan Hanlon, tel: 01727 851734 hanlonbryan@gmail.com or post to - 24 Monks Horton Way, St Albans AL1 4HA

**The Society acknowledges with gratitude the support from the following Corporate Members:**

- T&B (St Albans) Ltd
- Debenhams Ottaway
- Rumball Sedgwick
- National Pharmaceutical Association
- Christopher Place Shopping Centre
- St Columba's College



Looking to the future - with an eye to the past

**President: Geraint John**  
**Chairman: Tim Boatswain** 07873 586074

**Newsletter | Summer 2015**

This edition has been prepared by Eric Roberts (Committee member) and Peter Trevelyan (Member). If you have any comments, please write to the Editors at 3 Abbey Mill End, St Albans AL3 4HN or email [ptrevelyan@aol.com](mailto:ptrevelyan@aol.com)

**NEWS & COMMENTS**

**The Annual General Meeting** is on Thursday 25 June 2015 and we look forward to seeing many of you there. Please bring your copy of the Annual Report/Accounts with you for reference. Don't forget!

**Nominations for the committee are invited.** Send the nominee's name with their signature of acceptance plus the signatures of proposer and seconder to Jill Singer, Secretary at [oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk](mailto:oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk) or to Kingsbury Manor, St Albans, AL3 4SE by Friday 19 June 2015. All must be paid-up members.

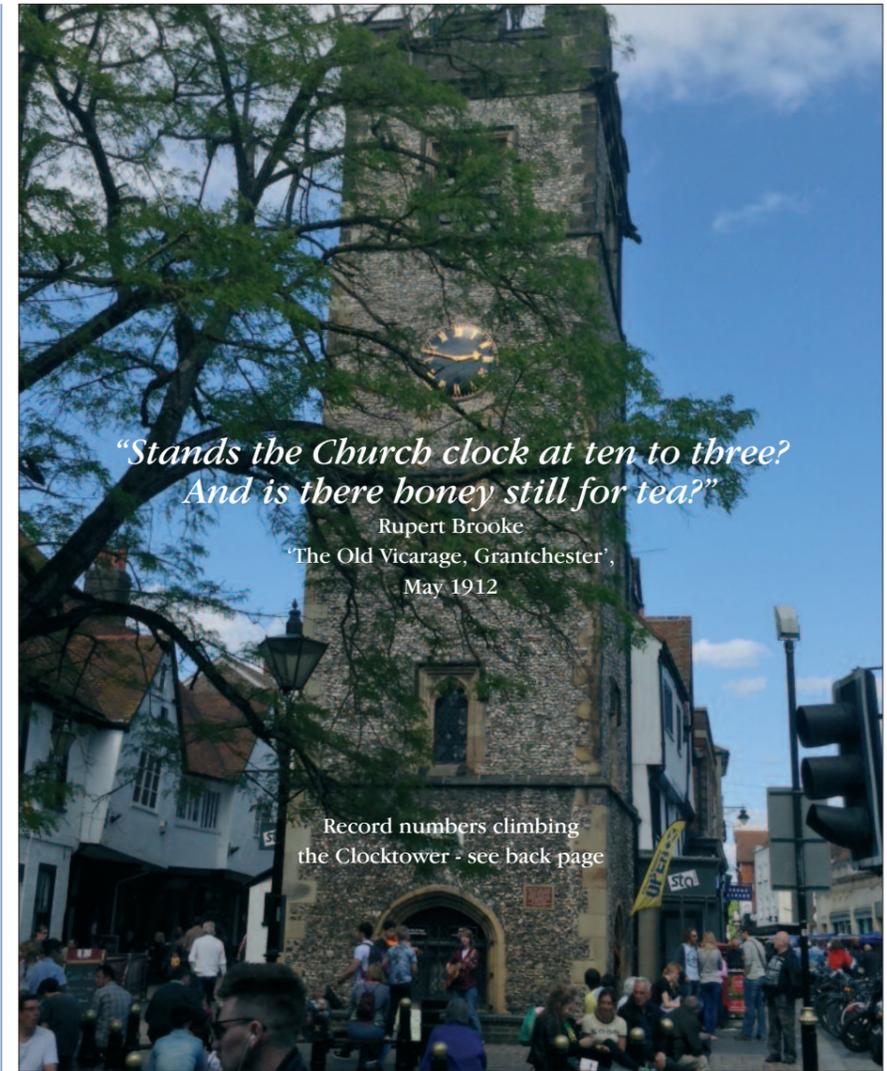
Members will be asked to approve the following **amendment to the Constitution:** "At committee meetings, a quorum requires at least four trustees to be in attendance, one of which must be an officer."

**Notice of Annual General Meeting**

**8pm Thursday 25 June 2015**  
The Octagon Centre  
St Peter's Church, St Peter's Street  
Followed by refreshments  
**Paid-up members only...**

**...have YOU renewed your subscription?**

**Renewals were due on 1 April 2015**  
If you wish to attend the AGM, receive future newsletters and details of events, visits etc, please renew NOW. We value your membership and support. Rates remain unchanged - see back page for full details.



With this edition members will find details of the Society's **Autumn visit by coach to Salisbury** on Saturday 26 September 2015. The Spring visit to Rochester was very successful. Rochester showed off its impressive Visitor Information Centre and facilities. Our Council would do well to visit to see this well-equipped and long-established tourist destination.

**We noticed in the run-up to the election** that certain national politicians declared that the licensing changes of 2005 for longer opening hours so as to create a café culture had been a failure. It was admitted that it had put extra pressure, and costs, on the Police, Councils and NHS, particularly A&E departments. Alcohol-related crimes now cost our hospitals £3bn a year. Will the new administration address this problem?

**As to planning,** all major parties were pledging to prioritise building new houses on brownfield land rather than let rip through the countryside. Whilst this was good news, we have had promises like this before. Notably, from the now-demoted

Eric Pickles MP, who back in October 2012 made the headline promise that the "Green Belt is safe in our hands". This did not stop him later making the decision to approve the Railfreight terminal on Green Belt land next to Park Street!

**On the subject of the Railfreight terminal,** we applaud the Council's decision to seek leave to appeal the latest Judicial Review of the decision. The Society will be writing to our MP to ask if she will extract from Network Rail a schedule of when all the necessary infrastructure works to the line (track, tunnels, signals and overhead wires) will take place, and how it will impact on our daily service.

If you think the current problems being experienced by all travellers into London Bridge are alarming - just you wait! Until a schedule is provided and the works start, absolutely no progress should be made on building the terminal.

Firm assurances are needed otherwise we land up with a road-based freight depot, like the others appearing alongside the motorway network.

## Congratulations to the Council but...

The Society congratulates the Council on its brave decision to continue its opposition to the Railfreight plan. It is also an expensive process and, in view of the other initiatives the Council is proposing, we wonder where all the money is coming from. Remember, it is also proposing to fund the new Museum of St Albans partly through commercial development on the Hatfield Road site. There have been reports that it is seeking to buy Hertfordshire House from publicly-owned RBS. This with a view to developing the south side of the Civic Centre in partnership with a developer. Presumably this will ensure that the prior approval to convert Hertfordshire House into flats does not go ahead, which could frustrate the whole scheme.

Apart from the money, it is the latter which gives us cause for some concern. The editorial in the 30 April 2015 edition of the Herts Advertiser was spot on pointing out that the Council doesn't always get things right. It cited the 1970s battle over

the Maltings shopping centre development which led to the Chequer Street Action Group being formed and its ultimate success. The Society would also quote a more recent example of the 2004 multiplex cinema proposals where the Council aligned itself with a developer in order to fund the project. The results were first a scheme for a monolithic block, subsequently withdrawn, followed by the infamous nine and 12 storey tower blocks of flats. So the warning bells are sounding.

We know that the brief for the Civic Centre Opportunity Site calls for a "comprehensive development including high quality civic realm, new retail and office space, and attractive affordable housing." A lot of useful work has already been done in the City Vision exercise, so further workshops are not required. **The Society suggests the Council launches an architectural competition, and then involves the public in the decision-making process to help select the winning design.**

## Annual Awards - still time for you to nominate

The Society's Annual Awards Team is looking for any projects considered extra special and completed between 1 January and 31 December 2014. They could include things big or small that have contributed towards enhancing

St Albans in some way. For example, new developments in the built environment, but not exclusively. In years past the restored Watercress Beds and the giant Festival Puppets have picked up the top award. As did the restored St Albans South Signal Box for 2008. Last year's overall winner was a building – the new Primary School Unit at The Samuel Ryder Academy.

The Awards Team will be assessing each nomination during the summer, so time is of the essence. Visits and final decisions – the latter kept secret until the night – have to be made in time for the Awards Evening held at The Maltings Arts Theatre, this year on Tuesday 13 October.

If you've seen something that caught your eye, do let us know. Email [oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk](mailto:oxhey@oxhey.demon.co.uk) or post to Awards, c/o 30 Fishpool Street, St Albans, AL3 4RT. Give the year of completion – it has to be either 2014 or 2015. Any so far for 2015 will be noted and held over for next year's judging.

Over to you. Join us in helping the Society celebrate what's best of the new in St Albans.



## All those homes! Questions that need answers

We regularly read that, in the period 2011 to 2031, the District needs to build thousands more new homes. The annual figures of 436, then revised up to 637, are often quoted.

Whichever one is taken, the following questions need to be asked and answered:

### Where will all the people work?

Hundreds of office jobs have been lost since the policy of converting offices into flats was introduced. The process is still going on. This is bad for the local economy and encourages out-commuting.

### Where will the children go to school?

There are already difficulties placing children in local schools. Some pupils, from as young as five, now have to travel considerable distances. This has a tremendous impact on family life and transport.

### Will the local health facilities cope?

Will there be enough doctors, nurses and other staff (how can they afford to live in St Albans?) and sufficient hospital facilities?

### Will the utilities cope?

Water is taken for granted, but can this be guaranteed? The sewage system is under pressure.

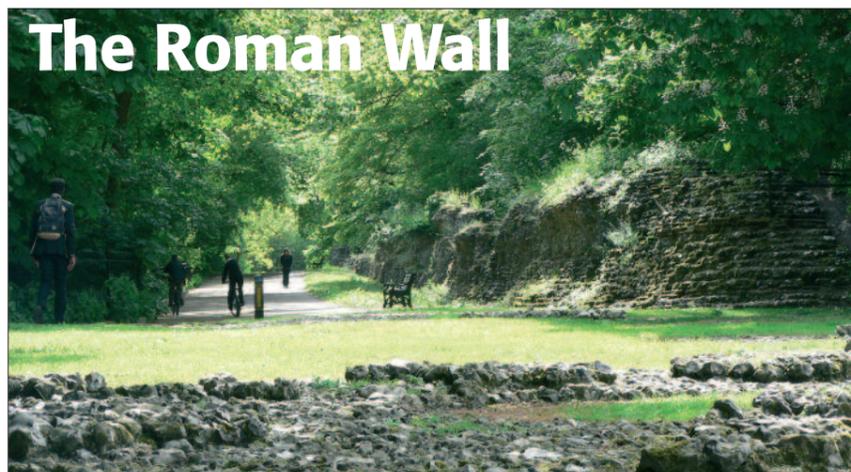
### What about transport and congestion?

Both the roads and the rail service are, for much of the time, at capacity. Congestion creates stress as people become exasperated with delays. St Albans as a retail and tourist destination will strangle itself and visitors will simply turn away to avoid hold-ups.

### What type of homes should be built?

This needs to be determined and controlled. Who are we building houses for and how will this affect the demographics of the district?

The Strategic Local Plan cannot come too soon. Answers to questions such as these need to be given from all political parties, locally and nationally. The Society suspects that many of the answers will lead to the conclusion that the numbers envisaged are simply UNSUSTAINABLE. **Building on such a scale, and on the Green Belt, really should not happen.**



There was a meeting on 26 April initiated by the Civic Society and Arc and Arc (SAAHAS) to discuss concerns about the deterioration of the large section of Roman wall following the removal of the railings. This was attended by representatives of the two societies, St Albans Council officers, Simon West (District Archaeologist) and local Cllr. Edgar Hill.

It was agreed that there is a need to better conserve the wall for the future. The Council has permission from English Heritage to install interpretation boards and will also ask if it can install signs warning that it is a criminal offence to damage or remove any part of the wall - to do so is now a 'Heritage Crime'.

The Council will set up a further meeting with English Heritage to include the Arc and Arc and the Civic Society, plus any others concerned, to take things forward. This takes place on 4 June. It was also agreed we should all publicise the importance of protecting and conserving this monument through our societies and members.

Jill Singer

### Editors' note:

The fact that the Roman Wall became political in the recent local elections was not edifying.

Apparently it had once been dismissed as "a dilapidated scrap of history" and this was unearthed as some political knockabout in election leaflets and correspondence to the local press. We think this was unhelpful and unnecessary.

If we are really serious about being a tourist destination, we need to conserve what we have to offer as well as pass on such artefacts to future generations. Some may make dismissive comparisons with bigger and more complete examples elsewhere, but IT IS WHAT WE HAVE GOT.

A similar argument was used about the former Odeon at a planning appeal into its demolition - that it wasn't highly rated in the Art Deco world. We pointed out that it was what we have got – and wanted to keep!

## St Albans: Gateway to The North?

Whenever I travel by train from Victoria into Sussex I always smile as we speed through Balham, as do others in my carriage. I guess it's because of that Peter Sellers' record (EMI 1958) "Balham - Gateway to The South." What a hoot! If you haven't heard it you are missing a comedy classic.

I wasn't so amused last autumn when reading that certain planning consultants were suggesting St Albans should become part of London. An idea also being promoted by Mayor Boris Johnson. So when I saw him outside the Town Hall back in October I had to resist telling him where to go!

Just because 60% of St Albans commutes to London doesn't mean we shouldn't

keep our city separate. We may be losing more and more offices, and hence local jobs, to flats and our Green Belt is under immense pressure from developers. That's no reason to surrender our city's individuality and rich heritage which still connect us with our civic pride and identity. Why become just another suburb of the capital's ever-creeping sprawl. To do so would result in what happened to places like Balham.

Behold: St Albans lying "foursquare" on the Thameslink line; "a rose-red city half as gold as green" - Gateway to The North!

Last summer The Clock Tower's clock stopped at ten to three. Shades of that Peter Sellers' record again. Was it an omen

## Licensing - Ombudsman's decision

A reply has been received to the Society's complaint about the Council altering licensing hours to a later time without further consultation with objectors. In summary, the Ombudsman decided that he could not investigate. This is because "the decision was made as part of Court proceedings which the law does not allow the Ombudsman to consider."

He added "the Society is understandably unhappy that a decision made by elected Councillors has been overturned by unelected officers without reference to objectors." We feel the 'understandably unhappy' speaks volumes.

Our concern was noted about the Council referring us to take the complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Council would presumably have been aware that it was something that could not be handled under this procedure. This was explained as "sometimes jurisdictional procedures are complex and, although this can be frustrating, it is preferred that Councils refer complaints so that the Ombudsman, rather than the Council, can decide if he will or will not investigate a complaint."

We still have issues over the same Councillors determining both licensing and planning applications for the same premises. We are considering summarising these concerns about licensing and seeking a meeting with our MP.

I wondered, and went and got some honey for tea!

I am sure the Society certainly won't surrender to London without a fight. Of course, there are going to be changes if our city is to evolve. There's room for improvements and new developments that blend in with their surroundings. The key is keeping a place still distinctive in character - surely one of the incentives for all those commuters to live here.

Who knows for what developers and planners in London might be eyeing us up? Vigilance is the key word. Join us in keeping St Albans like ...St Albans, of course!

Eric Roberts