



Registered Charity No. 1160314

# The Friends of St Peter's Newsletter

## Number 10 – Spring 2018

### Introduction by the Chairman of the Trustees

The Rectory Lane Cemetery Project is now well underway. The Trustees of the Friends are delighted that in November James Moir and Kate Campbell took up the very important roles of Project Manager and Community Engagement Officer respectively.

On taking up the role of Project Manager James Moir stood down as a Trustee of the Friends for the duration of the project and we are very pleased that his previous roles as Chairman of the Project Board and Convenor of the Project Group have been taken on by Paul Crosland who also remains a Trustee.

Since the last Newsletter Victoria Booth has retired as Treasurer and as a Trustee. She was appointed in March 2013 and we thank her for all that she has done for the Friends over the last five years. She has been succeeded in both roles by Steve Elliff FCA who lives in the town and who is the Financial Controller at Berkhamsted School.

As well as commending to you the articles in this Newsletter on the Court House and the Pitkin Family, I draw your attention to the event which we shall be holding on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October in remembrance of the First World War armistice in November 1918. Please see further details below.

We welcome ideas and suggestions from our members, and indeed other readers, as to what you would like to see the Friends doing for you and for the whole Berkhamsted community. Please do get in touch.

Peter Williamson ([peter.williamson47@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.williamson47@btinternet.com))

### WW1 Armistice Event

In remembrance of the centenary of the WW1 armistice of November 1918 the Friends are holding an event on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30 p.m. in St Peter's Church. Dr Heather Jones, who from September 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 will be Professor of Modern and Contemporary European History at UCL, will be giving a talk entitled:

“Myths and Realities of the First World War - One Hundred Years On.”



Heather Jones

It will be accompanied by music and WW1 poetry read by members of the Friends. It promises to be a most enjoyable and interesting evening and all are welcome.

Put it in your diary!

### A History of the Court House

By Jenny Sherwood

The present building is Tudor in origin but could well have been built on the site of a mediaeval building. It has been variably known as the Church House or the Town Hall in addition to the Court House. It could be considered as the town's first Civic Centre since we know that empowered by the last Royal Charter of 18<sup>th</sup> July 1618, issued by James I, the Town's Council met to deliberate. The Common Council consisted then of a Bailiff or Mayor and twelve chief Burgesses, who were elected annually. The Council also had the services of a full-time Recorder. This body was known as the Corporation. This Charter granted the town the right to hold a Court of Records at the Court House, where the Corporation also kept the standard weights and measures used to help settle trading disputes.



The courts of the Manor and Honour of Berkhamsted, held traditionally on Whit Tuesday and on the Tuesday after Michaelmas, met to hear 'all pleas, actions, suites or offences against the laws and liberty of the manor.' The Corporation was permitted to make bye-laws for the borough, to impose fines, penalties and imprisonment, to have an extra market day every week and two additional fair days annually, to maintain a prison, to collect market tolls. They were to hold a court of record once a month and a court of pied poudre to deal with petty offences on fair days. The Corporation brought no lasting benefits from its privileges and fell into abeyance in the 1660s. It was probable that manorial courts had been held in the Court House in mediaeval times, or possibly at the Castle.

Over the years the Court House has had a variety of uses. In 1838 it became the home of the National School, when additional rooms were built on the back of the house. Shortly afterwards the cottage next door was built for the schoolmaster.

With the introduction of the regulations of the 1870 Education Act and the Bourne Charity School children also joining the National School children the premises were no longer large enough. The Victoria Church of

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## The Early Pitkins in Berkhamsted

The name Pitkin is ancient in the annals of Berkhamsted. As far as is known, at present, the first record of the name of PITKIN in Berkhamsted is in the Register of Burials, where on 21 August 1586 is an entry recording the burial of one Alise Pitkyn. Many of the male Pitkins were named William, and hence the story of the family can be confusing. Here each William has been given a suffix in this article to distinguish between them.

William<sup>1</sup> Pitkin first comes to notice in the town in 1610 when he was chosen as Minister's Churchwarden for the ensuing year. He became the agent for the Lord of the Manor - the Duchy of Cornwall, in about 1612. When James I granted a new Charter in 1618 William<sup>1</sup> Pitkin was one of the first Burgesses, becoming a Chief Burgess in 1628 and Bailiff in 1636 and also a Member of Parliament. The office of Bailiff carried with it the office of Justice of the Peace,

Meanwhile his son, William<sup>2</sup> Pitkin had been born and was baptised on 11 December 1608 and another son Francis was baptised on 20 January 1613/4.

It is quite clear that while his family was expanding William<sup>1</sup> Pitkin was also increasing his land tenure and growing in importance. In 1614 Pitkin became one of three overseers of the poor. Pitkin was a fairly constant attender of the Vestry meetings which, in those times, virtually ran the parish, notwithstanding the existence of the Borough officers, the Bailiff and Burgesses

By this time it is likely that William<sup>2</sup> Pitkin had become a scholar at the school, where he was to be followed in the 1620s and 1630s by his younger brothers Francis, George and John. When William<sup>2</sup> Pitkin left school he went up to Pembroke College Oxford, where he matriculated on 6 February 1628/9, received his BA the next day and his Masters Degree on 17 October 1631. He married Elizabeth in 1634 and in July 1636 he became the 6th Headmaster of the Berkhamsted Grammar School, known as King Edward VI's, although in fact founded in 1541 by a local man John Incent, then Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London.

Their firstborn, another William<sup>3</sup> Pitkin was born in 1635, followed by another son, Roger. Then in December 1639 a daughter, Martha was born. William<sup>3</sup> emigrated to Connecticut in 1659 and founded a family there. He was followed to Connecticut by his sister Martha Pitkin where she married and founded a most distinguished family there – the Wolcott family. The county of Hertfordshire has thus made a considerable contribution to the State of Connecticut. Not only has she given the State the name of her capital, but through the Pitkins of Berkhamsted, many of her most distinguished citizens.

With thanks to Jenny Sherwood  
Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society

## A Pilgrimage to find her Pitkin Family

By Elaine Mercer

On May 17<sup>th</sup> Carole Boardman (nee Pitkin) and her daughter Olivia travelled almost 200 miles to visit Berkhamsted to find family graves in Rectory Lane Cemetery. Carole knew that her grandfather Walter Pitkin had died when she was just a baby, but while growing up she knew only about her mother's relatives close by in the Manchester area.

The availability of information on the Internet and her own grand-daughter's passion for history, led Carole to research her antecedent. She was astonished to find that the Pitkin family was a very honoured and long-standing family throughout Berkhamsted history and that Walter Pitkin as a member of the council had been influential in the development of the town in the 1920s and 30s.

"We were the only Pitkins in the Manchester phone directory when I was growing up" she said, "and now I have discovered I am from quite a long-established Berkhamsted family including a former head of Berkhamsted School, whose children William and Martha went to Hartford Connecticut US in 1643 and each started a dynasty there."

Carole's grandfather was Walter Pitkin (1882-1945) and on leaving school he became a solicitor's clerk. In 1905 he married a local girl Edith Mary Ward and they set up home in 19 Kitsbury Road. Walter was elected to the Berkhamsted Urban District Council. During his time on the Council the new Secondary School at Greenway was planned and with the outbreak of war Walter masterminded the arrangements for the schooling of the evacuees. He became Chairman in 1938 and the most notable event of this era was his laying of the foundation stone of the new Civic Centre and overseeing its subsequent official opening on 14th October 1938.



Carole and Olivia by the grave of Walter Pitkin – Carole's grandfather

This was the first opportunity that she and Olivia have had to visit Berkhamsted and the pair were fascinated to find the many connections that they had in the town. They visited the graves of Walter and his father and mother as well as one of his siblings Cecil, who died as a child of 5.

"It is pure coincidence that this is National Cemeteries week", Carole said, "but a very happy one. Meeting the representatives from the Friends of St Peter's proved valuable because I am not sure I would have found these graves on my own. I am so pleased to see that the Cemetery is being cared for again and will be preserved for future generations."

## Rectory Lane Cemetery

The Rectory Lane Cemetery is changing fast now that work has begun in earnest to transform the site with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund which awarded the Friends of St Peter's £907,000 as reported in the last newsletter. The Project Manager, James Moir, has been very busy finalising contracts with contractors and obtaining the relevant permissions for the work from the church authorities. Kate Campbell has been recruited to be the Community Engagement Officer and she has already organised many events to increase awareness of the project, some of which are described below. (Kate can be seen in the school visit photo dressed in black as Charlotte Claridge, widow of William Claridge, the town's photographer and artist in Victorian times.)

Water and electricity are being installed on the site. The first place to benefit from this will be the Sexton's Hut, which will be used as a temporary site facility for the contractors. At the top right hand corner of the site an area has been levelled ready for the proposed volunteer facility. Electronic counters have been installed at each of the gates so that the number of people using the Cemetery over the course of the Project can be captured.



The gates have been removed from the Rectory Lane entrance and put into store and the piers have been shored up prior to underpinning which is scheduled to take place in June. The fencing along the Three Close Lane Boundary Wall will also be removed and will either be repaired or replaced, depending on their condition.

The three main contractors will all be on site from w/c 18<sup>th</sup> June to repair the boundary walls and to underpin and repair the Rectory Lane Gate Piers and the Memorial Arch. Additionally conservation work will begin on the 19 selected memorials. Will Yendell, an apprentice who is studying for his Level 3 Banker Mason Course with Heritage Skills will be assisting with the conservation.

It will be necessary to close the Cemetery for a period of possibly two weeks, while the underpinning works take place, until the end of June.



The recent rain and intermittent sun has sent the Cemetery into overdrive! Everything is looking very lush, with wild flowers and grasses in abundance and some of the memorials barely visible. The first mowing of the year has been done and a large area has been roped off to be left as a wildlife haven.

## Events:

- Kate has done three talks in the area about the work in the cemetery, and encouraging people to come and enjoy the space.
- 10 members of Tring & District Camera Club attended a special dusk photography session. Photographs shared on FoSP web and social media. A photographic competition is planned for later in the year.
- A volunteer drop-in evening was held on 9th April at the Mad Squirrel - with many current volunteers and some new faces. Amongst the new volunteers recruited were some who are keen to undergo genealogy training so they can research people buried in the Cemetery, and others who are interested in adopting a grave. Training for both these activities will be provided.
- Over 114 visitors braved the weather to join in Easter Sunday's Discovery Trail at the Rectory Lane Cemetery. Guides wearing Easter bonnets were on hand to help with clues and information about the various parts of the Cemetery. The trail included counting yew trees, finding particular graves, learning about the Cemetery bees and testing the wooden xylophone which hangs from one of the trees. The children were rewarded with Easter eggs.
- The first school visit was from 15 Year 3 boys (age 7-8) from Lockers Park for the first session specifically designed to engage and educate school children. An experienced History-off-the-Page facilitator lead the very interactive session in the role of Mrs Jane Ghost, the wife of the Cemetery's Victorian grave digger, Richard Ghost.



Mistresses Ghost and Claridge will be resuming their partnership to provide three special tours of the cemetery as part of May's Chilterns Walking Festival. The first '*Cemetery Circular*' is on the morning of [19th May](#), the second on the morning of [26th May](#) and the third, specifically aimed at children during Half Term, is on the afternoon of [30th May](#).

Many more events are planned for the remainder of the year – some of which are listed in the programme of events on the back page of this newsletter. However, more activities are being added, and these will be published on the website:

[www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk](http://www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk)

Alternatively, you can find out more about what is going on by registering for the e-bulletin created each month by Kate Campbell. She can be contacted at [campbellkate01@gmail.com](mailto:campbellkate01@gmail.com)

Do come and join in!

## Programme of Events

November – December 2017



3 <sup>rd</sup> Jun	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
9 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Bring a Bear Concert	1.00 p.m.
10 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Recital – Le Page Piano Trio	7.30 p.m.
16 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Bridgewater Sinfonia Concert	7.30 p.m.
30 <sup>th</sup> Jun	Petertide Fair	
1st Jul	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
17-23 Jul	Bees Needs Week RLC	
5 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
12 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Rambling and Writing – RLC	10.30am-12.30pm
19 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Rambling and Writing – RLC	10.30am-12.30pm
26 <sup>th</sup> Aug	Summer Music in the Cemetery	4.00p.m.- dark
2 <sup>nd</sup> Sep	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
8 <sup>th</sup> Sep	Concert Berkhamsted Choral Society	7.30 p.m.
9 <sup>th</sup> Sep	RLC Heritage Open Day 'Let it RIP'	11a.m–6p.m.
16 <sup>th</sup> Sep	RLC Heritage Open Day 'WW1 Fallen'	2–5 p.m.
22 <sup>nd</sup> Sep	Bridgewater Sinfonia Concert	7.30 p.m.

### A History of the Court House continued

England Boys' School was built to commemorate Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. This was followed by the building of Victoria Girls' School, adjacent, in the early 1900s.

In 1863 Earl Brownlow of Ashridge bought the Manor and Honour of Berkhamsted with the exception of the Castle, from the Duchy of Cornwall. This included the ownership of the Court House, which was immediately leased back to various trustees at a nominal rent. In 1898 the Berkhamsted Urban District Council was formed. Court sessions were held in the Sessions Hall at the Town Hall until the new Civic Centre was built in 1935.

During WWI when the very large contingent of Inns of Court Officers' Training Corps was billeted in the town from 1914-19 the Court House was used as an Orderly Room. In 1918 during the Spanish Flu' epidemic when the IOC Hospitals could not accommodate all the patients, the Court House was also used as an extension hospital.

During WWII Berkhamsted had to accommodate a large number of evacuees from London schools and half-time schooling became a necessity, the Court House, together with every other hall in the town was used to accommodate the surge in population.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Victoria Schools were undergoing building works the children walked down the High Street in crocodiles to have lunch in St. Peter's Hall behind the Court House, and even the 5 year olds had a 9-4 school day. With the completion of the school building and the opening of their new hall, the old one became the dining hall and the Court House was refurbished and offices built behind, as we know it today. The Court House is now effectively the Church Hall for St Peter's Church.

## Become a Friend

To join the Friends please use this application form (or a photocopy of it). Alternatively, you can download an Application Form from the Friends website:

[www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk](http://www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk)

### Personal Details:

Title:
Full Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Email:

### Subscriptions

Individual	£12
Family	£20
Corporate	£50

### Gift Aid

My subscription payments **should/should not** be treated as Gift Aid donations (delete as appropriate)

### Bankers Standing Order

Bank Name:
Bank Address:
Postcode:

Please pay The Friends of St Peter's Church Great Berkhamsted, A/c No. 64109216, NatWest Bank (60-02-21) the sum of:

£	Amount in words
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Beginning on :

Date:
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and annually thereafter until further notice, charging my account:

Account Name:
Sort Code:
Account Number:

Date:

Signature:

Please return this form to: Paul Crosland,  
11 Upper Hall Park, Berkhamsted, HP4 2NW