



# NEWSLETTER

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

## SHOP WINDOW INTO HISTORY

**195** High Street, Berkhamsted had remained virtually unchanged for a century. The landmark building collapsed in the early hours of Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January. Emergency services closed the A4251 in both directions and evacuated nearby residents, miraculously no one had been injured, it could have been so much worse!

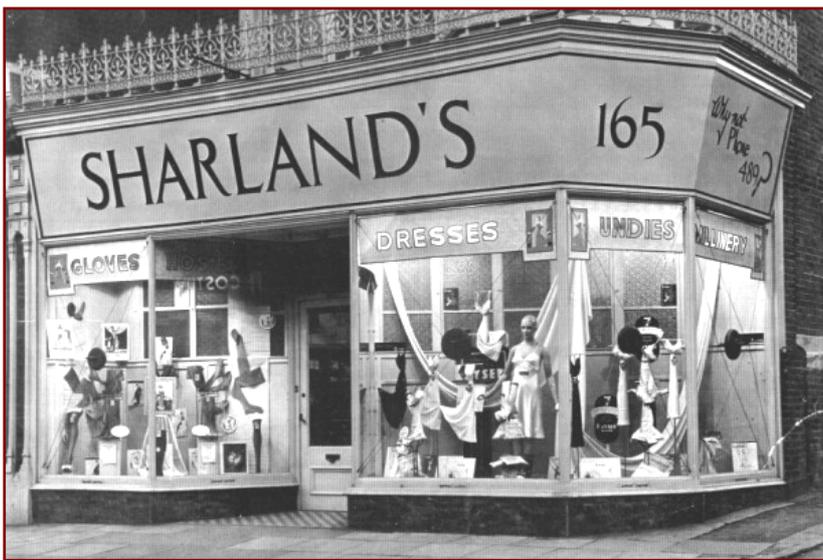


After investigation by Dacorum Borough Council's structural engineers, no defined cause was found, but the collapse was probably due to structural failure. Emergency support was erected, but it was deemed too dangerous to attempt to shore up the interior. Controlled demolition was arranged by the owners, Sorbon Estates. Plans had been submitted to extend the shop area and convert the rest of the building into flats. Hopefully we won't now end up with the replacement being another unattractive 'box' to mirror the other side of Elm Grove, we have lost too many of our character buildings already.

The property had been occupied by Birtchnell's Menswear shop, until last year when the business sadly closed its doors for the last time. Percy Birtchnell had started the business in 1938 in the then new art deco styled parade of shops next to the Rex cinema, now converted into flats. The high-class menswear shop then moved to Elm Grove corner about 1952.

Prior to Birtchnell's taking over the shop, it had been Sharland's drapers, which moved across the road into the much bigger premises vacated by Wards, and where M&Co now is. Prior to Sharland's arrival during the late 1920s, this Victorian building had been Southey & Co. showroom for their hand-built motor cycles which had been there since the 1890s.

Percy, who died in 1986, was an enthusiastic local historian, prolific author and a quite man who never sought the lime light, unlike his shop premises, unable to face the changes that were inevitably ahead, it decided to bow out dramatically!



*Photos: Top - The aftermath taken Sun 30 January. Lower Left - Taken c. 1943, before the re-numbering of the High Street. Lower Right - Taken c. 2000. Two lower photos from Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society collection.*

### THE DACORUM HERITAGE TRUST LIMITED

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# BERKHAMSTED & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Ever since its formation in 1971 the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society has been actively researching and excavating in the area around Berkhamsted. Following the important work done by members at the Cow Roast sites in the 1970's the physical work of digging has gradually declined. Recently, with fewer active members and the lack of opportunities for archaeological evaluation, there has been less emphasis on this side of our activities. This changed in 2009 when the Society was able to purchase a resistivity meter with the aid of a capital grant from the Berkhamsted Arts Trust.



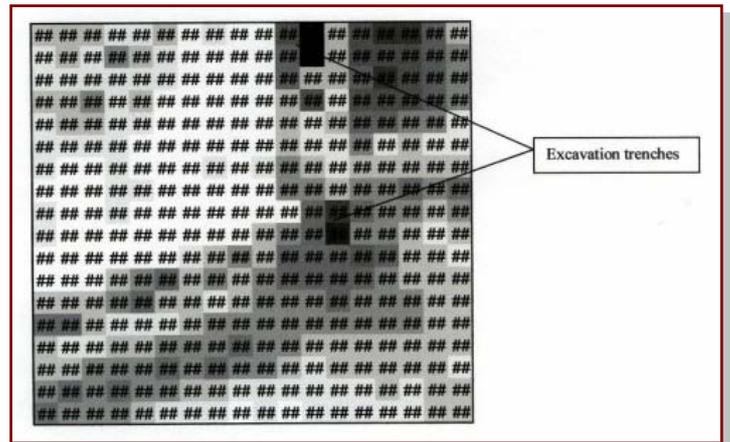
Under the supervision of Dr Bill Martin, and using his equipment, members of the Society had previously surveyed a large field with the anticipation of finding the original medieval village. Unfortunately, a small-scale excavation during 2008 did not support the expectation. Although the survey work had indicated the presence of a structure the findings proved to be less spectacular than hoped. However it did prove that resistivity was a useful tool for the Society to develop further and to acquire the expertise to download and interpret the survey results.

Following the acquisition of our own instrument, training and further resistivity work continued at Little Gaddesden in the summer of 2009. The exercise expected to record and trace the line of a Roman Road. The Viatores in their book entitled "Roman Roads in the South East Midlands" had postulated the road. They catalogued it as number 169B and it was supposed to run between Verulamium and Ivinghoe

Beacon. After a considerable amount of fieldwork with the meter we are confident that the road does not follow the projected line of the Viatores.

Fortuitously following on from this work the Society was invited to carry out a survey in the gardens of Ashridge House. The work was carried out in June and July 2010 and the results were very promising. Two small-scale trial trenches were dug during a week at the beginning of September that confirmed the presence of building material. Further research will continue through the winter with the prospect of a further excavation in 2011.

The Society now offers its members experience both in the use of instrumentation as well as the prospect of physical excavations.



*Ken Wallis, Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society*

Information and contact details - [www.berkhamstedarchaeo.org.uk](http://www.berkhamstedarchaeo.org.uk) or John Dahl 01442 842568 (kinross@aol.com).

## TANKS FOR THE MEMORY

Following the Great War of 1914-1918, The National War Savings Committee sought to recognise, in some way, the efforts of the major contributors and they came up with what can only be described as a new, yet poignant, way of achieving this.

From 1919, 265 towns throughout England and Wales, were presented with a war battered tank in acknowledgement of their efforts to procure investment in National War Bonds and War Savings Certificates had made a significant contribution in bringing the War to a successful conclusion. Hemel Hempstead took delivery of its own tank on 21<sup>st</sup> February 1920.

The War Office, with the consent of the Treasury, undertook to deliver all the tanks to their respective new homes as soon as was practicable. Indeed, the first group of tanks were already on the way home from the battlefields of Flanders.

The War Savings Committee were notified in advance of the presentation, and in conjunction with the Civic Authority, made arranged for reception of their tank, and its disposition as a permanent memorial of their town's financial efforts for the War.

The tank awarded to Hemel Hempstead stood for many years close to the Heath Park Hotel in Boxmoor, as can be seen from the photograph. However, its presence was not welcomed by everyone, Mr. E.A. Mitchell Innes KC, himself Mayor from 1911-1912, felt compelled to write the following letter to the current Mayor, Henry Frederick Hebert:

Churchill,  
Hemel Hempstead.  
April 16<sup>th</sup> 1923,

Dear Mr. Mayor and Bailiff,

I have had it in mind for some time to write to you on the subject of the Tank which stands on the edge of the Moor at Heath Park in the hope that the Borough Council may entertain the suggestion of its removal.

I hesitated, at first, to move in the matter, having regard to the fact the Tank had been accepted by the Borough with public ceremony, not very long ago. But, after consideration, I venture to think that there are the strongest grounds for its removal. In itself, it is hideous. It is neglected, dirty, rusty, and scored by lines of leakage from all the rivets.

Its associations are also hideous – those of carnage and destruction in action. In so far as it is a memorial of the war it causes only pain and repulsion to a very large number of people in the neighbourhood. This fact alone calls for its removal. We have, already, the only true memorial, at the crossroads, 159 yards off.

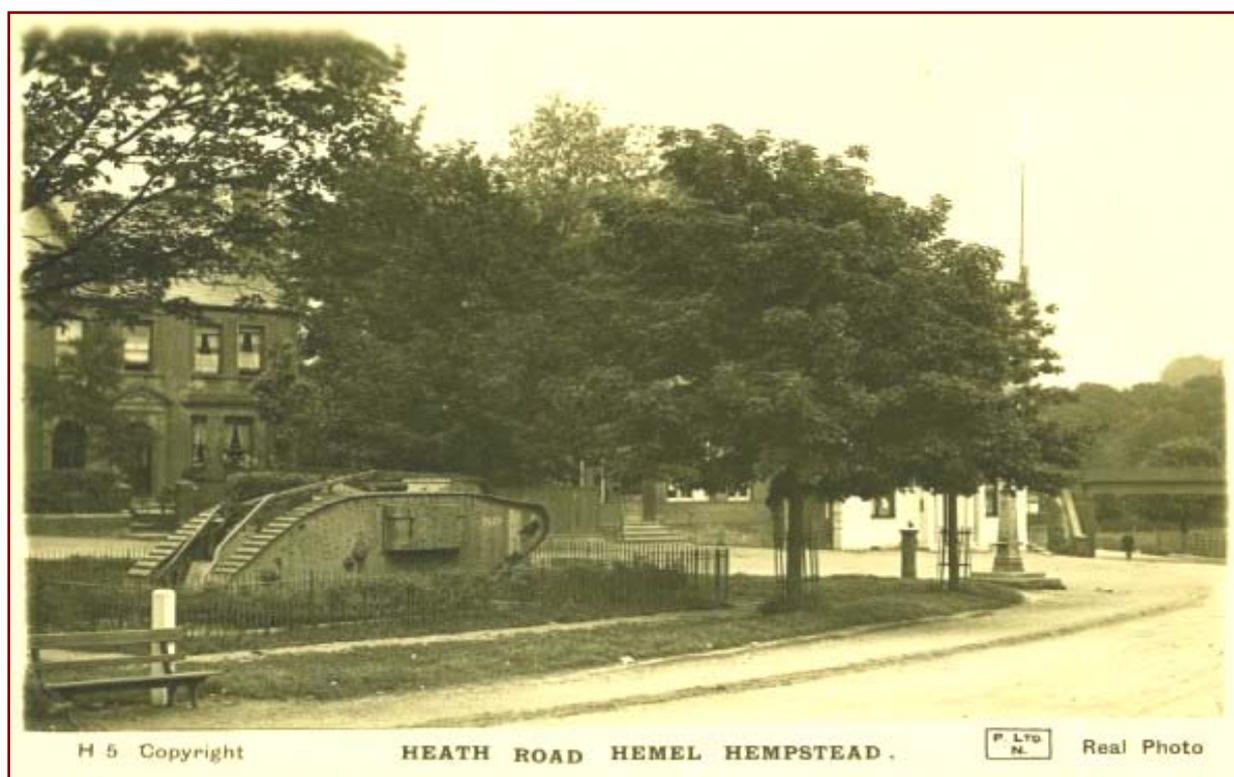
I live very near it and often have to pass it, and, therefore, perhaps feel more strongly than others who live further from it. But I know enough of the feelings of many others to enable me to say with truth that I speak for them as well as myself. I would ask you to make a small effort of imagination and consider the feelings of those whose view from their windows is blocked by an object such as this.

It is intended, I understand, to record upon the Tank the number of War Savings Certificates subscribed for by citizens of the Borough. No doubt the effort made in that direction was very gratifying, and I am glad to think that it will be generously rewarded by the value received by the subscribers for the money invested. But if any such record be necessary, why affix it to a Tank? Such a proceeding seems, at least, defective in humour.

But there is another absurdity - no such record has yet been affixed. The plate is there, but no record. The Tank itself, however, remains an object hideous, painful and inept.

May I express the hope that it will go, and soon? I have the honour to be, sir,

Yours faithfully, Edward A. Mitchell – Innes



The letter was read to the full Council, and following this a further letter was received from the Hemel Hempstead branch of The Royal British Legion:

‘The Committee of the Branch desire me to place before you a most emphatic protest against the proposal to remove the Tank from the Moor.

They consider it should be painted and preserved as a memento of the Great Struggle for National existence in which so many hundreds of Borough Citizens bore a part and that to remove it would be a slight to the memory of those who fell, as well as to those who were fortunate enough to survive.

There are-whatever a small minority may think-hundreds in the borough who can only look on the Tanks as preservers of many British lives.

The tendency to forget there was a war, amongst those who did not participate in it, is already too great, and to spend a large sum on the removal of this Souvenir to gratify the whim of a few, at a time when everyone is crying out at the burden of the rates would be nothing short of scandalous.’

Yours faithfully, S. G. TITE Hon. Sec.

As far as can be told this letter swung the balance of opinion, and the tank was cleaned up and repainted, restoring it close to its original state. It was eventually removed just prior to World War 2, and in a strange twist of fate may well have been used for scrap for the forthcoming war effort!

'The Silver Bullet' Magazine, c. 1919, lists the other towns, to whom tanks were awarded, the other six from Hertfordshire were Cheshunt, Hertford, Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and St. Albans.

Roy Wood, Hemel Hempstead Local History & Museum Society

Information and research – Nina Bevan. Photo: From The Dacorum Heritage Trust collection.

## QUIZ NIGHT – SATURDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

Our fundraising event had to be postponed from January owing to illness. We need **your support** - every penny raised will go towards preserving our local heritage collections. Bring your family and friends and gently tickle those little grey cells!

- At Hemel Hempstead Community Church, Haven House, London Road, Boxmoor HP3 9AB.
- **Tickets are only £4.00 each**, tables of 6 (max), to **get your tickets** contact the curators.
- Doors open at **7.30 pm.** for a prompt **8.00 pm. start.**
- There is plenty of parking and disabled access. There will also be light refreshments and a raffle.

## CURATOR'S CORNER



**International Quizzer.** The winner of our fundraising quiz sheet is Mr Derek Tarling from Hemel Hempstead. The photo shows our Assistant Curator, Nina Bevan presenting Derek with £20 John Lewis tokens. I would like to thank the folks who helped sell the sheets and everyone who took; part we raised almost £130.00.

**New Chairs!** We are very pleased to have received two comfortable chairs for our reception area, which means we now have somewhere for folks to sit whilst visiting, or having a tea break, as some of our volunteers aren't able to stand for long, the chairs will be particularly welcomed. They were generously donated by EIC Wealth Management of Hemel Hempstead, and came to us via Connect Dacorum. Thanks to Jeff Colls and a big 'thank you' to our director, Richard Tregoning for being a removal man for the morning.

**Education Workshop.** The curators ran a new Local Area Study workshop for Year 6 students at St. Cuthbert Mayne R C School, Hemel Hempstead. The two sessions covered the development of Hemel Hempstead, and looked at the geographical and historic changes using maps, photographs, craft activities and memories of people who had been evacuated here during WWII. The photo shows the wonderfully colourful 'thank you' card made by the pupils.

**Articles.** Have you got an interesting heritage story about our area? Do you have wartime, work or school memories that you would like to share with our readers? We would love to hear from you.



Visit the Local History website to read the latest articles.

*The Dacorum History Digest*

[www.dacorumhistory.bravehost.com](http://www.dacorumhistory.bravehost.com)



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