

St John's Church

serving Stanborough, Lemsford, Cromer Hyde



August / September 2026

£1



Photos from St John's School



Top & Middle Right: Alice in Wonderland, **Left (all) & Top Middle:** Outdoor learning week, **Bottom Right:** Opening the new school playground

Musings from the Lister Car Park

A few days ago, I introduced Revd Dan to the delights of the multi-storey car park at the Lister Hospital.

On arrival, I declared that this could just be the worst car park in the world.

He doubted me...until he'd experienced the logjams, the beeping, and every row looking promising until you realise the space is too small or is hiding a tiny Smart car behind the massive people carrier next door.

I'm not one for praying about parking spaces, but wondering whether you might eventually drive so high up the car park that you reach heaven itself can drive you to such things!

In case it's not yet apparent, I confess that I've often found myself feeling really quite stressed and grumpy in this car park.

But, something occurred to me that changed my perspective. Nobody goes to a hospital because life is going particularly well.

The person who had just pulled into the last available space might have been rushing to see a sick child. The



elderly couple walking slowly across the car park may have been on their way to another round of appointments. The woman sitting alone in her car, staring ahead, could have just received life-changing news—or been trying to find the courage to walk through the doors.

Seen like that, the car park looked rather different.

It wasn't simply full of people getting in my way. It was full of people carrying worries I knew nothing about.

(Continued on page 2)

Vicar's Message - *continued*

(Continued from page 1)

We spend so much of life assuming we know why people behave as they do. The impatient driver. The distracted shopper. The neighbour who seems abrupt. We fill in the gaps with our own stories, and they're not always generous ones.

Jesus seemed to have an extraordinary ability to see beyond what was obvious. Where others saw a nuisance, he saw a person. Where others saw someone's behaviour, he saw their story. Again and again in the Gospels, he stopped long enough to notice the full story of the individual in front of him.

And I wonder how different our days might be if we could manage to do the same.

Some car parks really are dreadful. But if you find yourself in one this summer, perhaps let it remind you that we don't always know what people are carrying. Calm and patience may not arrive overnight, but that small shift in perspective might just help us to be a little gentler with one another.

With love

Revd Kathryn

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Friday 25th Sept - 2 to 4pm - A Date for your Diary

Sunny afternoons with tea, coffee and cake served in our churchyard are features of our summer fundraising activities. In April we raised money for the Alzheimer's Society and then, in July, for Isabel Hospice. Both were a great success – thank you to everyone who supported these events in so many different ways.

Our next fundraising event will be a little different. This time the event will focus on our church – fundraising for St John's! Entry and refreshments will be free. Donations for St John's will be greatly appreciated.

Tea, coffee and cake will be there to enjoy, as well as having time for lots of chat-chat-chat. A great opportunity to catch up with friends, neighbours and to meet new people.

A group from the Welwyn Hatfield U3A Ukulele Group plan to entertain us and, possibly, some people might like to sing along with them? Other ideas are in the pipeline, but we'll keep those “under wraps” for now.

Everyone is welcome on **25th Sept** - Come along and join us for fun, cake and good company. Look forward to seeing you!

Revd Dan Ide - St John's new Assistant Curate - Welcome & Celebration Service

On Sunday 12th July, having been ordained as a deacon the previous day, St John's and St Michael's churches came together to celebrate Dan's arrival. Dan will be with both churches for the next three years. In this edition you'll see some photos of the celebration as well as Dan's first regular column - this one is titled “Welcome”. See the front cover and pages 5, 8 & 9.

Isabel Hospice - Coffee & Cake Afternoon



In gratitude for the care that Isabel Hospice provided for her mum, Peggy, Gina organised a coffee and cake afternoon in their aid on Wed 22nd July. To find out more about the work of Isabel Hospice and see photos from the event please see pages 12 & 13.



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Welcome - by Revd Dan Ide

"Welcome" is often one of the first words we see as we arrive at someone's front door. It's printed on doormats, hung on signs, or painted on walls. Yet after wiping our feet, we rarely stop to think about what that simple word really means.

Over the past few weeks, I've had the privilege of experiencing welcome in the very best sense of the word as I've begun my ministry at St John's, Lemsford. My welcome service was a wonderful occasion, with the church beautifully decorated with flowers and banners, followed by a bring-and-share lunch and (most importantly) cake. It wasn't



simply the decorations or the food that made it special, but the kindness, generosity, and genuine warmth shown by so many people.

I've also had the pleasure of visiting St John's Primary School for the Year 6 leavers' assembly, where the whole school came together to celebrate the achievements of pupils as



they prepared for an exciting new chapter. It was a joyful reminder that welcoming isn't just about saying hello; it's also about encouraging people as they grow and marking important moments in life together.

Since arriving, I've also met many friendly faces on the school run, in the church, and simply passing by. Every introduction and conversation has helped me feel at home, and for that I am deeply grateful.

Perhaps that's what welcome really looks like. It's more than a word on a doormat. It's taking the time to notice someone, making space for them, celebrating with them, and helping them know they belong. These are qualities that Jesus showed throughout his life, welcoming people from every walk of life with kindness and compassion. My hope is that St John's will continue to be known as a place, and Lemsford as a community, where everyone can find that kind of welcome.

Stanborough Lodge Care Home - by Jenny Roden

Stanborough Lodge Care Home is a small Victorian style country home situated within our parish. It is set at the end of a quiet road that was once the A1, before being cut off by the construction of the A1M. It nestles within beautiful landscaped gardens and is close to Stanborough Lakes. The care home offers respite, residential and specialist dementia care for residents with a range of healthcare requirements.

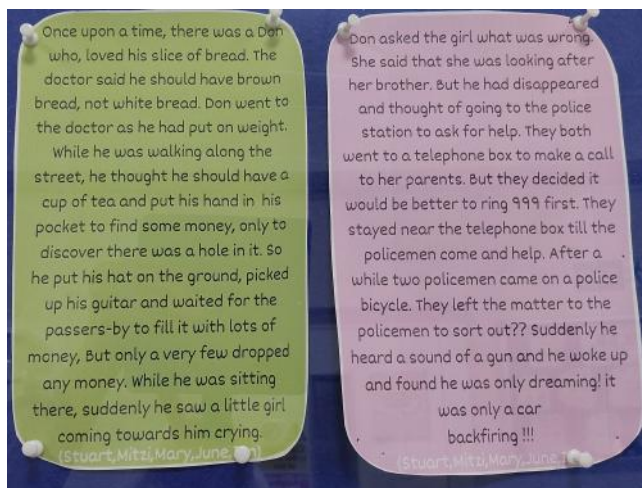


The residents have opportunities to participate in a varied programme of activities, such as fitness classes, musical entertainment, arts and crafts, baking, flower arranging and reminiscence games.

Our church has a presence in the care home. On the second Wednesday of each month, Ian Douglas and I visit to offer a short church service followed

by some social time with the residents. We receive a warm welcome from the staff and residents, whom we've got to know well over the months. Also, there are frequent social activities to which relatives and the community are invited.

The creative activities of the residents are beautifully presented on frequently changing display boards. It's fascinating to study the displays and wonderful to see what is achieved. The latest display is linked to a group Creative Writing activity. Thank you to Stanborough Lodge for agreeing to share this work with us through our church magazine. *Jenny*



Marnie - by Jo Brooks

Farewell Marnie!

Regular attenders at church (and avid readers of the parish magazine) will be familiar with Marnie – our Golden Retriever Guide Dog puppy-in-training. Nearly a year ago we introduced her to the Lemsford family in this magazine, and already we are getting ready to move her on to the next stage of her Guide Dogs ‘career’. At the moment we expect her to be leaving us at the end of September. We’ll be taking her back to the Midlands, where Guide Dogs have their national centre, and where she will join their breeding programme and find another family to live with.

Marnie has been our constant companion these last few months – she’s been pretty much everywhere with us



– to work in London, to the shops, hospital, dentist, hairdressers (for me



not her!), and everywhere in between. And of course, church. It won't be the same listening to Kathryn give the notices without Marnie heckling. It's been an adventure, a joy and a privilege for us, and we will miss her.

P.S. if for any reason they decide they don't want her for breeding, she'll be back for another couple of months, and we can do this all over again!

Guide Dogs provide a wide range of services with and without dogs to support people living with a vision impairment. Their staff, volunteers and dogs help children, young people, adults, and whole families to live actively, independently and well.

Visit Guide Dogs here for more information about what they do, and ways to support them (including how to volunteer as a Puppy Raiser!) - **Jo**

Bring & Share Lunch

After Curate Dan's first service



Welcome to St John's Revd Dan

On July 12th, St John's and St Michael and All Angels' came together to welcome - and hear from - Revd Dan on his first Sunday as our curate. It was a service full to the brim of warmth, joy, and welcome.

He had been ordained just one day earlier at an amazing service at St Albans Cathedral.

Below you'll see a montage of photos from the service.

The top-middle photo shows Revd Dan with Revd Kathryn and MP for Welwyn Hatfield, Andrew Lewin.

On the opposite page: more photos from the special day, as we all enjoyed a bring-and-share meal with lots of cake...





Photos: Images courtesy
of Nicola Sanders
Photography - [https://
www.nicolasanders.co.uk/](https://www.nicolasanders.co.uk/)
- thanks



Above Left to Right:
Mayor Michal Siewniak,
Head of St Johns -
Michelle Boylan, Revd
Kathryn Alford, Faye Dave



St John's School Lemsford Celebrates the Grand Opening of its New Playground - by Faye Dave

If you walked past St John's Church of England Primary School earlier this week, you might have heard an extra surge of cheers and applause drifting over the playground. After an incredible year of dedicated fundraising, determination, and community spirit, the pupils at St John's are officially enjoying a brand new playground!

The ribbon was officially cut on Monday, 20th July, by the Mayor of Welwyn Hatfield, Councillor Michal Siewniak, who joined pupils, staff, and parents to mark the special milestone. With wide smiles and great excitement, the children wasted no time exploring their new outdoor space - a moment made all the better by the huge effort it took to get here.

Power of the Community

Transforming the playground was no small task. Set up as a major project for the school year, the initial target of £26,000 felt ambitious for a small school community. Yet, through endless dedication spanning seasonal events, community drives, and the unwavering support of families, local grant supporters, and friends, the school community rallied together to raise an astonishing £47,000.

Every pound raised represents the generosity of our local community. From the Lemsford School Association (LSA) and parents organising

logistics to supporters cheering the children on at every step, this playground is a true testament to what can be achieved when a small community of just 105 pupils comes together for its young people.

More Than Just Climbing Frames

For the children at St John's, the new play area is far more than just timber. It provides an energetic, inclusive space where pupils can build confidence, stretch their imaginations, practise teamwork, and recharge their minds outdoors for years to come.

A Heartfelt Thank You

The school extends its gratitude to the Mayor of Welwyn Hatfield for taking the time to celebrate with us, and, importantly, to every single person in the local community who donated, volunteered, or offered a word of encouragement throughout the year. We would also like to give special thanks to Benefact Trust, Ramble Worldwide Outdoor Trust, and Welwyn Hatfield Community Fund for supporting our playground with grants.

This playground was built by the community, for our children, and it stands as a wonderful reminder of how strong the St John's spirit truly is - *Faye*



Above Left and Right: Photos from the Coffee Afternoon in aid of Isabel Hospice - see article on the right
Below Left: Gina, **Below Right:** QR code for donating to our Give-a-Little appeal for Isabel Hospice

Isabel Hospice - Caring for Peggy – and for Our Community

For Gina and her family, the work of Isabel Hospice is something very personal. During the last days of her mother Peggy's life, the hospice's nurses helped to care for her at home. Their skilled and compassionate support meant that Peggy could remain in familiar surroundings, while Gina and the rest of the family received reassurance and practical help at an extremely difficult time.

In gratitude for that care, Gina held a coffee and cake afternoon in aid of Isabel Hospice on Wed 22nd July. Thanks to the generosity of everyone involved, the afternoon raised more than £500.

Isabel Hospice has been caring for people across eastern Hertfordshire for more than 40 years. It was founded in 1982 by Isabel Last, a former nurse from Welwyn Garden City who was herself living with cancer. Isabel recognised the need for better support for seriously ill people and their families within the local community.

Working with a small group of volunteers, she helped establish what was originally called the Welwyn Hatfield Hospice Care Service. It later became Isabel Hospice in her honour.

Today, the charity provides specialist palliative and end-of-life care free of charge. Its Inpatient Unit in Welwyn Garden City offers a warm and reassuring place for people who need intensive nursing care or help in managing pain and other difficult symptoms.

However, as Peggy's story shows, much of the hospice's work takes place in people's own homes. The Community Palliative Care and Hospice at Home teams provide specialist nursing, symptom control, practical advice and emotional support. They work alongside GPs, district nurses and other healthcare professionals, helping people to remain at home, close to those they love, whenever that is their wish. A clinical advice line is also available 24 hours a day.

Care of this kind is provided without charge, but it is not without considerable cost. Isabel Hospice says that it must raise around £7 million every year through donations, fundraising events and income from its charity shops. NHS funding covers only about 30 per cent of its core running costs, leaving the hospice heavily dependent on the continuing generosity of the local community.

A heartfelt thank you goes to everyone who baked or donated cakes, helped with the arrangements, came along to enjoy the afternoon, or made a donation. Together, you helped raise more than £500 in recognition of the wonderful care given to Peggy and her family.

For anyone who was unable to attend - or who would still like to contribute - donations can be made using this link <https://givealittle.co/c/3yuuJvLhblpirPF2D3KB0B> or by scanning the QR code opposite.

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during the 11am service

Children and Young People at St John's by Jo Brooks

Hasn't it all gone quiet all of a sudden! Term is over, the buildings and grounds quiet and closed until September. Even the late-night football drama is just a memory. It's quieter at church too during August while Sunday Club is on holiday, but the church family continues to meet, to praise God, to care for each other. Church and school in Lemsford are bound together – we share the same space, meet to worship, celebrate together, talk, sing, laugh, eat cake (always lots of cake!).



In the Bible, the prophet Zechariah, normally pretty gloomy like most Old Testament prophets, presents a beautiful vision of the whole family of God, living, working, resting and playing together, all ages, all stages of life. He describes the older folk sitting and talking, spinning tales, and the children running and playing, all part of the same community. It's God's vision and ours too: 'a good city to grow old in... a good city to grow up in' (From Zechariah 8 v 4-5, The Message translation).

As you read through the pages of this magazine, I wonder how many stories you can find that show our whole community celebrating together!



After the summer pause and rest we are back together in September:

Wednesday 2nd September - Welcome Back Coffee Morning hosted by church for parents joining or returning to St John's School at the start of the new school year, 8:40am at school.

Sunday 6th September – all-together worship at St John's at 11am followed by a barbecue.

Sunday 13th September – Sunday Club returns, part of our 11am service, with Bible stories, crafts, games and play for children of all ages. Everyone is welcome, whether you are new to church or an old hand! This term's focus is on some of the stories Jesus told his friends, in Matthew's gospel.

Contact revkathrynalford@gmail.com or joholifield@gmail.com

Could you help bring a little beauty to St John's?

Could you help bring a little beauty to St John's?

The flowers at St John's are much more than decoration. Week by week, they help make our worship space welcoming, beautiful and prayerful. They mark the seasons of the church year, celebrate special occasions, and offer a quiet reminder of God's creativity and generosity.

We are blessed with a lovely team of flower arrangers who faithfully create the beautiful displays you see in church. They are a friendly and welcoming group who would really love some more people to join them.

You don't need to have experience to join in. If you enjoy flowers, creativity, or simply being part of a team, you would be very welcome to give it a go. Our existing flower arrangers are more than happy to share their skills and show you the

ropes.

The team usually arrange flowers on Fridays and Saturdays, depending on the season and what is happening in church. Even helping occasionally can make a real difference and means this important ministry can continue.

Below are a few pictures of some recent arrangements, to show the wonderful work already being done.

If you think you might like to get involved, please do get in touch with the team via the vicar's email address –

revkathrynalford@gmail.com.

Whether you have lots of experience or have never arranged a flower before, there is a place for you in the team.

Let's continue to make St John's a place of beauty and welcome for everyone who comes through our doors.



It is incredible to think that another school year has gone by. We have had a fantastic term at St John's with many highlights, enjoyable events and successes. We are really ending our school year on a high! Here are a few of our recent highlights:

Alice in Wonderland

We have been treated to excellent performances of this year's production, 'Alice in Wonderland.' Sandpipers and Kingfisher classes really did themselves proud with their fantastic singing, acting and dancing. There were lots of very proud family members in each of the audiences!

Collective Worship – 'Fullness of Life.'

This half term we continued to explore John 10:10. Our focus has been on change and the ways in which change is an important part of leading a full life. This has been an important part of our preparation for Year 6 and their next steps into secondary school.

SATs results

After a delay of a week, Year 6 eventually received their SATs results. We are delighted with the results and are pleased that this year the % of our children achieving at the highest level – greater depth – in Reading and Maths is above the national average. We have also seen a huge improvement in the Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling results.



RE ENRICHMENT DAY

In this term's RE Enrichment Day we explored the worldviews of Christianity. A worldview is the way people understand the world and their place in it. Christians around the world may worship differently, but all share the belief that every person is loved by God and should be treated with kindness and respect. In their house teams the children explored a different Christian festival and the ways it is celebrated around the world.

K'Nex Challenge Success

Many congratulations went to Callum and Finley in Sandpipers class who won first place in the 2026 Go Construct K'NEX Challenge! 163 schools, with a total of 8,745 pupils took part from across Peterborough, Hertfordshire, Luton,

(Continued on page 19)

Services

August 2026

2nd	Trinity 9	8 am	Quiet Communion (BCP)
		11am	All Together Holy Communion*
9th	Trinity 10	11 am	Holy Communion
16th	Trinity 11	8 am	Quiet Communion (BCP)
		11 am	Reflective Worship
23rd	Trinity 12	11 am	Holy Communion
30th	Trinity 13	11am	Holy Communion

September 2026

6th	Trinity 14	8 am	Quiet Communion (BCP)
		11 am	All Together Worship* followed by 'New Term' BBQ*
13th	Trinity 15	11 am	Holy Communion with Sunday Club*
20th	Trinity 16	8 am	Quiet Communion (BCP)
		11 am	Reflective Worship
		3 pm	St John's@3 Wild Worship*
27th	Trinity 17	11 am	Holy Communion

** Children are welcome at all our services, but these services and events are especially suitable for families and children (as well as people of all other ages!). BCP Book of Common Prayer; CW Common Worship. **NB Kathryn's day off is Friday each week***

(Continued from page 17)

Essex and Suffolk. The challenge was to create a model rocket out of K'Nex.

Sports Day

We had a fantastic Sports Day, the sun shone and the school field was full of children and their families enjoying the competitive atmosphere! The children took part in a carousel of activities in their house teams and were supported by Sports Leaders from Stanborough School. The event ended with races including the traditional toddler race, parent race and the very unique, the slowest cycling race!

New Play Equipment and our Mission 26:26

At the start of the year, we set the ambitious target of raising £26,000 with the aim of replacing the main equipment on the playground. We are delighted to say that around £46,000 was actually raised in the end due to the tremendous fundraising effort of the children, parents and the LSA. The new equipment is now completed and the children are already enjoying playing on it. What an achievement we are very grateful to everyone involved in making this project such a success.

This time of year gives us an opportunity to reflect as well as to prepare. We are looking forward to

welcoming our new group of reception children in September. We can also reflect with those children who are about to complete that journey, our Year 6, as they prepare to move on to secondary school. We have appreciated all that they have contributed to life at St John's. Our school vision is based, as you know, on John 10:10 'I came that they may have life, life in all its fullness.' We wish them all the very best in their future and pray that it is indeed a life of fullness; fullness of opportunity, hope and love.

Best wishes

Michelle Boylan

Head of St John's Church of England School

[For photos of Alice in Wonderland, Outdoor learning week & Opening the new school playground - see inside front cover. Also see Faye's article and photos on the New Playground on pages 10 & 11 - Ed.]

As mentioned in the last issue, ‘the village’ was bypassed in 1833 leading to a decline in the number of stagecoaches, carts and wagons travelling along the Great North Road through Hertfordshire. The decline of the traffic through Lemsford parish was accelerated by ‘railway mania’ which was taking hold of the country.

It would be useful to review the data from the 1841 census. The problem with trying to understand changes in Lemsford village life between 1841 and 1881 is defining ‘the village’. In 1841 it had no church and it started at the Roebuck and ended 300 yards past the bridge going towards Valley Road. In 1859 Lemsford became a parish which included Cromer Hyde, Stanborough, Handside and the ‘village’ called Lemsford Mill. Using census data for this area we get a larger database to compare the changes.

The number of people in 1841 was 371, breaking down into 80 families. 64 agricultural labourers, shoemakers, smiths, and wheelwrights included a baker, shopkeeper, beer keeper and school mistress. A lot of jobs were associated with the Brocket

Estate, gamekeeper, shepherd, servants (15) bailiff etc.

In 1851, the last ten years had seen the diversion of the Great North Road, and the building of the Great North Railway (GNR). The GNR was founded in 1846. During 1846 – 1849 construction of the first 20 miles of line out of London (to Hatfield) in 1850 saw the opening of the GNR from London to York (with Hatfield as one of the original stops). This meant the days of horse-drawn coaches were numbered. Hatfield railway station boasted a steam shed and a turntable. (The reason Hatfield’s platforms are offset). In December 1852 the new London terminus (King’s Cross), designed by architect Lewis Cubitt, was opened. Below is an image produced by AI imagining what it would have looked like.



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In 1851 we had a population of 357 and the census records 46 heads of families. The main employment was agriculture with 93 agricultural labourers, and the cottage industry employed 72 workers, mainly women, in straw plaiting. The census shows the range of trades including estate workers and service industries for the coaching trade including smiths and wheelwrights.

The old Great North Road still went through the village and the route past the Long Arm & Short Arm to Welwyn was shorter but steeper (this road stayed open until the late 1950s). The new Great North Road up Brickwall Hill and along the line of the present A1 motorway was a longer route to Welwyn. There are several theories about the name of the Long Arm & Short Arm and one is a sign with a short arrow (arm) pointing up the hill to the Waggoners at Ayot Green (the short route) or the long arrow (arm) up Brickwall Hill (the long route). The Sun Inn was run by the Allen family; the census describes his employment as a shoemaker. The Long Arm & Short Arm is described in 1853 in an auction catalogue as a 'brick built and tiled beer house and grocer's shop, bakehouse and premises. This moment in time is a pivotal moment in the history of Lemsford:

the end of the stagecoach and the dawn of the railways. The golden age of Lemsford as a major hub to the north was over. It would start to become a rural community based on agriculture and serving Bocket Hall. Its pubs and inns would provide local hospitality.

The Welwyn viaduct is one hour's walk from Lemsford and I imagine on August 6th 1850 the whole village travelled to Digswell to watch Queen Victoria open it. Looking at it today, it is an incredible sight. In 1850 I can only imagine what the folks of Lemsford thought. The sight of the new bricks all made on site and the two embankments, which required around 1 million tons of earth moved by human and horse possibly from Lemsford must have been seen as the eighth wonder of the world.

The census of 1861 shows the parish with 434 people living there, 78 heads of families, occupations similar to 1851. The census shows a James May working as a plate layer for GNR. The railway was making the country a smaller place to live. The effect of the diversion was over and the village settled down to serving the local landowners.

How did the railway change the village? No records exist in our

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Lemsford Local History Group - *Continued*

(Continued from page 21)

archives to suggest who would use the railway and why. In 1861 walking would have been the main form of transport, maybe a few pony traps and farm wagons with horses were available. The average wage was 11 shillings for a farm labourer, but they got a house and a food allowance. The cost of a railway ticket from Hatfield to London would have been too expensive for a labourer. Rail travel at this time was 50% cheaper than coach travel and quicker. It also opened up Britain to locations only dreamed of 10 years before. Day trips to the coast were popular. Cheap Sunday excursions were introduced around this time, and the poor could travel third class at an affordable price. The church saw these excursions on a Sunday as 'desecration of the Sabbath'. The national Sunday League was formed in 1855. They tried to persuade the London parks and museums to open on Sunday in 1856, but it was rejected. The local landowners and farmers could get their products to the London markets quicker and fresher by train. In conclusion life in Lemsford would have been agricultural with a small passing trade through the village. A major development is the opening of the Luton branch railway line in 1860

called 'the Luton & Dunstable'. This line would be used by the village maybe to visit and shop but certainly to export the straw plaiting - a valuable commodity for the economy of the area. In 1861, Lemsford was connected by rail to Hertford via Welwyn. Four years later, in 1865, a further connection was established through Hatfield and London Road to St Albans Abbey.

Both towns were major market towns for the goods of Lemsford.

The change is small, but we start to see the influence of the railway. Lists of occupations in the 1871 census that relate to the railway are railway smith, rail labourer, plate layer (4 men) and railway flagman. The number of people in the parish totalled 433. The parish boasted 4 pubs and 2 inns - the Wagon & Horses, the Roebuck Inn, the Sun Inn, Long Arm..., Waggoner's all on the Old Great North Road and the Chequers serving Cromer Hyde.

The census of 1881 shows a population of 392, number of jobs on the railway 10 including loco driver and porter. The Roebuck had closed in 1879 a sign of the decline in passing trade - a combination of the bypass and the railway. 1841 to 1881 was the

(Continued on page 25)



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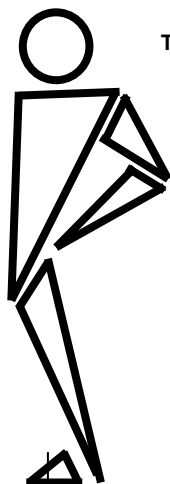
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transfer from coach to train. In the next issue we will explore the improvement of the Great North Road and the introduction of the A1/ A1M.

A consequence of the arrival of the railway was the demise of the cottage industry straw plaiting.

The decline of straw plaiting was due to the reduction of high import duties on straw plait in 1869 and regular imports from China starting. The railway made this change more viable with railway links to the ports. The people of Lemsford supplemented their meagre wage with straw plaiting and the loss must have had an adverse effect on the lives of the people of Lemsford parish.

Straw plaiting started with a bundle of straw. This was divided into 4, 5, 7, 9 strips by means of a sharp tool called 'the instrument'. You then started to plait to a pattern, most common 'the plait of 7'. When they completed 20 to 30 yards of plait they sold it to a local factor who sold it to the

local factories. The image below is of Gray & Horn, English Plait Merchants, owned by Coggeshall



Museum straw-plaiting.

The straw plaiting trade in Lemsford parish was a cottage industry which survived to WW1. The trade started in France and was introduced to Scotland in the 1560s. In the 1700s, hat and bonnet factories were set up in Luton, Hitchin, Stevenage and St Albans. Wages in Lemsford were low in the 1700s and 1800s and families were large. It became customary for wives and daughters to supplement the household income by straw plaiting. A woman in 1804 could earn £1 1s a week, agricultural workers earned 8s a week (for our

(Continued on page 27)

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Lemsford Local History Group - *Continued*

(Continued from page 25)

younger readers s = shilling and was worth 5p).

Children as young as five were taught and small children were sent to 'plait schools'. The children's

commission in 1864 found 2-year-olds in these schools in

overcrowded rooms doing long hours and if they fell asleep due to exhaustion

they were beaten. These schools were

abolished in 1891. By this date the industry was in decline, wages had fallen to 3 shillings a week (agricultural wages were ten shillings a week).

In the 1880s the market was in decline due to cheap imports from Italy, France and Switzerland. The nail in the coffin was WW1 when

women could earn more money in ammunition factories.

The image below shows four ladies in Cromer Hyde practising the craft in the 1800s (image supplied by Shirley Cochrane).



If you have any questions about Lemsford parish history or want to share memories email us at info@lemsfordhistory.co.uk or go to the website www.llemsfordhistory.co.uk



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During the first hot spell this summer, in May, we were making the most of it by taking tea in our garden—not just any tea, but one with our son and his wife, whom we always enjoy seeing. Suddenly, one of us noticed that a great tit was making solo journeys to and from a nest box that we had put up over a year ago. On investigation, it was clear that this bird was feeding some chicks inside.



This was really good news because the box had been given to us as a Christmas present in 2025 by the very son and daughter-in-law who were taking tea with us. It was empty last year, so we were all pleased that their gift had borne fruit.

In fact, this was but one present from them aimed at increasing the wildlife in our garden. In 2024 it was a hedgehog house, but that had signally failed to attract any. Last Christmas, it was a bee hotel but, so far, that too



has been unoccupied. The great tit using the bird box broke the drought.

This was a good example of nature raising our spirits. There have been lots of scientific studies demonstrating the health benefits that nature can bring. For example, a short walk in nature can improve attention by almost twenty percent, decrease depression symptoms, and make people feel more spiritual and self-reflective. Importantly, more green space around schools and homes is related to better school performance, reduced crime, and improved working memory.

Every day I scan the bee hotel, but it is still awaiting clients. Let us hope that some kindly bees drop in soon; what a wonderful day that will be!

You can read all Geoffrey's Nature Notes (this is number 37) at <https://geoffreyhollis.com/nature-notes>



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Prayer for our new Prime Minister and his Ministers

We pray for our reshaped government, that it will govern wisely and well. In so doing we are carrying out the instruction of St Paul: “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.”

– St Paul’s First Letter to Timothy 2:1-2

And finally A word from the Lord:

An Eskimo wakes up with a hangover and decides to go ice-fishing to clear his head. He reaches the ice and is about to cut a hole in it when he hears a voice from above: “There are no fish here.”

The fisherman is shocked but gets up and moves to another spot. As he’s about to cut a hole, he hears a voice from above again, “There are no fish here either.”

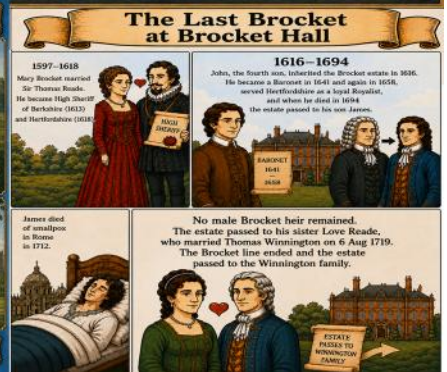
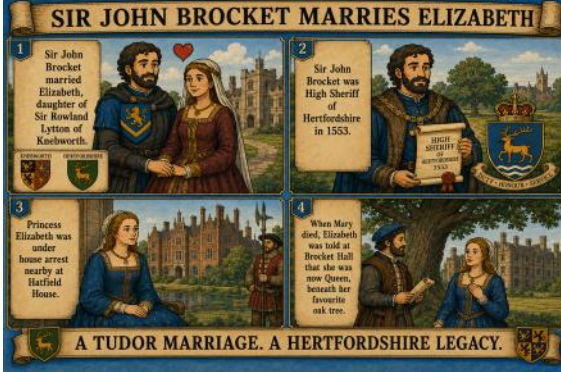
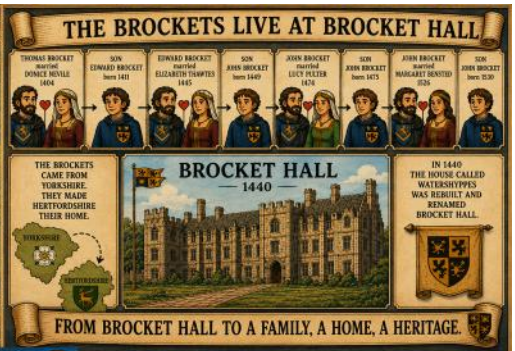
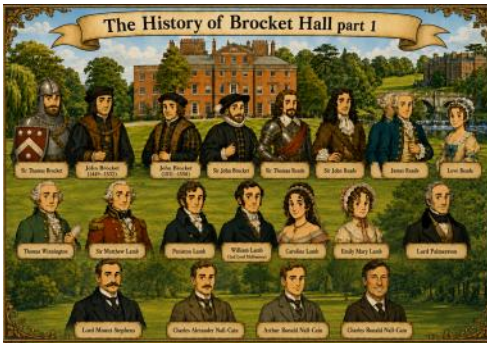
He gets up and moves to a third spot. Before he’s even finished walking, the voice says, “I’m telling you, there are no fish here.”

The fisherman says, “God, how can you be so sure there aren’t any fish here?”



The voice replies, “Because I’m the manager of this ice rink.”

The History of Bocket Hall Part 1 - up to 1923



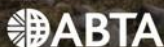
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