

## WE REMEMBERED A KING

Frederick Sander, the great breeder and hybridiser of orchids, who made his family's life here in the Camp district of St Albans, has become a major "friend" of Fleetville Diaries. One of our annual exhibitions was devoted to him and his son-in-law artist Henry Moon.

He is the subject of one account told at Hatfield Road Cemetery in our series of story walks called *Laid to Rest*.

And in a project at his family's grave plot at the cemetery Diaries has undertaken a restoration which resulted in a formal event



COURTESY PETER SANDER



attended by many members of both the Sander and Moon families, a few meeting each other for the first time. In the October edition of the magazine *Hertfordshire Life* Gillian Thornton wrote the illustrated feature article entitled *The Orchid King*, telling Frederick's story and that of his business. Liz, who curated our exhibition for FD, and the FD website, are both referenced in the article, as is a photo of the restored grave.

If, by any chance, you are unable to find a copy of the magazine in your newsagent or supermarket, Mike has purchased a copy for the FD archive, and has made a PDF scan of the article, which in these times is the only practical way we can pass dated magazine and newspaper articles between us. Many thanks to David for alerting us to the content of *Hertfordshire Life*.

*For readers less familiar with the Sander business after George Street, Frederick Sander's Orchid Nurseries was centred on Camp Road, downhill from Cecil Road. Today Ss Alban & Stephen Junior School is located here, with Ss Alban & Stephen Infant School & Nursery occupying Sander's private garden on the corner of Camp Road and Vanda Crescent.*

*Three other nearby blocks of Sander-owned land: the Cavendish estate, used to help fund the business; the land which is now the Breakspear estate; and the former fete field which is now the recreation section of Clarence Park.*

## WELCOME

to the eighth newsletter prepared for Fleetville Diaries. We are not planning a winter programme for 2020/21 but would love to re-launch for a summer programme in 2021. Details, as we have come to expect, remain fluid.

Among the open spaces residents are using for a breath of fresh air is Ellenbrook Fields, intended to be dedicated as a country park, part of the long-term plan for the former de Havilland Aircraft Company site. However, before then there is the thorny issue of permission to be given for sand and gravel extraction – or not. We have learned to live with aggregates abstraction for at least eighty years. But ...



Grazing in Ellenbrook Fields

The County's decision was announced on time at the end of September; planning consent for the aggregate workings was refused on multiple grounds, all of which have been widely discussed by communities in the area. The County Council was very concerned about an underground flow of bromate already affecting the groundwater and spreading in a way not clearly understood.

While the application has been refused Brett Aggregates could still appeal, and even if it does not the issue is not necessarily closed down for good, as the same authority will still have to confirm the final usage of the land.

## EARLIEST REFERENCE TO RATS' CASTLE?

Here's a question: how could we read about Fleetville before the district came into being? By searching for someone who was travelling along the road between St Albans and Hatfield, perhaps. Especially if it was an eventful journey.

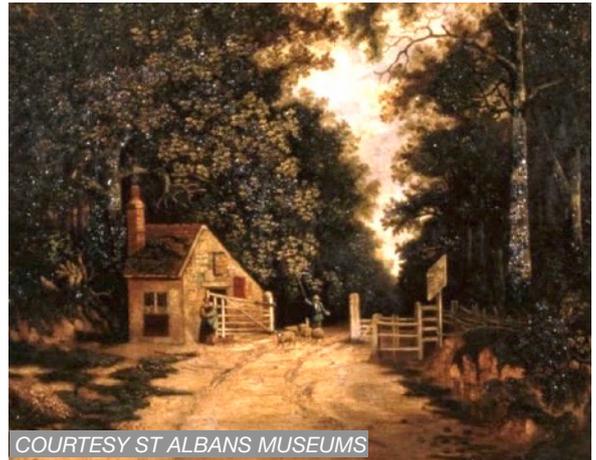
An 1878 issue of the *Herts Advertiser* tells us of such a journey by cart taken by James Harris, 21, a fish hawk. Mr Harris had stayed at the Beehive PH, London Road one August night that year, and on the following morning he started out "soon after nine" to call at the house of James Frost, dealer, of Inkerman Road, to buy some fish. He was accompanied by two other men, and, as we discover later, a small child. During that early period of the day a box of herrings was sold for three shillings and three pence (c16p).

There had to be a specific reason for such an article appearing in the newspaper. There was; it was an inquest report.

At Rats' Castle some herrings were sold. There was no other building nearby and Harris's customer was probably the toll keeper. There was no reference to paying a toll (collected from the side track, now Sutton Road)



There is no known image of the toll road at Oaklands but it probably looked something like this, the old road at Sopwell painted by John H Buckingham in the 1850s.



COURTESY ST ALBANS MUSEUMS

ABOVE: There is no known image of the Rats Castle toll house, but this is a painting of the Colney Heath Lane toll house.



so the cart had undoubtedly been driven along Hatfield Road from the newly-cut Stanhope Road. A Mr Flitton drove the cart; he was on the right side of the bench seat, with his little boy in the centre and Mr Harris on the near side.

They passed the lane leading to Beaumonts Farm and were approaching Oaklands Lodge (today's South Lodge), "travelling at four miles per hour", when Mr Harris prepared "to light up a lucifer". He stood up from his seat and fell forward onto his face, landing in the road. No explanation was given for why Harris should have needed to stand on a moving cart [do you think this is a pothole problem of the time?] The pony did not stop and William Pollard from the Lodge ran out to assist.

Incident occurred near the Wynchlands shops.

Dr Lipscombe was sent for and a verdict of accidental death was determined, resulting from a fractured skull.

We also know two further facts about Harris; witnesses stated he was sober that morning, and that he was "a heavy man".

The event also tells us more about the tollhouse too. Added to the toll network in the 1860s to put a stop to payment avoidance via the track, we know it had been vacated with the closure of the toll road in 1880. The fact that the building was already a recognised landmark using the name *Rats' Castle* at the time of this incident, suggests that the thatched roof was already infested while still being occupied, and not only after it had been left derelict for some time.

The story of the Rats' Castle can be found at <http://www.stalbansowneastend.org.uk/topics/topic-selection/rats-castle/>

## FEATURE STREET: PICKFORD ROAD

The fact that Pickford Road is not widely known is because no-one lives there. In fact, until fairly recently its name appeared on no map. So, to refresh our minds, it is a cul-de-sac which opens onto Sutton Road between Hedley Road and Cambridge Road. It began as the property of Messrs Ekins & Giffen who developed the Camp fields. In the early years of the 20th century you could walk among these fields and here and there would be a house, or a pair, occasionally a cluster; but much former field space remained.



COURTESY GOOGLE STREETVIEW

Built as a St Albans Co-operative Society maintenance and administrative building in 1938.

Ekins & Giffen had laid out most of the intended roads, but even on the earliest map there was clearly an intention not yet realised, circled blue on the map below. Also in blue is a broken line which follows a line parallel to Hedley Road; it would connect with Guildford Road across Maxwell Road.



COURTESY GOOGLE EARTH

The former laundry building at the right end of the red box.

By 1910 a large site along Sutton Road had been acquired by a partnership known as Cotter & Green – the block outlined in red on the aerial photo – and whatever they intended for the land they seemed to be in no hurry, nor were they concerned about protecting the connection across Maxwell Road; numbers 1 and 3 remained the only homes until the mid 1920s, after which the gap was closed when 9 and 11 Maxwell Road were finally built.

You would have had to observe closely but in tiny print in the *Herts Advertiser* in July 1938

permission was sought from the council for a comprehensive development of the site, for shops along Sutton Road and a roller skating hall behind. Roller skating was a popular social activity in the mid 30s and Fleetville was seen as a prime district for attracting customers. Soon afterwards, the former Ver Hotel at the foot of Holywell Hill (where Latium Close is today) also applied for a skating hall. This was granted by the Council on condition that the site was later returned to residential. The Fleetville applicant withdrew, but the St Albans Co-operative Society now acquired the site for an administrative office and vehicle maintenance and storage depot, and as with some of its other buildings, including the dairy in Burleigh Road, it was built in a modernist style.

To the rear a separate building was the premises of Langford's Laundry, later renamed St Albans Model Laundry. For the first time an access road became essential. British Indicators squeezed into the building as well.

As for the road name, a former resident of Fleetville has suggested that Pickford's removal vans may have been parked on this open space before it was developed.

Pickford's had its base in Victoria Street where today is Sweet Briar Mews. So the idea is purely speculative, and it is a private road. Does anyone have a different take on the name?



COURTESY NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

Block of land proposed for shops and a skating hall.

## STILE SITE CONFIRMED

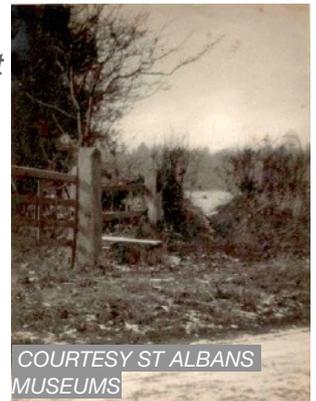
Following publication of the photograph of a stile in last month's FD Newsletter, which is said to have been in "Sandpit Lane and Lane off which became Beaumont Avenue", Carol followed up by suggesting the annotation might also have been referring to the northern end of the same footpath passing beside Beaumonts Farm. The location today would be the junction of Beechwood Avenue, Sandpit Lane and Marshalswick Lane. We puzzled over the angle of the stile in the photo and judged that it would have been right-angled at the northern end.

We concluded that the track, which ended approximately where number 6 Beaumont Avenue is today, and just inside the gate which had protected the privacy of the lane, would indeed be set at an oblique angle. Readers may refer to the photo and map in FD Newsletter 7.

To find it on the St Albans Museums website (<https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/explore/collections>) enter 2010.5087 into the search field. Click on the photo and go to the bottom of the (slightly) enlarged picture to find this comment now added:

*"The stile was on the east side of Beaumont Avenue approx where number 6 is today. Arranged obliquely it gave foot access to the path from the, then, private Avenue, towards Sandpit Lane. Today's Beechwood Avenue follows this path approximately, except that it joins Hatfield Road on the public side of where a white gate marked the boundary in Beaumont Avenue".*

Every item in the collection provides the opportunity for us to add a comment, perhaps to add additional information, or correct the annotation, or even to identify a location or object where none is given.



## TELLING US MORE

On a recent visit to the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park I noticed for the first time a recently installed street plate for a new short road in LB Newham. The authority must be aware that residents and visitors alike often pass and glance at street plates to wonder what a name might reference; in this case Layard Street, named after Stratford-born Nina Layard (1853 to 1935), botanist, archaeologist, poet and historian "who made many important discoveries in her field."

Given the article about Frederick Sander in this issue here is a suggestion for one of our roads.



## CAVENDISH ROAD

This land was owned by Frederick Sander, "the Orchid King". He named William Cavendish, President of the Royal Horticultural Society, one of the country's finest orchid collectors.

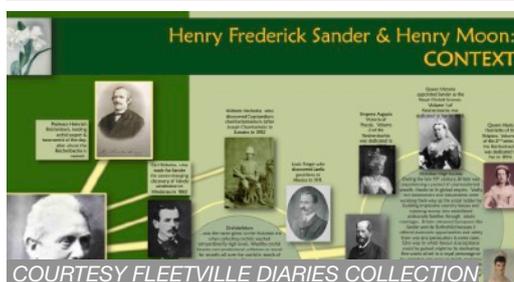
FLEETVILLE

AL1

It's an alternative to blue plaques!

Sander's site was significantly larger than that devoted to raising orchids. He sold the top end where is now the Cavendish estate (Cavendish, Albion and Cecil roads) to a number of house builders. He recognised one of this country's foremost orchid collectors of Sander's lifetime: William Cavendish, Sixth Duke of Devonshire.

## EXHIBITION SAMPLE



Our sign-off memory this month is a portion of one of the Sander exhibition panels. You can view the complete exhibition on [www.fleetvillediaris.org](http://www.fleetvillediaris.org)

Ideas, comments, pictures – anything – contact Mike on [mikeneighbour@mac.com](mailto:mikeneighbour@mac.com)