

Fleetville Diaries Annual Report 2019-2020

1. Introduction

When Fleetville Diaries held our Annual General Meeting in November 2019 it was at the end of a busy year of events and projects and we had exciting plans for 2020's activities. In January 2020 we prepared and publicised our programme for the year which would have included a variety of talks, presentation of our research into the history of Ballito Hosiery Mills, our regular history walks around Hatfield Road cemetery, visits to places of interest beyond St Albans and our much-acclaimed garden party. We were not to know then that all these plans would soon be thrown into disarray by the Covid-19 pandemic. These plans of course included our 2020 AGM, due to have taken place on 25 November.

Despite not being able to carry out most of our scheduled activities and to report on them at the AGM in the usual way, the committee felt that our members and contacts would be interested to hear what work on the history of Fleetville and district has still been going on during this strange year.

2. January and February 2020 meetings

Two well-attended and fascinating meetings took place in January and February. In January we heard Mike Neighbour's *Children of the Camps* presentation about the lives of children born into displaced persons camps. In February Sarah Graham and Sue Gaylard told us about the time when St Bartholomew's Hospital relocated to Hill End. The presence of several former Hill End nurses in the audience later allowed Sue and Sarah to enlarge on their store of knowledge about the hospital.

3. Monthly newsletters

When in March Covid-19 and the associated restrictions forced the abandonment of our meetings, Mike Neighbour generously undertook to produce a monthly newsletter for circulation to members and contacts. Nine newsletters have so far been produced, primarily by Mike, but with input from other committee members in the form of memories, research from past projects and pictures. Each newsletter usually includes a feature on a particular street and a variety of items of local and current interest.

4. Other research and activities

Throughout 2020, various members have continued to pursue their interests in particular aspects of Fleetville's past and present, including:

- The history of Ballito Hosiery Mills; we hope that a presentation on this subject can take place once meetings resume.
- Ongoing research by Mike Neighbour into the history of various local buildings and businesses; some of this features, as indicated above, in our monthly newsletters as well as on Mike's own St Albans Own East End website: www.stalbansowneastend.org.uk.
- Alex Bell is working on the history of the former railway line (now the Alban Way) from the Salvation Army halt to Hill End station, including the Hill End level crossing and Herbert Read's fatal accident there.
- Romaine Hutchison interviewed Mumtaz Begum about her family moving from Pakistan to England and establishing their lives in 1960s St Albans.

Additionally, our work restoring the grave in Hatfield Road cemetery of the Sander / Moon family of orchid growers and the 2019 celebration of their lives featured in the October edition of *Hertfordshire Life*. Entitled 'The Orchid King - St Albans genius who sparked a global love affair' it featured photos and a quotation from Liz Jones (formerly Bloom).

5. Fleetville Diaries website

Despite having stepped down from membership of the committee, Liz Jones has generously continued to maintain our website: <https://fleetvillediaries.org> and to place material on it. Contributions and memories from members, e.g. relating to schooldays or growing up in Fleetville, are always welcome and Liz is happy to upload them. Committee members are very grateful to Liz for her ongoing involvement.

6. Membership and contacts

Membership renewals took place in January 2020, resulting in a total membership of 37 people. Additionally our contacts list, maintained by Alex, contains 134 distinct email addresses, representing 151 individuals (including members).

We plan for membership subscriptions paid in 2020 to be carried over to 2021; the exact time period to be covered will depend on when we can re-start our activities.

7. Committee membership

The committee members elected at our 2019 AGM: Alex Bell, David Gaylard, Romayne Hutchison, Anne Marie Kelly, Mike Neighbour and Terry Swain, are all willing to continue as committee members until our 2021 AGM. At that point it is likely that some new committee members will be needed. And our committee is not limited to six members, so additional volunteers before that time are also welcome.

8. Financial situation

Despite the lack of activities our finances are in a healthy position. As of November 2020 we have a bank balance of £1322.00 and a float of £23.45, making a total of £1345.45.

9. Looking forward to 2021

Along with the rest of the UK, we await developments in relation to Covid-19 with a mixture of worry, uncertainty, and hope for better things. Once it seems possible for us to resume activities, with restrictions eased and the ability to ensure the safety of participants, we shall endeavour to prepare a programme of activities for at least part of 2021. We hope that this can include some events carried over from 2020. At that point we shall reinstate our public liability insurance, currently suspended. We may also be able to re-visit some of our other delayed plans, including the production of a Fleetville Diaries brochure and the development of a Wikipedia page for Fleetville.

We shall keep everyone informed through our newsletters and website and hope to be able to see everyone again before too many more months have passed.

Romayne Hutchison, on behalf of the Fleetville Diaries committee, 01/12/2020.