

PHOTO OF THE MONTH



COURTESY ST ALBANS LIBRARIES AT HALS

If you have moved to the eastern districts of the city at any time, it won't be long before you hear someone mention the Sutton Road bridge. The single track railway which passed over it closed during the 1960s, but that is not what gave the bridge its talking point. We should explain that the bridge and its railway was a product of the mid 19th century, the railway bridging a farm track; a horse and cart, or traveller occasionally passed underneath. Even so, it was necessary to lower the ground under the bridge once the former track on each side was made into a road to enable a minimum link between the Camp and Fleetville sides.

These pedestrians are probably on their way to work at the Nicholson coat factory on the left after the railway. A narrow raised path was later built on one side with a fence to protect pedestrians from an unusually high step down into the road. No other known photographs show this fenced high walk, which may not have lasted very long.

The gathering of water (or snow) was a result of a high water table and the scooping out of ground below the bridge. We have previously mentioned a former surface stream from springs in the vicinity of The Wick. Surveys by the water authorities had confirmed the likelihood of it following the line of Sutton Road before turning towards Campfield.



COURTESY ST ALBANS MUSEUMS

NEW COMMUNITY CENTRE

For the past five years the trustees of Fleetville Community Centre (FCC) have prepared plans for a new building, with the prospect of opening by 2025.

The District Council has recently raised its profile in respect of community facilities. It now plans to demolish the existing Fleetville Community Centre and Marlborough Pavilion and both are to be rebuilt in partnership with their user trusts.

The much-loved but old "temporary" Fleetville Centre in Royal Road, first erected in 1942 for the children of munitions workers in the district, is now over eighty years old and can no longer be adequately maintained.

The Council, which owns the site, the FCC Trust and the building's users, are in talks, and the next phase is the drawing up of concept designs and costs.

The plan is to create a more energy-efficient building with solar panels, heat pumps and green walls or roofing.

Trust Chair, Trevor Parsons commented: *"It is not only clear that a modern building is needed but that it must be considerably larger to cope with increasing demand and diverse population in the area for the services needed."*

The project is well and truly under way.

A VISIT TO THE POLICE STATION

Today a visit to the local police station would entail driving to Comet Way, Hatfield. Historically, such a visit would have depended on where we lived. The city had its station at the top of Victoria Street on the site of the one recently demolished. But until 1913, Fleetville wasn't in the city at all, so our visit would have taken us to a house in Woodstock Road south, formerly Tess Road. This building is no longer extant either, now replaced by the nursery school car park. But it was the local headquarters of Hertfordshire county police responsible for a considerable area east of the city.

So, what happened in 1913? In that year St Albans City Council became responsible for a swathe of "added areas" including Fleetville and Camp. More police officers were required, but their beat patches were also more extensive and reporting in to the Victoria Street station became increasingly time-consuming. Woodstock Road remained a county station, and there was no such thing as operational sharing! The solution, by 1932: police cabins in various parts of the district. Beat officers could complete their logs and reports in the cabin and connect to the main station by telephone. Victoria Street in turn could contact the cabin via a flashing blue beacon on the roof – no mobile radios then! One other benefit: members of the public could make an emergency call from the phone which was accessible from the outside.

Until recently the location of a cabin in or near the centre of Fleetville was unknown, but it now seems to have been discovered. The St Albans' Own East End Blog (<http://stalbansowneastend.blogspot.com>) posted on 10th March shows it – just about, part hidden behind a lady's hat! See the red circle in the picture above. The cabin, known as a Police Call Box, was sited on the corner of Sutton Road and Hatfield Road, on the edge of land belonging to Ballito. This novel approach to policing was featured in a press photo celebrating the 80th anniversary of the 999 service.

The cabins, being made of timber, did not last until the post-war period. Although many had brick-built replacements in 1939, it seems the Sutton Road cabin was removed and its brick cousin reconstructed at the junction of Beechwood Avenue and Hatfield Road. Blue-painted pillar versions were introduced in the late 1950s.



COURTESY BT



COURTESY STALEY HAINES COLLECTION



COURTESY ST ALBANS LIBRARIES

Top: inside the red circle the wooden cabin to the left of the traditional road sign and a lady's hat. Photograph taken in 1939.

Left: St Albans City Police cabin when installed (but not in Fleetville) in 1935.

Right: 1950s police pillar outside what is now the CAMRA building in Hatfield Road.

FEATURE STREET: WOODSTOCK ROAD NORTH

To understand Woodstock Road we first need to take a walk eastwards along Sandpit Lane. Let's begin from the railway and at some time in the 1890s. To the left and right land was utilised by tenants of Earl Spencer, the trustees of Thomas Kinder, and by the owners of Marshalswick House. There were no road connections with Hatfield Road until reaching Smallford – which is probably why the private track which is now Beaumont Avenue was so illegally popular – and gated.

Having negotiated a connection to Hatfield Road with Sir John Blundell Maple to join his park road (Clarence Road), Spencer sought to connect with the new Fleet Ville and Hatfield Road at the eastern end of his intended development. At the turn of the century it also seemed inevitable that the estate of Marshalls Wick would later be developed.

Spencer planned a new road, variously named Woodside Road or Woodstock Road in his future proposals until the latter name was settled on.



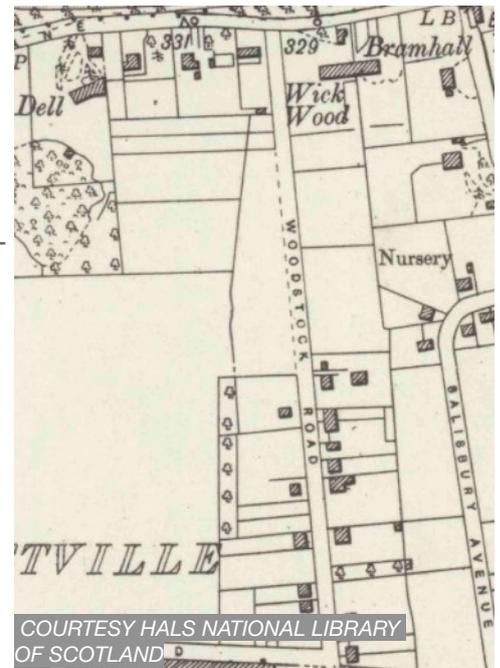
Woodstock is the geographic location of the Palace of Blenheim, the seat of the Dukes of Marlborough.

The new road joined Sandpit Lane at a T junction – the Marshalls Wick development and its future link northwards at Homewood Road did not yet exist. At the southern end the road was made up as far as the top of the hill brow. A road between Fleetville School and the

Alley had been laid out and built on by Thomas E Smith and named Tess Road, and a little estate by Hansell & Tomlinson was also being created and the name of the road which bridged the gap was named Princes Road (probably commemorating the four sons of George V and Mary). From c1903 these three separate roads were physically connected, but it took until 1948 for Tess and Princes roads to be renamed Woodstock Road South (with renumbering) and Woodstock Road to receive the North suffix.

Both of Spencer's connecting roads, Jennings and Brampton, are on the western side, but none is on the east side because the ownership boundary with Beaumonts Farm estate is close to the road. The topography is best seen along Eaton Road, where the springline follows the estate boundary.

Most of WRN's houses were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s south of Jennings Road; the first homes, 22, 24 and 32 are from 1906 and 1908. The most dominant and earliest in 1903 was the substantial Wickwood with its own coach house and acres of grounds. Sir Arthur and Lady Peake lived there from c1927 to c1933, after which the house was converted and grounds developed as a series of



apartments, the whole renamed Wickwood Court. Sear & Carter held land at 44 and 46 which was used for trial grounds; this was maintained until 1960 when the family focused their resources onto the Smallford nurseries (now Notcutts). Today this is Gleave Close with two street-side houses, a terrace of seven town houses at the end of the close, and a further group, Garden Close, off Salisbury Avenue. On the west side numbers 49 to 61 originally included very long rear gardens, later shortened to assist in the creation of new homes on the site of *Monks Horton*. The former *Little Wick*, also in Sandpit Lane, gave way to Marshals Court.

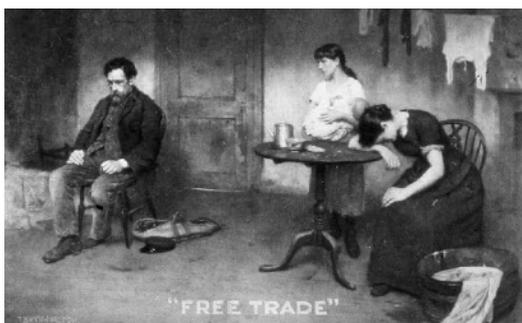


SEND A POSTCARD

Your editor cannot claim to be a collector of postcards, but he does have a boxful from places visited over the years, including on occasions when the camera was left at home or when the phone had an almost empty battery inconveniently later in the day.

Two subjects in a Fleetville group of cards, and now in archives, were printed about 120 years ago; one by Orford Smith Ltd before the name Fleetville was applied to this district. Below right was the result of a contract with Mellin's for its cod liver oil; probably a filler job (the contract, not the oil) between some of the firm's major colour printing work. Although both Fleetville firms specialised in colour printing only one here shows off its colour printing technology.

The card on the left was produced by T E Smith, Hatfield Road, for an unknown client. Maybe it was intended to accompany a lecture or talk about the unequal opportunities of everyday life. Again, the "quickie" jobs can be sandwiched between major contracts for catalogues and brochures, mainly in colour. T E Smith's had large enough premises to house a range of machines for a variety of work.



YOU COULD BE A TRUSTEE

Richard Bull, Park Manager at Highfield Park Trust (HPT) has announced a requirement for two new trustees. One is to help develop the Trust's Forest Schools' Initiative; the other is for a trustee to join the Finances and General Purposes Committee.

Full details about each role is available on the HPT website, and if you would like to discover more send a covering letter and CV to Richard at Highfield Park Visitor Centre or email admin@highfieldparktrust.co.uk by Sunday 11th April.



Ideas, comments, pictures – anything – contact Mike on mikeneighbour@mac.com

The FD website is www.fleetvillediaris.org