

Wheathampstead History Society – ‘the story of our changing high street over the last 100 years’

We are now over half way through our Heritage Lottery project and making good progress. 22 volunteers have been recruited and are busy researching properties and recording people’s memories of the high street during the last 100 years.

Thank you to all who have contributed memories, photos & documents: if anyone else has anything to contribute there is still time to do so – please contact wood.highstreetproject@gmail.com

Some fascinating stories are starting to emerge not only about the use of the premises fronting on to the high street, but also some of the characters that lived & worked on the high street. Within the last century it has witnessed the disappearance of many businesses including 3 farms, 5 Pubs, a blacksmith & wheelwright, a gents outfitters and a solicitors. These have been replaced by a range of other businesses in subsequent years.

Encouragingly nearly all the commercial properties on the high street are now occupied and trading. The temporary exception is The Swan – a grade-two listed building and one of the oldest properties on the high street – which sadly was damaged by fire in the early hours of 16th July. A blaze started in a first floor bedroom and spread to the roof. Six fire crews attended and fortunately nobody was hurt in the fire. The damage was extensive but it is believed not to be structural; however it may be some time before the pub re-opens.

At the time of writing, the property is boarded up and tarpaulins stretched over the surviving roof but repair work has not yet begun.

The Swan is a timber-framed building and dates to around 1500. Originally it is believed to have started life as an open hall building and a two-storey wing was added sometime in the seventeenth century. The large chimneystack probably dates from the same time. The roof would have been thatched and in the middle of the nineteenth century it was re-faced in brick, looking much as it did earlier this century, before the July 2013 fire. We came close to losing The Swan in 1900 when a fire then seriously damaged the building.

If you know anything about The Swan, or any of the other properties facing onto the high street, we are keen to hear from you.

We plan to tell ‘the story of our changing high street’ at a celebration event on Sunday 26th January 2014, in the Memorial Hall, Marford Road. Do put the date in your diaries now – we hope you will be able to join us.

Sandra Wood
Project Lead