



The Welwyn Garden City Society Magazine

**Championing a town
designed for healthy living**

**Issue 7 Music
Autumn • Winter 2024**

**Gascoyne Estates
Planning update
Welwyn Garden
City Music Society
Welwyn Harmony
Memories of music
The Welwyn Garden
Concert Club
The Sex Pistols
Lol Coxhill
The Welwyn Garden
City School of Music**

This packed issue focuses on music in the Garden City.

Since its foundation in 1920 our town has been alive with music, and we have lots of fascinating contributions which reflect this. Thank you to everyone who has written for us! We realise, of course, that we haven't covered every genre of music, let alone every local society making or appreciating music. We wish we could have included more, but our limited number of pages restricts us.

We feature contributions from two music-making organisations. The Welwyn Garden City Music Society consists of both a choir and an orchestra, and was founded in 1921. It's the town's oldest society! Welwyn Harmony, Hertfordshire's only ladies' barbershop chorus, is newer, but nevertheless has more than 30 years of singing to its credit. The Welwyn Garden Concert Club describes its long and vibrant history of bringing distinguished musicians to perform in our town, whilst a number of local residents recall the fun and excitement of "The Hop": going to hear, dance to, or perform in bands at Woodhall Community Centre. Many of our older members will know that some famous bands performed in Welwyn Garden City before they became really well known, and Clive Wilson's article about The Sex Pistols shows how their performance here in 1976 led to greater renown – and notoriety! Not everyone knows that The Digswell Arts Trust gave a place to at least one musician – Lol Coxhill – and Anneke writes about his years in Welwyn Garden City. We don't neglect music teaching, and Anneke's piece about The Welwyn Garden City School of Music uncovers a fascinating tale involving the town's first resident, a celebrated concert pianist, and an artist who ran away to sea at the age of 16. Naturally the magazine also carries articles about planning issues. Anthony Downs describes the development work of Gascoyne Estates, the organisation which manages the land and property of the Salisbury Family, including Hatfield House and Park. He describes Gascoyne's approach to building new developments on its land, incorporating high standards of sustainability combined with design that respects local traditions. He explains how these principles will be applied to Gascoyne's new development at Creswick. And of course the magazine's regular planning update covers other aspects of planning in the town. Ruth updates us on the progress being made to refresh the content and refurbish the fabric of the poster booths in the town centre. We're enormously grateful to those members who have created new posters for the booths. You may have seen the two new ones, now installed. A small team from our Society is working on the poster booths, and we're very keen to attract new volunteers to this effort. We'd love to hear from you if you can spare just a little time every month. We thank all our contributors, who have given their time and expertise to make this such an interesting issue. We hope you enjoy it. The next issue of the magazine will explore transport in Welwyn Garden City. Please get in touch with us at magazine@wgcsociety.org if you want to contribute an article, a short piece or a picture. We'd love to hear from you!

Anneke Bambery **Editor**

Ruth Sykes **Designer**

Cover photo: Summer on The Campus © Anneke Bambery

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<https://wgcsociety.org/>

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Join the Society and help to improve the future of our town!

If you're reading this and you're not a member of the Welwyn Garden City Society, it's easy to join – just contact us at membership@wgcsociety.org. Please forward or pass on this magazine to friends and family, and help spread the word.

Do you have views about topics featured in this magazine?

We welcome your thoughts – send them to the editor at magazine@wgcsociety.org. The theme of the next issue is transport in Welwyn Garden City. All opinions in this magazine are the authors' own, and unless stated, they do not represent the views of the Society.

The Society's constitution and executive committee – a new era

At the Society's AGM on 31 July 2024 all the officer posts on the executive committee fell vacant, and unfortunately there were no nominations for new people to fill those posts. We already had a vacancy for a treasurer, but Paul Taylor has kindly agreed to continue as our book-keeper. To allow the Society to carry on with its work, an amended constitution was put to the members at the meeting. The amendments allow for an executive committee with no officers, and simply require a minimum of three committee members. This revised constitution was voted in by the members at the meeting. To read the new constitution, visit the Society's website at wgcsociety.org.

Following the adoption of the new constitution, the new committee was voted in. They are:

Clive Wilson, Dave Doughty, Elahe Taylor, Gerry Crux, Paul Taylor (acting book-keeper) and Yvonne Rule.

Dave, Clive and Gerry have between them served for a very great number of years in officer positions, and they're now standing down from those roles. They are willing to continue as ordinary committee members, and we thank them, not only for this generous gesture, but also for the dedicated work they have done for our Society in the past. We're very grateful to Elahe and Paul for continuing as ordinary committee members, and we're delighted to welcome Yvonne Rule to the committee. Alan Gray, who served on the committee for many years, has recently retired from it. We thank him for his work and support.

Anneke and Ruth, who aren't committee members, will carry on creating the magazine. John Cook (not a committee member either) will continue to maintain the website and provide his creative input to the poster booths.

Poster booths update

Ruth Sykes

New posters Since the last update, two new posters are now on display (pictured, right): one about the Welwyn Garden City Railway Station, the other about Richard and Celia Reiss, who contributed enormously to the establishment of Welwyn Garden City.

Many thanks to all who contributed text and photos for the new posters. Your great ideas and hard work are very much appreciated! Specifically, thank you to Malcolm Cowan, Barbara Davies, Angela Eserin and the All Aboarders team for the station poster, and to Stephen Bensley for the Reiss poster.

The new posters are printed on magnetic material, which sticks easily onto steel panels that were recently installed. This new system of mounting posters appears to be working very well, with no reports of slippage, which unfortunately had proved to be a problem with the previous mounting materials used.

The Remembrance Day posters displayed last Autumn are now in storage, available to display again during the next Remembrance Day period.

Call for volunteers to join the poster booth team! We need more volunteers to help look after the poster booths. Please let us know if you'd like to get involved. The poster booth team organises the cleaning, maintenance and repairs of the poster booths, liaises with authors and edits the texts. If you have an interest in any aspect of the poster booths, please email booths@wgcsociety.org.

Sponsorship Sponsorship is required to keep the poster booths in good order, as well as to pay for the production of the posters. The booths require cleaning, maintenance and repairs from time to time; and a fresh coat of paint now and again.

The poster booths are available for sponsorship from local businesses and organisations. In return for sponsorship, the logo of the business or organisation will be displayed on the poster booths. There could be other benefits, such as promoting information of interest to people who live and work in Welwyn Garden City. Let us know if your local business or organisation would like to learn more about this and we'll get in touch. Please use the email address booths@wgcsociety.org.



New posters in the booths, on the topics of Welwyn Garden City Railway Station, and Richard and Celia Reiss

To help explore sponsorship possibilities, our poster booths team recently met with the Welwyn Garden City Business Improvement District (BID) to discuss the possibility of working together with BID to investigate more sponsorship options. We are in contact with other potential sponsors and will keep you updated on any developments.

More new posters on the way As mentioned in my last update, posters are ready to be put into production for three more topics:

- Distinguished Garden Citizens, featuring information on local residents who are remembered for their contribution to the lives of residents of our town and beyond – with thanks to Stephen Bensley.
- Digswell House and the Digswell Arts Trust – with thanks to Howard Cropp and Allistair Covell.
- The Cherry Tree restaurant – with thanks to Angela Eserin.

More poster ideas welcome! There's still room for more ideas! Please do let us know if you have an idea for a new poster by emailing booths@wgcsociety.org. If you'd like to author a poster, we'd be delighted to hear from you, and we'll send you our simple guidelines (<https://wgcsociety.org/creating-a-new-poster-booth-panel/>). If you don't have a specific idea, but do have general thoughts, please let us know the sort

of thing you would be interested to see displayed on the poster booths.

Suitable topics are anything related to the story of Welwyn Garden City, appropriate for an audience of all ages and backgrounds. Photographs and illustrations are particularly welcome to make the posters visually impactful.

Background of the poster booths The poster booths were designed in 1951 by Louis de Soissons. Following a long period of dereliction and misuse, they were refurbished by the Welwyn Garden City Society in 2020. Originally designed to carry adverts, their purpose now is to tell the story of Welwyn Garden City.

Titles of recent posters include The Story of The Poster Booths; A Marriage of Town and Country; The Henry "Tim" Birkin Story; The New Town Agricultural Guild and the Model Dairy; Welwyn Film Studios in Welwyn Garden City; Ebenezer Howard 1850 – 1928 and the Town Plan; Welwyn Garden City Railway Station, and Richard and Celia Reiss.

For more background information, there's an article about the poster booths in a previous edition of the Society magazine here: <https://wgcsociety.org/magazine/spring-summer-2022-2/> See page 10.

If you have an idea for a poster, please contact the team to discuss it at booths@wgcsociety.org.

Gascoyne Estates – an overview of a long-term approach to development

Anthony Downs is the Estate Director at Gascoyne Estates, which manages the Cecil family's land and property. The company believes that local people should have a say in how their towns and villages evolve. On Gascoyne land it has been building developments which incorporate high standards of sustainability, combined with design that respects local traditions. Anthony describes how these principles will be applied at Gascoyne's planned new development at Creswick, north of Ascots Lane.

Gascoyne Estates holds and manages land and property on behalf of Lord Salisbury and his family. Perhaps best known for the careful management and conservation of Hatfield Park, including Hatfield House, Gascoyne has over the last fifteen years become increasingly involved in the debate around strategic growth within Welwyn Hatfield and indeed wider Hertfordshire. This is perhaps an example of history repeating itself – previous generations of the Cecil family took a keen interest in town planning, housing standards and architecture. This included working with Ebenezer Howard in concluding the sale of land to facilitate the early development of Welwyn Garden City.

The Cecil family (Lord Salisbury and his predecessors) has owned land and property in this area for over 400 years. The principle of responsible business has been practised for generations and the family has consistently demonstrated a commitment to fostering sustainable communities through thoughtful long-term planning. As such Gascoyne, through the legacy associated with its history and landholdings, can be considered intrinsically linked to the borough. However, rather than taking a retrospective view on life, the company is focused firmly upon the future, the aim being to remain vibrant, relevant and forward-thinking.

Gascoyne Estates' approach to long-term development is characterised by a commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and well-considered, high quality urban planning and design. As the company embarks on projects in Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield, these principles will be at the forefront of decision-making, shaping developments that seamlessly blend modernity with the unique characteristics of each location.

Gascoyne Estates' core principles

Sustainability: Gascoyne Estates places a strong emphasis on sustainable development, recognising the importance of minimising environmental impact and promoting best practice. In all its projects, the company adheres to high standards, and wherever possible incorporates renewable or low carbon energy solutions. Gascoyne Estates aims to create developments that will stand the test of time, generating community pride and contributing positively to the environment for future generations.

Community engagement: Central to Gascoyne Estates' ethos is the idea that successful development is rooted in the needs and desires of the local community. The company actively engages with residents, local authorities, and stakeholders throughout the planning process to ensure that the resulting communities are both functional and reflective of the unique character of the area.

Gascoyne recognises that development will always be a contentious matter. Change gives rise to fears for what the future might hold. Much of Gascoyne's approach to development is driven by a similar range of concerns, and a desire to provide an alternative approach to the challenges of growth. Since 2006 Gascoyne has sponsored and hosted events examining many of the issues which lie at the heart of growth and modern development. It believes that engaging with the local communities who might be affected by a development is a vital part of the planning process, enabling local communities to collaborate with designers on a vision for their future.

Early on Gascoyne decided that a programme of positive engagement was the most favourable option. Our preferred approach is through the charrette method¹, which seeks to create a collaborative process and a well-refined and interactive form of engagement with local stakeholders. Charrettes offer the unique advantage of facilitating a platform devoted to the concerted effort of workshopping a problem or contributing to a development's design.

Any decision to release land for development is set against a backdrop of rigorous technical analysis and a sound understanding of the sites concerned. For years the Gascoyne team has worked alongside a group of specialists, examining diverse areas including ecology, archaeology, landscape, transport, utilities and infrastructure as well as the more obvious topics of architecture and town planning. Whilst seeking to maintain the quality of development on its own sites, Gascoyne is also a vocal advocate for broader coalitions driving initiatives across central Hertfordshire – for instance the Green Corridor, and innovative solutions to public transport.

Design codes and pattern books

The last decade has seen Gascoyne Estates produce codes for design in its own core estates and in future development projects. These codes seek to define local character in terms



*New houses built
by Gascoyne Estates
at Mill Green.
© Clive Wilson*



of building materials and architectural detailing, and aim to avoid the commonly found, standardised developer fare. What defines a place, and how might this be used in new buildings? Whilst Gascoyne seeks to maintain quality and attention to detail in its work, the company is equally focused on current and future technology. So although properties may have a traditional appearance, they will be highly insulated and efficient, utilising heat recovery systems and heat pumps. Examples of past work, primarily smaller regeneration projects within Old Hatfield (including the Railway Station, Arm and Sword Lane, Dunham Mews and Church Lane), or more recently at Mill Green (see illustrations), demonstrate what can be achieved when appropriate time and energy is taken to carefully design and specify new buildings.

Contrary to what many believe, it is still possible to deliver viable, good quality, mixed use development in a traditional Hertfordshire style, which is nevertheless capable of adhering to 21st century building and sustainability standards.

Urban planning

Gascoyne Estates believes in the power of properly considered urban planning to create beautiful, well-rounded, vibrant communities in which people can live and work. House types will range from smaller properties to larger family homes and they will offer a variety of different tenures. Beyond housing, Gascoyne has a desire to integrate commercial spaces, schools, community and recreational facilities, and green spaces into its developments, promoting a balanced and fulfilling lifestyle for residents. This approach aims to cater to the diverse needs of the community, fostering a sense of belonging and connectivity.

Gascoyne Estates' approach to Creswick

Creswick lies on the southern fringes of Welwyn Garden City, north of Ascots Lane. This site will see the development of 340 new homes. Gascoyne Estates is seeking to build upon its legacy of delivering high quality buildings and spaces, as realised at Old Hatfield and Mill Green. These all reflect the goal of creating a long-term legacy of which we can all be proud.



The southern edge of the Creswick Plantation, seen from the footpath which runs between Mill Green and Stanborough Lakes. This is fairly distant from the Creswick development site, but the other (north-eastern) end of the Plantation will be closer to the new houses. This photo serves to illustrate the Plantation's dense deciduous woodland. © Anneke Bamberg

Gascoyne Estates' approach to long-term development is characterised by a commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and well-considered, high quality urban planning and design

Creswick is the first of Gascoyne's larger development sites, and the aim is to replicate the quality of earlier projects but to achieve this at scale.

In contrast to the trend for flatted development, Creswick will provide a sensitive urban extension to Welwyn Garden City and will offer new housing within the borough. Most of the development will consist of family homes, varying in type, style and size, and reflecting the Hertfordshire vernacular.

The scheme has been comprehensively master-planned in close consultation with Welwyn Hatfield's planning officers and other consultees over a period of some years. Amongst other factors, this has influenced the design of not only housing but also landscaping; the consideration of roads, children's play areas, and better connectivity through well-designed cycle and pedestrian links into the Creswick Plantation (pictured left) and indeed beyond. The Plantation has

recently seen a further 2,500 trees planted under the Queen's Green Canopy initiative.

The scheme still takes traditional design cues from Gascoyne's Pattern Book, and follows its Building Code which maintains Garden City Principles. Creation of sustainable communities is one of Gascoyne's key priorities. That is why the proposed development seeks to decarbonise from the outset and will

utilise heat pumps to heat homes, in place of conventional gas boilers. Providing electric charging points, a car club, healthy streets and financial contributions towards sustainable patterns of travel, will all facilitate residents' adoption of

greener and healthier lifestyles.

Plans for Creswick include strategic investments in transportation, utilities, and public services to support the growing population. The goal is to create a seamlessly connected community where residents can enjoy the convenience of modern amenities without compromising Welwyn Garden City's unique charm. Vehicle and bicycle parking has been a key consideration in the scheme's design and the proposals provide attractive carports and shelters. Appropriate refuse and recycling storage is also considered. The existing cricket club will be relocated, providing it with new facilities and creating a focal point for the new community. The provision of new grassland and perimeter planting offers a valuable opportunity to improve

wildlife habitats and to create precious corridors to existing ponds and ditches. This will achieve over 30% biodiversity net gain in habitat units.

As a local organisation, Gascoyne very much understands that new development can be an emotive topic. A key concern for local communities whenever any new development is proposed is the impact upon already strained services. That is why Gascoyne and its delivery partner Places for People (PFP) are committed to providing over £13m towards education and healthcare. The healthcare investment will deliver improvements at the Spring House Medical Centre, and at Hall Grove and Peartree Surgeries. Homes

for local people are equally important, which is why this development provides a policy-compliant housing mix, which will include 51 much-needed homes for social rent, and 49 new homes for affordable rent.

Key to realising this vision is the careful selection of the housebuilding partner. Gascoyne identified PFP (formerly Zero C), following an exhaustive search of potential builders. Candidates had to demonstrate not only commercial acumen but also a track record of delivering high quality developments elsewhere. Critically, the commitment to quality and sustainability had to be demonstrable and real – not simply a line from a marketing brochure. As one might imagine, the shortlist of potential builders was challenging to compile. Many of the larger volume developers are reluctant to adopt a partnership approach or to step outside a standardised delivery model. Whilst this is understandable when viewed from certain stances, Gascoyne feels it is generally desirable to ensure parties are aligned in their aims and philosophies if relationships are to be successful and are ultimately to endure. Gascoyne chose not to simply sell the land and walk away. They will remain involved for the life of the scheme and indeed beyond, via the proposed scheme of management. Creswick is underpinned by a well-developed masterplan, the Gascoyne Building Code and Pattern Book – these form part of the legal framework under which the development will be delivered. It is fair to say that whilst discussions have taken place around certain details, the process to date has been entirely collaborative and both Gascoyne and PFP are excited about the opportunity to create an attractive, high-quality development at scale.

In conclusion

As a landowner with a long and historic association with Welwyn Hatfield – and Hertfordshire more widely, it would have been irresponsible not to engage with the Local Plan process. Gascoyne Estates long ago concluded that one can either seek to engage and strive to improve the environment in which we all live, or adopt a negative, cynical or passive stance which would

only result in further disappointment and the justification for many people's current scepticism. Gascoyne believes it is uniquely positioned to deliver a properly considered contribution to local housing, green infrastructure and employment for several reasons. It is essential that we aim high.

In the past decade there has been much discussion about, and support for, the idea of a new garden city as a means of meeting housing demand in Hertfordshire. That nothing has happened to date serves to emphasise the logistical challenges of such an undertaking. That is not to say a new garden city is unachievable, but other alternatives must also be sought as

viable solutions, so that adequate numbers of both homes and workplaces can be delivered within the borough.

This does not mean we ought to limit our aspirations. Gascoyne is seeking to deliver an alternative to bland or ugly housing developments which often lack the

facilities needed to establish a sense of community pride and spirit. This might be derided as unrealistic. Yet the Prince of Wales' work at Poundbury, Dorset was similarly met with scorn at the start, whilst at the turn of the twentieth century Ebenezer Howard's ambitions for a garden city at Letchworth and subsequently at Welwyn Garden City were also maligned as being unworkable. All are now celebrated as successful models for best practice in their different ways.

Gascoyne has maintained dialogue with a number of other long-term landowners and businesses which have embarked upon a similar journey. Valuable relationships have been formed (and important lessons shared) with the teams at the Duchy of Cornwall, which is engaged in delivering Poundbury and Nansledan. Further north, Gascoyne has enjoyed visits to and dialogue with professionals in Scotland who have been

building Chapelton and Torna-grain. Whilst it has taken time to gather momentum, it is fair to say that the Legacy Landowner Group is now firmly established and there are many similar developments starting to appear. It perhaps speaks volumes about our planning system that the gestation period of many of these schemes is generally considered to be 15 to 20 years. Work is due to

start at Creswick during 2024. Time will tell whether Gascoyne and its partners have successfully achieved their aim to build a new neighbourhood of Welwyn Garden City which lives up to Ebenezer Howard's vision for a second Garden City.

Gascoyne are committed to providing over £13m towards education and healthcare.

The development provides a policy-compliant housing mix, which will include 51 much-needed homes for social rent, and 49 homes for affordable rent.

The proposed development seeks to decarbonise from the outset and will utilise heat pumps in place of conventional gas boilers. Electric charging points, a car club, healthy streets and financial contributions towards sustainable patterns of travel will facilitate residents' adoption of greener, healthier lifestyles.

¹ Charrettes are public meetings devoted to a concerted effort to solve a problem or plan the design of something.

Further reading:

<https://www.gascoyne.org/>

<https://planning.welhat.gov.uk/Planning/Display/6/2022/1375/MAJ/Planning-application-for-the-Creswick-development>

Welwyn Harmony

Sarah Stevens is the Chair of this talented ladies' barbershop chorus



Performing at Ashwell Village Day, 2024. ©Monika Szita-Rimann

We are Hertfordshire's only ladies' barbershop chorus and we sing a wide range of songs in four-part harmony. Our repertoire includes songs from modern film classics, songs from the musicals, and popular melodies. There is something to appeal to all tastes. We are an inclusive and friendly chorus based in Welwyn Garden City, with members ranging in age from 18 to 80. We pride ourselves on welcoming anyone who loves to sing. No musical knowledge is required as we provide music learning tracks as well as sheet music, along with lots of support from other members.

As all our singing is in the a cappella style no amplification or musical backing is needed and we are able to sing at a variety of venues, indoors and out. We have sung at events ranging from the Mayor's Ball to public concerts, private dinners, garden parties and local festivals. We were keen supporters of the musical events of the Welwyn Garden City 2020 Centenary celebrations, singing at some pre-2020 promotional functions and at the launch event. Unfortunately due to Covid most of the subsequent events had to be cancelled, but we were honoured to be asked to provide a video to be played at the beginning of The Town and Country Planning Association's Welwyn Garden City Centenary Symposium, delayed for a year until September 2021, and even then held mostly online. We chose the song "Don't Stop" by Fleetwood Mac as we felt the sentiments of that song matched the way in which our chorus, and the community, got through those difficult times.

Community and charity work is important to us too. We were delighted to be asked to sing at the Isabel Hospice Lights of Love service last December and we frequently sing for small groups at residential homes.

We are keen to share our love of this kind of music and we also give illustrated talks about the world of barbershop, with live singing to demonstrate some of its technique and variety. This appeals to groups such as the U3A and The Women's Institute, who like to combine social and educational activities at their meetings!

As well as performing we like to compete, to give ourselves a challenge and to make sure we continue to improve. There are some local contests but the big one is the annual national Convention for Ladies' Barbershop Singers. This consists of a weekend of great singing from competing quartets and choruses, and there are shows in the evenings by top choruses and quartets. We have mass sings in the bars, and we get the chance to mix with choruses from all over the UK. We usually do quite well, but in 2019 we won the award for Most Improved Chorus, which was amazing and a recognition of all the hard work we put into our singing.

We always welcome new members. Come along to one of our open evenings on a Tuesday night at the Vineyard Barn, meet us and try singing with us. It's great fun!

You can find out more and have a listen on our website at www.welwynharmony.co.uk or search Welwyn Harmony on YouTube.

Memories of music in Welwyn Garden City

Local people recall their musical past

"At Our Lady's Church, which opened in the early 1960s, the first choir was instigated by my father, Jim Fogarty (right), who wanted to start a four-part choir. He approached Father Cumming, the parish priest, and was referred to a man called Gerry Ainscough, a local teacher and musician. It went from there, with Gerry leading the choir as organist and choirmaster, and my Dad singing as one of the tenors." **John J. Fogarty**



Above The Church of Our Lady, Queen of Apostles, on Woodhall Lane, where Jim Fogarty started the first choir. © Anneke Bambery. Left Jim Fogarty. © John J. Fogarty



Above The Woodhall Community Centre, where The Hop was held from the 1950s onwards. © Anneke Bambery
Below 1997, and Tanya was dancing. By kind permission of Tanya Sealey

"I do seem to recall being politely asked to leave The Cherry Tree as a teenager because our singing had become, well, undesired.

What were we singing? Now that, I don't recall, but it was pre-Christmas and we may well just have broken up for the college holidays, so I'd be surprised if it didn't have a seasonal element somewhere. Clearly not 'Silent Night', which they might have preferred." **T.P.**

Editor's note: We are indebted to all the contributors to this feature, and especially to John Fogarty, who first contacted them on our behalf.



"I have some memories of bands playing at Woodhall Community Centre, as I was in one! We were called Midnight Frost and I was the stand-in bass guitar player (the main one was at university, so I covered term time). We played heavy metal/punk. Panshanger Youth Club also had gigs on, and I remember playing there. My friend Spike congratulated me by lifting me up – and unfortunately dropped me, which ended up with me being in A&E!

There were many rock nights on, also at The Cherry Tree, which had a rock disco in the late 1980s and early 90s. Other local bands I remember were Hidden Fear and Obsidian. Fashion for girls who were rockers at this time consisted of a little denim or leather mini skirt or tight jeans, a band T-shirt (a T-shirt featuring a band's name or logo), or a lace-up vest top. On our feet we wore Dr Martens or baseball boots. The boys wore Dr Martens, tight jeans or leather trousers, and either a band T-shirt or a paisley shirt.

There was a lot of head-banging and stage diving going on." **Tanya Sealey**

"I went to The Hop when it first started, which was in the 1950s. It was the highlight of the week and was always heaving. If you couldn't get on the dance floor we used to sit around the edge of the floor and do the 'hand-jive'. All the boys would turn up in their Italian jackets, the girls in their flared skirts with layers of net petticoats, some had hoops and when they sat down their skirts would rise up! Perhaps that's why the boys always sat on the opposite side of the room!

My husband Noel Boland gigged there in a skiffle group. He played guitar, his brother Jimmy played the big tea chest bass made from a wooden chest, broom handle and rope, someone else played washboard, and there were others that I can't remember. They all sang and Big Willie would really get the place going with his own version of singing. There were also various other amateur groups. One group, I don't recall the name, was very good. The lead singer was a local lad called Mick Meadows. I still have Chas McDevitt's original washboard complete with rusty thimbles.

Seth Rees ran The Hop and a huge man by the name of Mario (an actor) was also in attendance. Seth used to look after us all and make sure we were safe. Happy days!"

Margaret Boland

"I started going to The Hop [at Woodhall Community Centre] when I was about 15 and just left school. It was such a joy to listen to the bands and move to the music. The nuns from Mater Dei frowned on it so it wasn't mentioned in their hearing. It was on Monday, Friday and Saturday." **Winnie Thomas (née Casey)**, who had been a pupil at Our Lady's School.

The Welwyn Garden Concert Club celebrates its 80th season

The Club's Chair, Karen Springthorpe, relates the story of this thriving society which brings outstanding musical talent to perform in the Garden City



Above Tim Gill (cello) and Fali Pavri (piano) performed a duet recital during the Club's 2018–19 season.

© David Robertson.
Right Dorothy Hess.
By permission of the Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, WGC109.



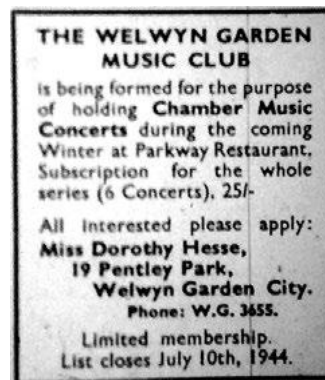
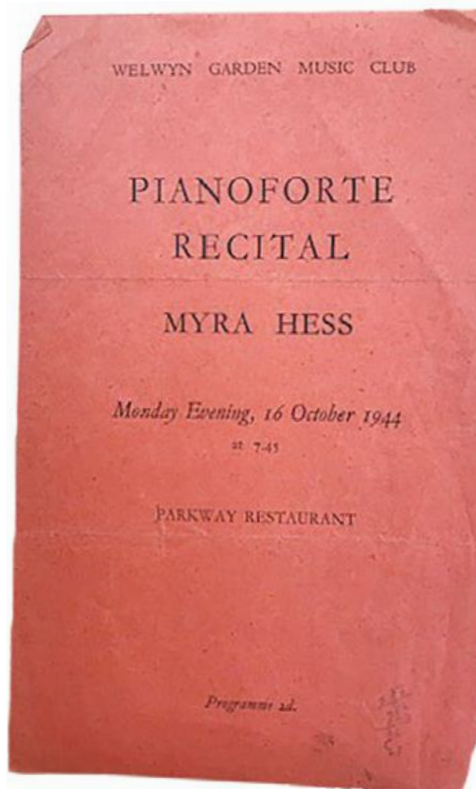
In early 1944, local piano teacher Dorothy Hess put a small notice “to those who enjoy good music...” in the Welwyn Garden City newspaper, announcing her intention of forming a music club¹. Applications for membership (limited to 250), costing 25 shillings for six concerts per season were to be sent to her address. She had moved to Welwyn Garden City from London after her home was bombed in WWII, and she soon established herself as an outstanding piano teacher. Previously, she had had a career as a concert pianist in the UK and abroad, but she found her true vocation was teaching and inspiring young musicians, some of whom went on to have successful international careers. There was interest for a club and the inaugural concert of the Welwyn Garden Music Club (as it was first named) was a recital by the famous pianist, Myra Hess (not a relation) on Monday 16 October 1944 in the

¹ Dorothy's family name was Hess, but she used “Hesse” professionally, so as not to be confused with Myra Hess.

MUSIC



Above The Parkway Restaurant, in Welwyn Department Store. This was the first venue of the Welwyn Garden Music Club (later the Welwyn Garden Concert Club). By permission of the John Lewis Partnership Heritage Centre.
Right The programme for the inaugural concert of the Welwyn Garden Music Club (later the Welwyn Garden Concert Club). The celebrated pianist Myra Hess performed.
© The Welwyn Garden Concert Club.
Far right The advertisement placed by Dorothy Hess in the local paper in 1944.



Parkway Restaurant.

How Dorothy Hess and Myra Hess had met I do not know, but from correspondence that I have seen they were dear friends. The musical community in London at that time was rich with talent and visiting artists. They would have had many

mutual musical colleagues. Weeks after the war started and the city went dark, Myra Hess had approached the Director of the National Gallery, Kenneth Clark, and suggested she hold concerts in the empty galleries. She believed the arts “played a powerful spiritual role in the health of the nation at the best of times – and would play a greater role during wartime”. The now historic concert series, which continued until April 1946, beyond the end of the war, soon began.

The Welwyn Garden Music Club had started two years earlier and it does not seem a coincidence that

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it would host many of the same artists that both women knew. Thus the club became a platform for some of the most famous musicians then working in the UK, including those trapped in England by the war and those who had chosen to remain here for their safety. One assumes Welwyn Garden City was a less risky venue than London, although not so far away. The club's first season, which premiered with a piano recital given by Myra Hess, continued with a violin and piano recital by Max Rostal, a violin prodigy originally from Austria. This was followed by a trio of John Francis (flute), Kathleen Moorhouse (cello) and Maurice Jacobson (piano/composer). Jacobson was regarded in his lifetime as a "musician extraordinary". Next came an evening with the Ebsworth String Quartet, joined by tenor Jan van der Gucht, Victor Watson (double bass) and Dorothy Hesse herself as pianist.

In the years 1945 – 1955 the high quality of music making continued with recitals by the famous Russian opera soprano Oda Slobodskaya (who had escaped Nazi Germany), and the German lieder soprano Elisabeth Schumann, as well as the UK's beloved mezzo-sopranos Kathleen Ferrier and Flora Nielsen. Other performers included the guitarists Andrés Segovia and Julian Bream; Maurice Gendron (cello); Ernest Lush (piano); oboist Leon Goossens, and a solo recital by Dorothy Hesse herself performing four Beethoven sonatas, followed by another pianist, Gina Bachauer. Kathleen Ferrier then returned with the legendary pianist, Gerald Moore, followed by the violinist Ida Haendel and the pianists Wilhelm Kempff and Shura Cherkassky. Concerts were also given by the Griller, the Zorian, the Loewenguth and the New Italian String Quartets; the Jacques String Orchestra; the London Belgian Pianoforte Quartet; the Boyd Neel Orchestra, and Cyril Preedy, a pianist described as "the most outstanding young pianist to emerge in the post-war era". Nowadays one may not be familiar with many of these names, but the early members of the club were experiencing outstanding music making and Miss Hess's intention of giving a platform to extremely talented young artists at the beginning of their professional careers was evident from the beginning. For example, the all-female Zorian String Quartet had only been formed in 1942. They returned to the club several times and became famous for premiering the works of Britten, Tippett, Bloch and Bartok in England.

The club continues this tradition yearly, actively considering notable young talent, competition winners and

During the second world war, the club became a platform for some of the most famous musicians working in the UK, including those trapped in England by the hostilities, and those who had chosen to remain here for their safety

Post-war club members experienced outstanding music making, from such as the guitarists Andrés Segovia and Julian Bream and the UK's beloved mezzo-sopranos Kathleen Ferrier and Flora Nielsen

We reach our 80th anniversary season in October this year with a vibrant season of talented musicians and a growing membership of eager concert-goers

Our association with the Cavatina Chamber Music Trust has enabled us to offer free tickets to 8 – 25 year olds, whilst keeping our adult tickets and membership competitive – and a bargain alternative to travelling to London venues

recommendations from members for future concerts. As a result, in recent years we've been able to engage pianists Ashley Wass,

Tom Poster, Clare Hammond, Ashley Fripp and Louis Schwizgebel early in their fine careers, as well as the violinist Savitri Grier, clarinettists Julian Bliss and Michael Collins, tenor James Gilchrist and the mezzo-soprano Fleur Barron amongst others, before they became

too well-known and busy with international engagements. In decades past, Hess's audiences had heard both of the young cellists William Pleeth and Christopher Bunting, who played together in the Stars in Battledress entertainment unit during their army service. Ensembles like the Juilliard, Amadeus, Takács and Wihan String Quartets, to name but a few, have all performed for us in their early years. These young players

performed over many seasons alongside such historic pairings as Benjamin Britten with Peter Pears, Francis Poulenc with Pierre Bernac and Janet Baker with Martin Isepp. Premieres of new compositions have also featured at the club over

the decades. I cannot accurately say how many, but in 1954 Rubbra's "Trio in One Movement, Op. 68" (composed in 1950) was performed by the Rubbra-Gruenberg-Pleeth Trio and our programmes featuring both Britten and Poulenc show them performing their own works, while, in our 21st century concert seasons, groups have come with music commissioned from contemporary composers.

Sadly, in 1967 Dorothy Hess passed away. Besides having been the Founder-President of her club, guiding the hard-working volunteer committee of like-minded residents, some of whom had been with her

from the beginning, she had also been the president of the Welwyn Garden City Music Society during her last 18 years. She was much loved and missed, and several memorial concerts were given. The first, on 27 May 1967, was a piano recital of Bach, Prokofieff and Schumann by André Tchaikowsky. A second piano recital was in April 1968, given by Henry Lowinger, a finalist

in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. A third was in April 1973 with the cellist Marius May and pianist Adela Kotowska. All were held in the hall at the College of Further Education on The Campus. A Hess Memorial Fund was also set up, which raised over £1100, with donations sent

in from all over the world. At the time it was suggested that this money should be used to create a music library or study room. One can now find and use The Dorothy Hess Room within the

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*Far left Nicholas Daniel
OBE. © Eric Richmond.
Left Andrew Watkinson.
By kind permission of
Andrew Watkinson*

Campus West Library in Welwyn Garden City. It is a useful resource for local history and archival activities, and it contains part of the Hess archive.

In 1977, it was decided to change the club's name to the Welwyn Garden Concert Club, as there was continuing confusion with the Welwyn Garden Music Society! Our new name remains to this day. Having for decades had its main venue at the Parkway Restaurant, which is now the café in our John Lewis (bought and redeveloped by the company in 1983), the club made use of the halls at the Hatfield Polytechnic and College of Further Education, until it was approached by Campus West in 1974. This new complex had opened in 1973 for the purpose of giving a platform to local community activities of all kinds. The club settled there for the convenience of its members and remained, despite the unsatisfactory acoustic of the main hall and many managerial problems over the years, until an enormous rental increase made its use untenable. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise as, in 2016, the search for a new local venue brought us to St. Francis Church, Welwyn Garden City, with its outstanding acoustic. It is loved by our performers and audience alike and is a welcoming and comfortable space.

The intervening years have seen seasons of outstanding artists come and go and many returning several times, being favourites of the members. Notably, the Endellion, Wihan and Takács String Quartets; Red Priest; Julian Trevelyan (piano); and Nicholas Daniel OBE (oboe/conductor), either with his accompanist Julius Drake or with the Haffner Wind

Ensemble. We've been especially fortunate to have had a long relationship with both our Patron,

Nicholas Daniel and our President, violinist Andrew Watkinson, as they came to the club as very young artists. Both have delighted our audiences with their many concerts and have supported us over the decades. Nicholas Daniel performed for the club in 1991 and first became our Vice-President in 1993, while Andrew Watkinson came as leader of the Endellion String Quartet in 1981 and became our Patron in 1999 after the death of Emmie Hess (Dorothy's sister and former Patron) before later becoming our President.

The Welwyn Garden Concert Club is now part of a decreasing, yet extremely important network of concert clubs in the UK. As a platform for young musicians, we offer performing experience, a fee and a discerning, friendly audience, not to mention a hot meal and, in the early days, even transport and a bed for

the night! The club's committees have grown and shrunk over the years. Sponsorship from local government and companies, once generous, has now gone, although we continue to seek it. Membership numbers have fluctuated and a season was curtailed by Covid, along with a special concert that was to have been part of the town's centenary celebrations. But despite all this we reach our 80th anniversary season in October this year with a vibrant season of talented musicians and a growing membership of eager concert-goers. Our association with the Cavatina Chamber Music Trust has enabled us to offer free tickets to 8 – 25 year olds, whilst keeping our adult tickets and membership competitive – and a bargain alternative to travelling to London venues. We encourage the many young people in our area, be they instrumentalists or not, to come and be inspired by hearing excellent live music. If we are to make it to our 100th anniversary they will be our audience of the future!

All are welcome at our concerts – you don't have to be a member of the Club. For more information and full details of our next season find us at: <https://www.wgconcertclub.org.uk/>. Tickets are available online and at the door.

If you have early concert programmes from the Welwyn Garden Concert Club, or memories that you can share with us to add to our archive, they will be most gratefully received! My thanks to the librarians at Campus West and the County Archives, to Dr. Mary Anstey, Helen Shabetai, The John Lewis Partnership Heritage Centre, Nicholas Daniel OBE and Julius Drake for their help and contributions.

Welwyn Garden City Music Society

Richard Darby and Celia Smith chart the distinguished history
of our town's oldest society

Welwyn Garden City Music Society is proud to be the oldest society in the town. On 29 September 1921 a group of music lovers met and decided to form a music society. A committee was chosen to bring this into effect, which met again on 4 October, when the name of the society was fixed as Welwyn Garden City Music Society. Officers were appointed, a set of rules drawn up, and a subscription of five shillings (equivalent to 25p) per annum imposed for active and honorary members alike. The Society has retained its name and individuality ever since. Thus the Society is only a year younger than the Garden City itself, and reached its centenary season in 2021.

The first choir rehearsals in 1921 took place in the Citizens' Meeting Room, an army hut in the woods where members were well advised to bring a hurricane lamp to light the treacherous path in the winter. The orchestra was formed soon after with the first combined concert held in April 1922 at The Cherry Tree restaurant, which had opened its doors in March 1921 and provided the new town with its first purpose-built public meeting space. This concert included The Banner of St George by Elgar, who at that time was still busily composing and conducting performances of his best known works for early recordings. From its beginning the Society has consisted of both an orchestra and a choir, which in these modern times is somewhat of a rarity. In recent years, to emphasise the performance aspect, the Music Society has performed as the Welwyn Garden City Orchestra and Chorus. The first conductor was Sidney Sheppard who did a great job of persuading friends and neighbours to join his new music group, and since those early days the Society has benefited from several music directors and chorus masters, in particular Roy Budden and John Bantick, both of whom many present-day members recall as contributing much to the Society.

Society members have performed in public concerts every year since 1921, including the war years 1939 – 45. This unbroken record was only spoilt in our centenary season in 2020 when the Covid pandemic intervened. Both the orchestra and choir maintained contact and “a sort of rehearsal” online using Zoom, but we were grateful to get together again for our first post-Covid concert in October 2021, followed by our delayed Centenary Concert in December 2021.

The early years

Over its first century the fortunes of the Society varied but in 1922, with the population of the Garden City being under 400, it is remarkable that the membership of the Music Society was

50! The town's population has now risen to over 51,000. Initially the Society was buoyed up by the enthusiasm of its members, but it led a hand-to-mouth existence for many years, finding finance from subscriptions, grants and fundraising. Such was the situation in 1951 that the chairman negotiated an overdraft from the bank on his personal guarantee.

On the outbreak of war it was decided to change the times of rehearsals to avoid the difficulties of the blackout. Consequently orchestra rehearsals would be on Thursdays at 4pm and the choir on Saturday afternoons at 5pm. In 1941 both choir and orchestra took part in a combined choirs' performance of the Messiah in Hitchin, conducted by Reginald Jacques who subsequently became extremely well known. In 1946 the Society appointed a new conductor: Mr Harold Watkins Shaw, who later became well known for his critical edition of Handel's Messiah. His approach was more professional, which resulted in improvements in both choir and orchestra. He stayed until 1949 when he moved to Worcester.

In 1952 members agreed to join with the Mid Herts College of Further Education as an evening class, which gave the Society a financial advantage in providing a rehearsal venue and financial support for the conductor. Membership fees would pay for the class fees. This arrangement continued for

From its beginning the Society has consisted of both an orchestra and a choir, which in these modern times is somewhat of a rarity

many years, finally finishing in the early 1990s as a result of the Government axing further education evening classes. In 1959, after auditioning for the BBC, the choir was requested to take part in the programme

“Let the People Sing”. It was understood that the additional expenses for rehearsals would be reimbursed. The choir was duly recorded and the programme went out on 28 May 1959. Unfortunately the BBC failed to reimburse the Society for the extra cost of hall hire for special rehearsals, so the Society suffered a considerable loss. No satisfaction could be obtained from the BBC and consequently the Society has not sought inclusion in any BBC programmes since.

Recent years

The choir has participated in a series of concerts involving the massed choirs of Hertfordshire, which allowed us all to participate in large works which would otherwise be beyond our ability as individual groups. Four performances were achieved over a number of years. Rehearsals were initially within our own groups, then a series of regional rehearsals, finally culminating in a dress rehearsal in the largest venue available – Watford Leisure Centre. All four concerts were conducted by Derek Harrison (of Hertford Choral Society) in the Royal Albert Hall. Funds were raised for the British Council for the



We now perform as Welwyn Garden City Orchestra and Chorus, giving three combined orchestral and choral concerts a year, with an additional orchestral fund-raising concert each October



Top The Verdi concert on 16 November 2003 in the Royal Albert Hall. © Hertfordshire Choirs Organising Committee

Bottom The Society performing in St John's Church, Digswell, June 2023. © Steve Hughes



*The Orchestra and extras rehearsing Dvořák's Cello Concerto, with Ellen Baumring-Gledhill, on 25 June 2024.
© Richard Darby*

Prevention of Blindness. The first concert was in November 1994 when we performed Britten's War Requiem. The next took place in October 1999 when we performed Mahler's Symphony No. 8 (The Symphony of a Thousand). In November 2003 we performed the Verdi Requiem and in November 2007 it was Berlioz's Grande Messe des Morts. All together it was a thrilling experience to perform in the vastness of the Albert Hall.

The Society today

A small committee still works as hard as the original founders did to ensure the smooth running of the Society and its performances. Our current music director, who conducts the weekly orchestra rehearsals and concerts, is James Ross. James has strong links with Welwyn Garden City, as he is the grandson of Dr Ross, an early GP in the town. He is now much in demand as a conductor internationally as well as in the UK and we are lucky to have had him with us since 2000. Crispin Lewis, our choir master, conducts the weekly choir rehearsals with Barbara Manning, our regular choir accompanist, whom many might recognise as a well-known pianist in the area. The orchestra is excited to be starting the current season with a new leader, Jonathan Acton.

We now perform as Welwyn Garden City Orchestra and Chorus, giving three combined orchestral and choral concerts a year, with an additional orchestral fund-raising concert each October. Our rehearsals are held at Templewood School, with the choir meeting on Monday evenings and the orchestra on Tuesdays. These days most arrive by car, some of them the latest electric models, and hurricane lamps are no longer a requirement!

The Society feels strongly that music for all ages should be encouraged in our community, especially for new generations, and with this in mind we have held bi-annual children's concerts since 2015. These take place at Templewood School in

May and we have been delighted that choirs and drumming groups from the school have taken part. We look forward to our next children's concert in May 2025. All are welcome, especially children of all ages.

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We now give three combined orchestral and choral concerts a year, with an additional orchestral fund-raising concert each October

Perhaps you, or someone you know might like to join us? If you are interested we'd love to meet you

We are a friendly group! As well as our primary function of making music and enjoying learning what we are performing at the next concert, we take pleasure in our regular rehearsals and we believe we also provide a social function in enabling members to get together with their shared interest in music. As well as our concerts we have annual open rehearsals for both choir and orchestra, in order to recruit new members who are always warmly welcomed. Our repertoire is mainly classical but covers a wide range of music, both orchestral and choral. We have been lucky enough to play concertos with some amazing soloists, many of whom have been talented students on the verge of a blossoming professional career. It has been a privilege to work with them and to give them a platform to show their talent. The choir over the years has sung a wide range of works ranging from a cappella songs to major oratorios, again with some splendid soloists.

In these early years of our second centenary we eagerly look forward to each new season of music making. Perhaps you, or someone you know might like to join us? If you are interested we'd love to meet you. Please get in touch with either the choir or orchestra

choirsec@wgcms.org.uk or orchestra-sec@wgcms.org.uk. If you don't sing or play why not come along to some of our concerts – information and tickets are available via our website, www.wgcms.org.uk.

Do join us at our orchestral concert on Sunday 13 October at 5.30 pm, (Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto & Kalinnikov Symphony No. 1) at Christchurch Baptist, Tewin Road, Welwyn Garden City AL7 1BW. Tickets available via <http://www.wgcms.org.uk> or on the door.

The Sex Pistols' appearance in the Garden City

One of the early live outings of The Sex Pistols, a controversial punk band, was in Welwyn Garden City in 1976. Clive Wilson discovers how this came to pass.

Back in the 70s bands appeared at student venues as part of their nationwide tours. One such venue was The Mid Herts College of Technology, now known as Oaklands College. There the headliners on 21 February 1976 were a middle-of-the-road country rock band called "Mr Big" who were riding high at number 4 in the charts with a song called "Romeo"¹ (having listened to it I can understand why it's not better known). It's interesting to note that the pop charts of that week included "Mama Mia" by Abba, "Convoy" by C.W. McCall, "Love to Love You Baby" by Donna Summer and "I Love To Love" by Tina Charles. Number 1 Was "Late December '63", a retro track by the Four Seasons².

A new musical movement was forming known as punk rock. This sought to shake up the complacent music scene of the day. The Sex Pistols were just starting out in 1976 and were at the forefront of punk rock. By a quirk of fate one of The Pistols' first live performances ended up being in Welwyn Garden City "supporting" Mr Big. The Pistols' manager, Malcolm McLaren, was a controversial character who was steeped in the anarchist movement of the 60s. McLaren had an unconventional life story and was always pushing the boundaries of acceptability. Before The Sex Pistols emerged he had been involved in a radical group called King Mob who carried out notorious pranks including one in Selfridges where they dressed up as Santa Claus and handed toys taken from the shelves to children in the shop.

When The Sex Pistols were starting out they had no opportunities to perform. So McLaren used to ring up venues and announce that his band would be the support group, since support bands were not always organised by venues. Sometimes a support group pulled out, and this is what happened at Welwyn Garden City, where the support band Masque had cancelled. McLaren exploited any vacuum, and so he sent the band

The Sex Pistols playing the Manchester Lesser Free Trade Hall on 4 June, 1976. John Lydon, aka Johnny Rotten, is centre stage. Image: Oleifri, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons



Lol Coxhill – and Jazz

Lol Coxhill (1932 – 2012) was an internationally renowned free improvising saxophonist. For a few years from 1977 onwards he was a resident at The Digswell Arts Trust, at Digswell House. From time to time he performed at The Fountain pub on Parkway. The photo shows him many years later, in 2007. Herts Jazz started running sessions at The Fountain in the mid 1980s, but in 1991 they moved their weekly Sunday sessions to the Panshanger Golf Complex. From 2010 to 2018 the club held its sessions at Campus West, where it was very successful. At this venue in 2011 the club initiated the prestigious Herts Jazz Festival. The club now operates at The Maltings in St Albans. For more information visit <http://www.hertsjazz.co.uk/club-history>.



Above Lol Coxhill in 2007. Photo source: Wikimedia Commons Pz60761, author Andy Newcombe, Farnborough, UK. Far left A present-day view of the building which housed The Fountain Pub. © Anneke Bamberg Left The Fountain Pub in Parkway in 1988. Live jazz sessions were held here in the 1980s. Photo by Harold Stull. Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies LC8745

along to play and get live experience – in Welwyn Garden City. The Pistols did not appear on any publicity. They just turned up at The Mid Herts College and claimed to be the support act. Most attendees were looking forward to some easy listening and received a big wake up. But others who were in the know or had connections to McLaren's shop came to cheer the band on. The Pistols' setlist included: cover of "Substitute" originally charted by Clout³; cover of "Stepping Stone" originally charted by The Monkees; cover of "Watcha Gonna Do About It" originally by The Small Faces; original track "Pretty Vacant" which

subsequently reached number 6 in the charts in July 1977.

Allegedly there were up to 100 attendees – most of whom had just come along to hear any band, as used to happen back then. But two of the audience members had travelled down from Manchester after reading reviews of The Pistols in the music papers. They were subsequently inspired to change their names and form their own bands – Pete Shelley formed The Buzzcocks (they had a number of hits including "Ever Fallen in Love with Someone you shouldn't have" which reached number 12 in 1978), and Howard Devoto who formed the cult band Magazine. They liked The Pistols so much they invited them to play in Manchester. The Pistols' subsequent appearance at the Free Trade Hall there (see photo) galvanised the Manchester music scene and spawned Joy Division/ New Order, The Smiths, The Fall and others. All down to their appearance in Welwyn Garden City.

¹ Spotify link: <https://open.spotify.com/track/1rMcCycv3ISzxBkgV5uA>

² <https://www.officialcharts.com/charts/singles-chart/19760215/7501/>

³ Substitute originally by Clout <https://open.spotify.com/track/6Emcew1wV588w2hh8SmLiu>

The Welwyn Garden City School of Music

In the 20th century the thriving musical life of Welwyn Garden City was supported by dedicated music teachers like Edith Haggis and Molly Jennings. James Ching, a distinguished concert pianist, also contributed to music education in the town.

Do any of our more senior members recall having piano lessons at Mrs Haggis's School of Music? The rather grandly named Welwyn Garden City School of Music was on the western side of Elmwood at the junction with Applecroft Road, in a building that no longer exists¹. Mrs Haggis and her daughter Mrs Molly Jennings taught music there to many local children.

Edith Haggis (née Waite, 1871 – 1950) was one of Welwyn Garden City's earliest inhabitants, and her daughter Molly (1895 – 1984) is credited with being the town's very first resident. From the start both were deeply immersed in the musical life of the town. Molly later recalled her mother playing the piano at the town's very first social evening, held in one of the huts in the workmen's camp in the woods, and Molly herself performed at the town's first concert².

How Molly came to be the first inhabitant of Welwyn Garden City is an interesting story. Her reminiscences³ describe how she happened to visit Welwyn village in May 1920, and became interested in the project to build a new town nearby, on what was then still entirely unspoilt and beautiful countryside. The following month she visited the area again, this time with her husband Edwin Mason Jennings, and they decided to buy a housing plot on High Oaks Road. In September 1920 they borrowed a horse and over five days they moved the only home they then had, a showman's caravan, from Esher to Handside Farm on Handside Lane. Here they lived in the rickyard until it got too cold, when the farmer kindly invited them to stay in his house. In February 1921 they moved into their first house, newly built at 65 Handside Lane. Molly's mother Edith and her brother John Alfred joined them there. Later Molly and Mason lived at The Bungalow, 12 High Oaks Road (fig. 4).

The local trade directories reveal that as early as 1925 Edith was running a private school called The Alpha School ("for boys and girls from 5 to 18") at the premises that later housed The School of Music. By 1929 she was taking only boys aged 5 to 10, but still educating girls up to 18. Two years later she had restricted her intake yet further, to boys and girls aged 4 to 11. The 1932 Welwyn Garden City Directory (WGCD) carries the first reference to the "Welwyn Garden City Pianoforte School", naming Mrs Haggis as the principal. Interestingly, The Alpha School appears to have continued to operate alongside the new Music School at the Elmwood/Applecroft Road address throughout the 1930s, so Edith, by now in her 60s, must have been an energetic woman.

She had spent her early married life in South London, where her husband William worked for the Board of Guardians. She had three children, William, Edith Mary (Molly) and John Alfred. She may have separated from her husband when she came to Welwyn Garden City, because when he died in 1938 his

address was given as St James Road, Wandsworth Common. His beneficiary was his son-in-law Edwin Mason Jennings. If there had been a separation then perhaps for Edith the new town of Welwyn Garden City offered the chance of a fresh start.

Edith's School of Music had a distinguished visiting director, James Ching MA, B. MUS. OXON., FRCO. Ching (1900 – 1962) was a well-known concert pianist, teacher, broadcaster and author (figs. 2, 3 and 6). He specialised in playing Bach, and performed at prestigious venues such as The Wigmore Hall and at the Proms, as well as on BBC radio. Today he is chiefly remembered for his books on piano technique, which are still highly regarded.

Like Edith, he was an energetic character. While pursuing his career as a performer and broadcaster, from 1936 to 39 he was also the director of The Brighton School of Music, and around the

same time he became a visiting teacher and musical advisor at Downham School, a girls' boarding school near Hatfield Heath in Essex. He also found time to promote his own correspondence course for music teachers and students. It's hard to say how involved he was with Welwyn Garden City, and how much time he spent here. But there are indications that the relationship with Edith's School of Music was based on, or led to, ties of friendship.

Edith's younger son, John Alfred (1897 – 1968), was an artist who chiefly painted landscapes, but portraits by him are known. He lived with his wife at Tewin. He made a portrait in oils of James Ching at the piano, with the title "James Ching playing Bach's music at Tewin, September 1942"⁴. He also drew a charcoal portrait of the musician (fig. 3). A quick search on Google will show you many of John's landscape paintings, and fig. 5 shows a view of his garden at Cheyne End, Tewin. Like his mother, John was active and resourceful. At the age of 16 he ran away from home, signed on as ship's crew, and sailed to Australia. There he painted, joined the Australian military and served as a Ranger during WWI. He visited many countries during his life, studied in Paris and put himself through a two year course at the Royal College of Art in London. He exhibited all over the country and continued painting until his death.

The Welwyn Garden City School of Music continued after WWII, but by 1939 the WGCD lists Edith as "assisted by Molly Jennings", although the photograph (fig. 1) may suggest that Molly was involved with the School before this. You can listen to a sound recording on the internet⁵, where a local resident, Gladys A. recalls going to The Bungalow for piano lessons with Molly. She also mentions learning the piano at The School of Music with Edith Haggis. The School of Music was still listed in the 1948 WGCD, but it seems to have closed around the time of Edith's death in 1950. Nothing now remains of it, but in its time

The Welwyn Garden City School of Music was on the western side of Elmwood at the junction with Applecroft Road, in a building that no longer exists



Fig. 1 The Welwyn Garden City School of Music. Edith Haggis is the white-haired lady in the centre, and her daughter Molly Jennings is behind her to the left. Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Welwyn Garden City Local Studies Library LC4680.

Fig. 2 James Ching. By kind permission of Mary Bonnin.

Fig. 3 A portrait of James Ching by John Alfred Haggis. Charcoal on paper. © Sarah Lewis. This reproduction by kind permission of Mary Bonnin.



Fig. 4 High Oaks Road, with number 12 on the left. Molly and Mason Jennings lived at this address, and Molly gave piano lessons here. ©Anneke Bambery.



Fig. 5 John Haggis' garden at Tewin. Oil on canvas, by John Alfred Haggis. © Sarah Lewis. This reproduction by kind permission of Mallams Auctioneers.

Fig. 6 Philip Edward Morrell; James Ching; Sir Stanley Spencer and an unknown man. By Lady Ottoline Morrell. Vintage snapshot print, 1924. NPG Ax141568. Ching is second from the left. Ching was well-connected through his studies at Oxford, where he socialised with Lady Ottoline Morrell and her circle at nearby Garsington Hall.

it played a significant part in the musical education of many local children.

Further reading https://www.jameschingmusicnotes.co.uk/html/james_ching.html

I am most grateful to Mary Bonnin, Chris Storrar and Sarah Lewis for their generous help with this article.

1 In the 1939 England and Wales Register Edith is listed at 35 Applecroft Road. The street directories of the inter-war period show that The School of Music was at the end of Applecroft Road, on the corner. Next to it on the same road was a nursery school, and beyond that was the Applecroft Hostel. The house which today is number 33 is situated

next door to the former hostel, and therefore must have been the nursery school.

A modern building now sits on the site of The School of Music.

2 <https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/people/molly-jennings/molly-jennings-part-four> The social took place during the winter of 1920 and 1921, and a workman's hut was used because at that point there was no proper public meeting place. The concert was the opening event for the new Cherry Tree restaurant in 1921.

3 <https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/people/molly-jennings/molly-jennings-part-one>

4 <https://jamesching.co.uk/13outbreak-of-war/>

5 <https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/history-of-welwyn-garden-city/where-do-you-think-you-played/oral-records/childhood-and-mid-teens-in-welwyn-garden-city>

Planning update

The UK Government's planning policy In July a new approach to planning arrived with the new Labour Government. Prior to the election, the party had spoken of planning reform. Here are some of the headlines from its manifesto:

- 1.5m new homes to be built over this parliament.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will be revised – prior to the election Rachel Reeves promised that this would be part of a “once in a generation” overhaul of the planning system. If volunteers are available then the Society will issue an abbreviated version to its members.
- Mandatory housing targets will be restored, meaning that each planning authority will once again need to deliver a fixed number of new homes each year.
- Local planning authorities will be supported by Government funding for additional planning officers.
- A “brownfield first” approach to planning will be introduced, with fast-tracked approval for development on urban brownfield sites.
- There will be a more “strategic” approach to green belt land designation. The Government plans to release lower quality “grey belt” land from the green belt.
- New towns will be built.
- The Government promises the biggest increase in social and affordable house building in a generation. They want to strengthen planning obligations to ensure new developments provide more affordable homes, and make changes to the Affordable Homes Programme to ensure that it delivers more homes from existing funding. They promise to prioritise the building of new social rented homes and to better protect our existing stock by reviewing the increased right to buy discounts introduced in 2012, and by increasing protections on newly-built social housing.
- New mechanisms for cross-boundary strategic planning will be introduced. All Combined and Mayoral Authorities will have to plan strategically for housing growth in their areas. Combined Au-

thorities will have new planning powers along with new freedoms and flexibilities to make better use of grant funding.

Of course it remains to be seen how these proposals will play out in the real world, but since coming to power the Government has indicated its firm commitment to delivering on these pledges. To read more, go to <https://labour.org.uk/change/kickstart-economic-growth/#get-britain-building-again>

The B&Q site, Swallowfields In December 2023 the Society took part in the inquiry into the Council's rejection of the application by Thrive Homes to build flats and evict B&Q from its site. The Society felt strongly that the Council had been right to turn down this application. The land is designated in the Local Plan as an employment area, and B&Q and Dom's Snacks jointly provide over 60 jobs. It is also an important part of sustainable communities to have homes and employment as promoted by Ebenezer Howard. So it's very disappointing that after months of delay the Planning Inspector decided to uphold the appeal, giving the development the green light. This decision may well mean that the Garden City loses another retailer and employer, and of course it heralds yet more blocks of flats in this area. It may also result in the loss of the last garden centre in the town. The immediate focus is to mitigate the negative impacts of this shocking decision. Our sympathies are with those who will be directly affected.

The delay in announcing this decision wasn't helpful for any of the parties involved, and was particularly difficult for the retailers and their employees. There's a lot to take in and there are many lessons to be learned. These will be followed up in due course. The Society thanks everyone who helped with the inquiry, and we very much appreciated the huge community response. We're indebted to Clive Wilson for the enormous amount of work that went into spearheading the Society's Rule 6 preparations for the inquiry, and for attending every day of the inquiry itself. We thank other members of the Society who also worked very hard on this. The Inspector's decision document can be downloaded here <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/View-Case.aspx?caseid=3327269>.

We understand that any changes to the site will take some time as this was only an outline planning application.

Broadwater Road – North Site – Shredded Wheat This site has been subject to planning blight for decades. As we reported in the last issue, it has been bought by a large international developer, IJM Land, and will be delivered by their subsidiary for this project, the Treble Eight Group. The developer has recently delivered homes at Royal Mint Gardens next to the Tower of London. The first phase of this latter development comprises 266 apartments, and the second phase, to deliver a 450 bed aparthotel and 79 residential apartments, is in progress. Read more about this project here: <https://theedgemalaysia.com/node/692211>. At the time of going to press the Society has had four updates from Treble Eight, as well as two encouraging meetings with them to discuss their emerging plans for the site. A number of factors will affect the shape of the development including the Buildings Safety Act 2022 (enacted in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy). The legislation makes a second fire escape mandatory in new high-rise buildings and reduces the viability position of the tower blocks previously planned for this site. The outcome of this may be a development with fewer high-rise dwelling blocks, the inclusion of a hotel and a consequent rationalisation of green space at ground level. Society Members will be updated on future developments.

Broadwater Road – South Site MTVH (Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing) Around 2020 the South Site was bought by the housing association MTVH. Phase 1 of their development has been completed. An increased proposal for the subsequent phases was previously submitted, but it is understood that the Buildings Safety Act 2022, enacted in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, has impacted the proposed tower block designs.

BioPark site The site has now been cleared and is up for sale. It is disappointing that there is more delay and the site has no immediate prospect of meeting the need for new homes.