Caddhist meeting report - January 2026

Houghton Regis – Then and Now
Mark Bolan and Roger Turner

It was in 2012 when redevelopment yet again threatened Houghton Regis that a group of residents got together with the aim of preserving and recording the heritage of the town. And so Houghton Regis Heritage Society was born.

Houghton Regis was historically a huge parish bounded by Poynters Road on the east to the Dunstable crossroads and the A5 on the west. Dunstable at some point 'acquired' some of the SW portion.

Within the parish 23 Mesolithic pits have been excavated but none are preserved. The town gets a good mention in the Domesday Book and is clearly shown on a 1762 map of Bedfordshire. However, very little evidence of this remains.

In 1964 Tythe Farmhouse and Tythe Barn were demolished to make way for Bedford Square – opened by Hattie Jacques. The Townsend Industrial Estate, a relatively modern development was knocked down and is now All Saints Independent Living accommodation.

Beside the Green Thomas Whitehead School established in 1654, still stands. It provided free education for 15 poor boys from Houghton Regis and 5 from the surrounding hamlets. Thomas Whitehead School is these days to be found in a modern building behind the church. The Red House, a Grade II listed building is where Thomas Whitbread lived.

By the church some cottages and the lock-up have been demolished to provide parking.

The Chequers Pub and the Crown both remain and the Kings Arms has been rebuilt in the 1930's after a fire.

The Brandreth family has long connections with Houghton Regis. In 1640 Henry Brandreth purchased Houghton Manor and Sewell using money made from selling uniforms to both Charles 1st and then Cromwell. He lived in the Manor house overlooking the Green – no longer there. However, Houghton Hall, commissioned by his daughter Alice Smythe in 1700 still stands imposingly overlooking the Green. The long association of the Brandreth family with the town is indicated by 25 tombstones in the church.

The talk raised questions about the preservation of old buildings – we can't keep everything, so how are these matters decided?

As a tailpiece we were told about a recipe book written by Rebecca Price of Houghton Regis in the 1600's. This gem is still available today.

We have been invited by the Society to have a guided walk around Houghton Regis, possibly in the summer.

Jane Payton