

Sarratt Local History Society—Talk by Laurie Elvin, Chairman of the S.W. Herts Archaeology and History Society

Those in the audience who only know Cassiobury as a 'park with no gates' and who expected to find out the history of the Earls of Essex and their association with and development of the actual historical estate were to be slightly disappointed. But had the talk been a pantomime there is no doubt that the villain whom we would all have hissed and booed at each mention would have been Watford Borough Council.

Having dismissed suggested Roman origins of the name Cassiobury and after referring to King Offa's grant of the land to St Alban's Abbey in 793 AD, the speaker rapidly took us to a map of modern Watford. From this and other maps and photos he showed us how (with the exception of the actual formal parkland) the historic house, its eccentric lodge gates and farms, neglected by the last family members at the beginning of the 20th Century, were almost all systematically demolished by the Council to make way for 'improvements' to the road system.

Charming photographs of delightful semi rural corners, byways and crossings, with glimpses of the old buildings, were contrasted with the later, 'improved' versions: arid concrete and tarmac surfaces, treeless views and 'efficient' traffic flow areas.

We were left to wonder how the Park itself and its magnificent trees managed to escape the soulless destruction.

The questions at the end of the talk reflected a clear desire on the part of the audience to learn more about how the grand Earls of Essex became involved in Cassiobury. Who were the inhabitants during the turbulent years of its occupancy? Who was responsible for the various designs of both house and garden and who employed them and why was the house eventually so neglected and eventually abandoned by its final inheritors? Another, different, talk perhaps?

Angela Colman

The next SLHS talk will be on 17 November when Dr. Robin Gain will be talking about 'Peace in Watford. From Memorial Hospital to Hospice.'
NB the venue has changed and this talk will be in the Village HALL not the School. All future talks will be in the Village Hall.