

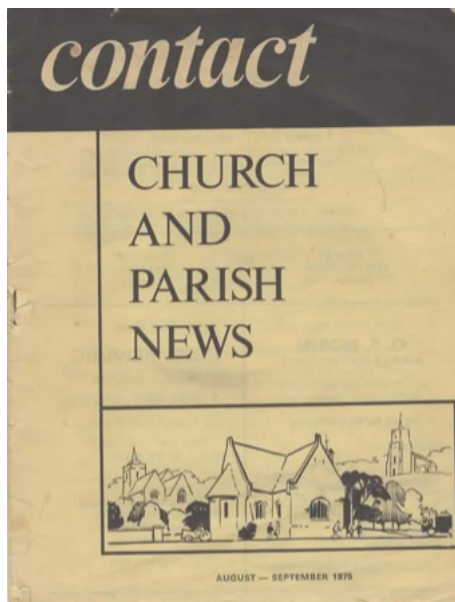
BUNTINGFORD LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

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Prior to radio and TV, news both local, national and international had to be gleaned from newspapers. One of Hertfordshire's first newspapers was the Recorder printed in 1834 by Stephen Austin; it cost 7d in pre decimal money which was out of reach of most people. It wasn't until about 1923 that Buntingford had its own paper, The Buntingford and North East Herts Advertiser, owned and printed by Robert Wilkerson, helped by Bert Thody and George Hill. It ceased to trade in about 1940 and so the town was left with no place to read local news on events and meetings in the town.

In 1966, St Peters Church in Buntingford and St Marys Church in Aspenden joined forces and produced a church and parish magazine called Contact. It was delivered free to every household in the town and village. Although it was predominately about events at the 2 churches it did carry reports on local clubs and schools. Bert Thody was a regular contributor writing articles under the guise of "TEB" on local history. The magazine contained adverts from local shops and businesses which helped pay for the printing costs. A contentious writer was "Alexander Pew" who would stir up readers with his articles. No one knew who he was. By August 1975 the cost of producing the magazine had risen and the churches felt that they could no longer subsidise it so that was the final edition. Included in the church news was the baptism of the following children, Louise Jane Mahon, Ian Keith Jordan, Christopher Ian Baker, Neil John Forrest, and Nicola Jane Johnson. Alexander Pew had the last word suggesting that perhaps some other people in the community could produce a more sophisticated magazine.



The Buntingford Civic Society decided to launch a magazine called the Buntingford Journal and asked Shelia Clark to be the editor. They thought a single A4 sheet of paper with articles could be delivered free to all households in Buntingford. Shelia had other ideas, she felt the town deserved better than that and refused to act as editor unless she was given carte blanche to produce a proper magazine filled with information on up coming events so that people would know what was going on in the town. She set about writing articles herself as to start with the only person to write anything was Vic Tott who as ex gardener of Layston Court Gardens would write a piece each month on what jobs to do in your garden.

Mike Stevens helped to get the journal up and running, he had the print department where he worked run off copies in their spare time, then his family would

The Buntingford Journal

3p.
January 1976



A magazine of events in and around Buntingford.

collate the pages and staple them into a magazine. The first copies went on sale in January 1976 at a cost of 3p. The run of 300 copies soon sold out. It contained just 12 pages of articles and 4 pages printed on blue paper of adverts and a cover with a drawing of the town clock.

A cartoon of a hairy little man, modelled on Dick Rye, appeared in the first edition. He was called Bunta and symbolised the spirit of Buntingford, he illustrated the editorial comments and was drawn by Ian Downing a 6th former at Ward Freman School. The name Bunta was found in a book called place names of Hertfordshire, where it was said the name Buntingford came from "A Ford of the People of Bunta". There appears to be no evidence to suggest that was how the town got its name, but Bunta was here to stay for the time being.

Within months it was obvious the journal was a hit with each month more and more being sold. By the end of 1976 600 copies a month were being sold and advertising revenue increasing monthly. The 12 pages had doubled to 24 pages of news and events.

In February 1977 a story about 8 year old David Whitby was printed. He had written to Jimmy Saville asking "Jim to Fix it"



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for an increase in his pocket money. He was taken to see Dennis Healy the then chancellor of the exchequer. His ploy must have worked as his pocket money did increase.

Shelia had to retire in July 1978 as her husband's job moved to Norfolk, and a new editor Madaleine Foreman took over the reins.

After Madeline's stint of 2 years, she was followed in the role by Maureen Doherty and Sue Herbert, Miranda Norris, the late Debbie Lemay (3 times editor), Barbara Brabazon, Penny O'Dell, Jean Cook, Mike and Polly Sharkey and Val Hume. Each editor added their own individual stamp on the journal although the ideals of the content stayed pretty much the same.

Val saw the job of editor advertised and was interviewed by the late Charles Purvis and Jenny Dingley, asked what she would bring to the job, she said she would like to do profiles on Buntingford residents. She got the job and her first edition went out in May 1994. She was given a typewriter and a stack of A5 sheets of paper on which to type up the articles. Once that was done Val spread the sheets of paper on her dining room table and she would move them around like a jigsaw puzzle until she was satisfied with the end result. Things became slightly easier when a computer could be used and Robin Southgate gave Val a crash course on Page Plus a desktop publishing application.

Val's favourite contributor was Philip Plumb who could always be guaranteed to provide a neatly typed article complete with pictures which Robin Southgate would digitise for her. Val's biggest problem was getting people to interview for her profiles. She interviewed Minnie Vandome but before she could get the article printed Minnie died. Not wanting

to lose all the history she had learnt from Minnie she approached her family and asked if she could still use the profile. They were so delighted with the article they used it as the eulogy for her funeral.

In 1984 during Debbie Lemay's tenure the journal was entered into a competition for the best journal in Hertfordshire. In 2002 during Val's time the journal was again entered into a competition run by Cambridge Evening News. The journal was entered along with 66 others from Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Essex and Buntingford's came 2nd, winning a plaque and generous cash prize.

As well as the editor there were a willing bunch of helpers, one of the most important was the proof reader. Val's proof reader was Eileen Platt. Her role was crucial and on one occasion when she wasn't available the computer spell check changed Eunice Wood's name to Eunuch Wood's.

There has always been someone in charge of advertising, and a band of delivery people who deliver the journal to members come rain or shine.

Regular contributors included Philip Plumb's articles on the history of the town which I often use as a reference when researching my articles. "Walter Meadows" who was actually Jean Hayes wrote about the local countryside. Local clubs and schools wrote about their activities, and recipes, poems, and gardening tips have all graced the pages over the years.

One regular was "Esme Crampton" who wrote "Worms Eye View". This always stirred up plenty of letters to the editor usually in disgust at what she had written. No one knows who Esme was perhaps she will reveal herself after all these years.

Another regular was Vyse who wrote rather tongue in cheek articles at first about his childhood exploits then later on about his adventures with his 2 friends Chicken Cleggy and Photo Foggy. He illustrated his pieces with lovely drawings.

This one illustrated his reminiscing's on his shed building as a child.



In August 2008 Val retired from the post after 148 editions, a figure never beaten. Aliya Chowney took over from Val and her first edition was the first one to be sent to the printers in electronic format, which continues today. Aliya stepped down in October 2011 to be replaced by Christine Noble. Christine had worked for the Readers Digest and took to editing like a duck to water. In December 2014 the cover of the journal was produced in colour, followed in February 2015 by pictures and adverts inside which were also in colour.

Disaster struck in 2020 when Covid hit the population. Whilst Christine managed to produce February, March and April's editions, clubs had to stop meeting, the editions in May, June, July/August didn't happen. A much thinner edition was produced in September but how Christine managed this as her husband John Makin died during this period. Christine

remained in post until June 2023 when she returned to her home county of Northumberland. She was replaced by Anne Wright who is our current editor.

Advertising is key to the survival of the journal. The first edition contained 36 adverts, December 2025 had 76 adverts so a significant rise. Jennie Keeling used the adverts from all of the journals to work out what shops were in the High Street during each period making a list of the date the advert appeared then disappeared. We used this information in our exhibition of the High Street.

Today 550 copies are printed every month, some are distributed to shops who sell the journals, the rest are delivered to members who buy a yearly subscription. It takes 7 days from sending the copy to the printer to receipt of the finished item.

So, January 2026 marks 50 years of the journal, it still contains information on clubs, events, advertising of local services and so much more. Who would have thought that Shelia Clark's vision would have been kept to all this time.
