

## 1987: ALBURY PIGEON HOUSE

In 1979, Dr Maurice Burton, the eminent naturalist who lived at Weston House, Albury, set up the Albury Trust. The first project that this body undertook was to restore the Tudor pigeon house, which stands in the former farmyard of the Manor of Weston, now the yard of the Duke of Northumberland's Albury Estate Office (TQ 052 479). The building was in an advanced state of decay but photographs dating from 1900 provided a guide for the restoration work.



*The presentation to Dr Burton by Eric Wood outside the pigeon house in June 1987.*

Dr Burton had a distinguished career at the Natural History Museum and was well known as a writer of many popular books on wildlife and as a broadcaster. In addition he wrote the popular *Nature Note* column in the Daily Telegraph, in which role he was succeeded by his son Robert. He organised fund-raising events for the restoration project, including, appropriately, pigeon-pie parties, and thanks to his determination and generosity and the support of the Albury History Society, which he also founded, the project was completed in 1980. It received a Civic Trust Award in 1982, when it was said to be 'a splendid example of restrained restoration'.

Pigeon houses are of interest to industrial historians as the droppings that accumulated on the earth floor of the buildings were a source of saltpetre, the principal ingredient of gunpowder. Surrey was an important

centre of the early gunpowder industry, with several mills in the Tillingbourne valley. It seems likely therefore that Albury pigeon droppings were used for this purpose. However, any suggestion that gunpowder made at neighbouring Chilworth was used in 1588 against the Spanish Armada is unfounded, as the Chilworth mills were not established until 1626.

The Albury pigeon house is an eight-sided brick-built structure with a pyramidal roof containing four dormer 'porches' each with a pair of entrances. The building is surmounted by a lantern, the top of which is about 35 feet from the ground. Inside there are over 600 nest-holes and a potence. This is a structure consisting of a vertical central post, pivoted at top and bottom, from which horizontal beams project. These support a ladder, which gives access to the nests.

Since the Award was made in 1987, conditions in the interior of the building have deteriorated with the accumulation of debris. Some maintenance work to make it more accessible for viewing would be welcome. Those wishing to visit the pigeon house should request permission from the Albury Estate Office in Weston Yard, Albury.

*Alan Crocker*



*Members of SIHG viewing the Albury pigeon house after their AGM in the village hall.*