

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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BLHA SPRING EVENT

Adding Branches to Your Family Tree

CLAPHAM VILLAGE HALL

Saturday, 13 February 2010

9.30 am to 12.30 pm

Laura Johnson and Ruth Gill from Bedfordshire and Luton Archives will lead the event and it will deal with using less familiar sources of information to build your family tree, such as:

Cemetery and crematorium records and monumental inscriptions; Nonconformist records (non-Anglican); Poor law records; Asylum and gaol records; Newspapers; Poll books and electoral registers; Land and property ownership; Trade directories and trade and business records.

There will be ample opportunity for questions and discussion of problems.

Tickets are £10 which includes coffee/tea and biscuits at 11 am. Numbers are limited so prompt application (in any case before 23 January) should be made to **Mike Turner, Hon Treasurer BLHA, 117 High Street, Clophill, Bedford, MK 45 4BJ**, stating name, address, telephone number and e-mail address.

BLHA Annual Conference 2010 and AGM

The 2010 Bedfordshire Local History Association Conference will be held on Saturday, 5 June 2010 at Potton, hosted by the **Potton History Society**. Conference registration will commence at 9am. As in previous years, the Conference will be preceded by the Annual General Meeting of the Bedfordshire Local History Association, which will commence promptly at 9.30am. The Conference will commence at 10am.

No charge will be made for those who only wish to attend the AGM and are unable to stay for the Conference. The Conference is expected to finish around 4pm. Lunch and refreshments will be included in the Conference fee as in previous years.

Potton History Society has hosted two previous conferences and we look forward to another stimulating event. Included in the provisional programme are an illustrated talk about an aspect of Potton's history, the experiences of the society following the launch of their website and a guided tour of the churchyard, causeway and historic market square. Full details of the programme and registration details will be issued shortly to BLHA individual members and member societies and organisations.

Gold in the attic

From this issue I have taken over from Brian Lazelle as editor of *History in Bedfordshire*. Brian is now Chairman of the Association and so needs more time to devote to that role.

As a relative newcomer to Bedfordshire, I had kept my links with my previous History Society at Loughton in Essex. In September 2009, as Secretary of the Langford (Beds) History Society, I arranged for a talk to be given on the history of Langford Football Club by the Rev Jim Broadbridge, a local Methodist Minister, President of the Football Club and the author of a recent book on the Club's history.

In the course of his talk, Jim Broadbridge mentioned that he had been brought up in Loughton in Essex. At the break, I talked to him about this and he told me that, in 1965, he had written a thesis on 'Changes in the Urban Geography of Loughton since 1920' which he still had. He also had a collection of old postcards and photographs from the 50s and 60s.

We met later and the thesis and collection of pictures was passed to me and they have now been scanned for the Loughton Society's archives and for possible publication in their *Newsletter*.

This story illustrates just what gold might be lying unremembered in your cupboards or lofts. If you, or someone you know, has old photographs, postcards, pamphlets or booklets relating to your local area

make sure your history society knows about them. There will surely be someone in the society who could scan them for their records and then return the originals to you.

TED MARTIN

A church and village memorials project

ELISABETH ROBERTS *tells us about the St Michael and All Angels Millbrook, Bedfordshire, Church and Village Memorials Project and how a team from Millbrook visited France in October 2009 to pursue their researches.*

In November 2007 when the armistice service was held in Millbrook Church, complete with the Last Post, Len Hall's great niece attended. She was most impressed that the names of all the men from the village who had died during the First and Second World Wars were read out.

Her uncle had been killed when his ship had triggered a mine 20 miles from Tripoli during the Second World War. Although not a Millbrook man, he was remembered on the Church memorial plaque because his wife worked for the Rev Cotton and his family during the war. It was her interest that started me thinking about researching all the names on Millbrook's memorial.

Nearly two years on, with the project well under way, we found ourselves wandering over France looking for the graves and memorials of soldiers who were listed on the memorial and photographing them.

On Thursday, 1 October 2009, myself, husband Paul and son Stephen, accompanied by Abby and Joe King-Johnson, sailed from Dover to Dunkirk, then drove to a French Hostelry, Hotel de la Gare in Achiet le Grande where we were to lay our heads for the three nights that we were there.

The first four cemeteries were in the general area of Arras, which we visited on the first day.

We went first to the furthest one, where Arthur James Gillett was buried. This was in the Moeuvres Communal Cemetery Extension, 10km west of Cambrai, which we found with no trouble, until looking for his headstone. At first glance another name was on the one we thought it should be, then we spied his name underneath; two soldiers shared one headstone. This would have meant that it was known who they both were, but they could not be separately identified. They both died on 27 September 1918, six weeks before the Armistice.

The cemetery at Mouevres was laid out between September and October 1918 and enlarged after the armistice when graves were brought in from the battlefields on the Cambrai to Bapaume road. The extension now contains 565 Commonwealth burials and commemorations of the First World War, 263 of the burials are unidentified, but there are special memorials erected to 31 casualties known or believed to be buried among them.

The second cemetery, The Rookery, was to be the most emotional one of the trip as this was where

Paul's uncle, Herbert Roberts, was buried, as far as we knew no relatives had ever visited his grave. All we knew was that 'he died in the First World War, somewhere in France'.



Paul Roberts at his uncle's grave

The Rookery Cemetery was named after the trenches in the area because they looked like rooks' nests dotted about.



The Rookery Cemetery

It was situated 3km south of the straight main Arras to Cambrai road, and to reach it we had to drive up farm tracks from the main road, and there it was in the middle of open fields, with a long, straight grassed path leading from the track through ploughed fields to an immaculate hedged square cemetery containing 55 burials, of which, only one grave was unidentified.

The next stop on our journey was to find Sergeant George Money and Private William Thomas Neale's names on the big memorial at Arras. We found the memorial with no trouble in the western part of the town of Arras. Their names were commemorated on the plaques along with 34,757 names of men who have no known grave.

The City of Arras is built on a network of underground quarries and tunnels, first constructed for quarrying the chalk used for building in the Middle Ages. These were extended for 14 miles in 1916 by the New Zealanders and miners from the North of England, to go right underneath enemy lines. They provided shelter and a means of conveying the troops to launch surprise attacks on the enemy. These tunnels accommodated 20,000 men and were fitted with lights, running water, kitchens etc. They are accessed down a lift shaft 70ft below ground. They are well worth a visit if you are in Arras.

On day two of our mission to find the war graves our search was centred around the Thiepval/Albert areas. The first one to find was Private Frederick

Charles Pepper's grave at The Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension. Roisel is a small town 11km east of Peronne. There are now 877 First World War casualties commemorated in the Roisel Cemetery, 514 of which are German casualties.

The second burial we searched for that day was Second Lieutenant Frank Lloyd Sharpin, the son of a former rector of Millbrook. The Grove Town Cemetery, Meaulte, where he was buried proved to be the most difficult yet to locate. This village was situated south of Albert and a small airport had been built just where we thought the track leading to the cemetery was. After riding around for a while, we had to stop to ask someone for directions. We eventually located it up several farm tracks in the middle of fields right on top of a hill.

Grove Town cemetery was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and contains 1,395 burials, most of which are from the Somme battlefields.

As it was getting near the end of the afternoon, we decided to visit the other memorial in Thiepval the next day, on the way home.

After a lovely sunny few days we awoke to a drizzly morning, so we packed up and left for our first stop on the way home at Thiepval to locate Private Horace Putman's plaque on the vast memorial. There are 72,099 identified casualties on this memorial which is situated off the main Bapaume to Albert road. It also boasts a large visitors' centre which holds a database of many of the casualties named on the monument.



The Thiepval Monument

The last place we visited before we caught the ferry home was Le Touret cemetery, situated on the Bethune to Armentières Road, to visit the memorial to Corporal Frederick George Pepper. This was on another very large memorial to 13,000 men who fell in this area before 25 September 1915 and have no known grave.

At all of these cemeteries there is a door in the wall containing books showing where to find the graves or commemoration plaques of soldiers; there is also a visitors book, which we signed each time, explaining how we were researching the names on the Millbrook church memorial in Bedfordshire.

All the memorials and cemeteries are built on land donated by the French Government and are maintained to an exceptionally high standard by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

To complete our search of Millbrook men who gave their lives for their country, we have one more memorial to visit, that of Private Albert Edward

Bunker who is commemorated at Ypres in Belgium. It was just too far to go on this trip as we only had two days in France: maybe next year!

To add to our project, if any readers have photographs or any further information about any of the men mentioned above, please contact: Elisabeth Roberts on 01525 404069 or e-mail lissie.roberts@btopenworld.com

Village memorials projects

There are hundreds of war memorials all over the country, with thousands of names of those who fell in the First World War. The intention was that those names should be preserved for posterity but, with the passage of the years, many memorials have fallen into disrepair and been neglected. The lives and sacrifice of these heroes should not be forgotten and there have been efforts all over the country to remedy this situation.

In addition to the St Michael and All Angels Millbrook, Bedfordshire, Church and Village Memorials Project, recounted above, Kenneth Wood of Biggleswade spent five years researching his book, *Biggleswade and the Great War*, which details the lives of those remembered on the town's war memorial. We hope to have more on this book in the next issue of this newsletter.

Marc Alexander from the village of Chigwell in Essex has written *Marching Off to War: The Events Surrounding the Men of Chigwell Killed in the Great War, 1914-1918*. The book took eight years of research, using the parish magazine, service records at the National Archives, the multi-volume roll of *Soldiers who Died in the Great War*, medal index cards, and unit war diaries.

Another person ensuring the names of the fallen from the First World War are preserved for future generations is Shirley Bond whose story was told in *Saga Magazine*. She chose the war memorial in the village of Cuckfield, West Sussex. Her book is *Cuckfield Remembered*. She hopes that it will inspire others to research the stories behind the names on the memorials of their own town or village.

'In *Cuckfield Remembered* I explain how I discovered the family history of each man, his school days, social life and the employment he enjoyed before joining up. I found out where each man enlisted, and which regiment he joined. From this I managed to glean information about the men's personal experiences of war and the often heart-rending, but sometimes amusing, letters they sent home describing conditions.'

The sad story of Cuckfield, losing a generation of young men, was repeated in towns and villages in every part of the country. Shirley Bond says:

'Although the story behind the names on each war memorial is the main subject area of the book, I also wanted to highlight the celebrations held for those who returned. Similarly I feel it's important to mention the valuable role played by the women in the community during the First World War. They took over many of the men's jobs in their absence . . .

Four years ago I called in to Cuckfield's museum – I knew the curator at the time – and my interest was sparked by an old photo album. In it there were photos of 71 men out of the 81 men listed on Cuckfield's war memorial. Frankly it was all a bit of a muddle; some had their names listed, some just their rank. It was hard to work out who was who. After all, the album was getting on for 100 years old.

I started off by photographing the names on the village war memorial, in the church yard and on the wall of Holy Trinity church. In Cuckfield's village hall, on little wooden plaques, there are the names of the 460 men of the village who went to war. It's incredible to think that so many men went to war when there were never more than 3,000 people living in the village, according to census records.

Names are still being lost despite the action of organisations like the War Memorials Trust.'

A similar project, this time online, has been spearheaded by historian Maggie Stephenson-Knight in Dover, Kent. The Dover War Memorial Project website aims to ensure that the frontline town's dead from the Great War are remembered.

Shirley Bond has written a booklet (*A Name Carved in Stone*) which gives the information needed to discover the history of every man listed on a First World War memorial. She gives methods of research, and how to use war records, censuses, parish magazines, contemporary local newspapers, photographs, school records and memorabilia such as medals.

The Imperial War Museum and the War Memorials Trust would like projects similar to those outlined above to take place throughout the country and we would be happy to hear about further projects in Bedfordshire with a view to publication.

Sources: Material for the above article was obtained from Shirley Bond, *SAGA Magazine* and the Newsletter of the Loughton (Essex) Historical Society.

Book Review

British Built Aircraft, Volume 4, Central and Eastern England, by Ron Smith. (Tempus Publishing Ltd, The Mill, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Glos, GL5 2QG, 2004. ISBN 0 7524 3162 5, 224pp, paperback, £19.99.)

This is Volume 4 of an ambitious project to provide a complete record of aircraft construction in Britain and 'to pay tribute to the heritage of the British aircraft industry and to create and preserve a record of its lost endeavours'.

In Section One (58 pages) Ron Smith covers the evolution of the industry, looking at the pioneers, the mass production of the First World War, the collapse and rebirth of the industry between the wars, the Second World War mass production, the post-war period, rationalisation 1960–77, modern times, and the genealogy of BAE Systems.

Section Two takes up the following 155 pages and is the meat of the book. It is arranged alphabetically by county and, within each county, by town, area or airfield and, under those headings, by the particular establishment.

A minor criticism is that the definition of 'Eastern England' only becomes apparent from a paragraph under 'Structure' in the Introduction. Essex is not included in this volume, but this is not readily apparent to an intending purchaser and it would have been better if the publisher

had printed a coverage map on the inside front cover (which is blank) or, alternatively, listed in the Contents all the counties covered in the book. Also, perhaps in a future edition, the County name could be carried in the right-hand page headline as an aid to finding your way around the book.

However, that said, Bedfordshire heads the list of counties that are dealt with and some interesting nuggets may be found in just over 20 pages. Among them are the delta wing HP 115 which provided low speed test data to support the Concorde programme, first flying from RAE Bedford in 1961. There is a table of other notable first flights from this establishment on page 62. There is a section on Skysport Engineering of Sandy which specialises in restoration projects and the Cranfield College of Aeronautics/Institute of Technology/University. The contribution of RAF Henlow to the war effort in erecting and test flying over 1,000 Canadian-built Hurricanes between 1940 and 1943 is noted and, in the First World War, Morgan & Co built a variety of aircraft at Leighton Buzzard including 42 Vickers Vimy bombers. Mrs Hewlett was the senior partner of Hewlett & Blondeau of Leagrave which built at least 225 Armstrong Whitworth FK3s during the First World War and the Napier Engine Co tested engines at Luton Airport from 1940. Hunting Percival Aircraft were also there from 1936, producing such well-known types as the Pembroke, Proctor and the Provost trainer, besides building de Havilland Mosquitos during the Second World War.

Our neighbouring counties of Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire are fully covered as are Derbyshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Warwickshire and the West Midlands.

The research that this project must have entailed almost defeats the imagination and the author is to be congratulated on his diligence and the excellent result of his labours. This well-designed book in quarto format has been neatly typeset in Bembo (a beautiful typeface that should be used more often) with chapter headings and other headings in Optima (the thinking person's sans-serif). I could detect no obvious errors or inaccuracies and there is an excellent Index and Bibliography. It is printed on good paper and appears to have sewn binding in paperback for durability. To say that it is profusely illustrated is an understatement – there is a photograph (sometimes two) on almost every page apart from the Introduction and the standard of reproduction is generally very good.

In sum, then, apart from Section One, this excellent book is not for sustained reading but it will be essential for research and also for dipping into for the odd textual nugget and intriguing illustration. It will be invaluable for students of the aviation, military and industrial history of the counties covered. * * * * * TED MARTIN

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