

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2008

The 15th Annual General Meeting of the BLHA was held on 17th May 2008. There were 70 members present, including representatives from 17 societies.

In his report, Barry Dackombe, the Chairman, looked back on a successful year. The register of speakers distributed last Summer had been judged to be most helpful by our member societies. A palaeography workshop run for us by BLARS staff at Great Barford last Autumn had been appreciated, and to celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Association a meeting had been held in March this year at Clapham. Dr. Kate Tiller of Oxford University had given an inspiring talk, and Martin Lawrence looked back over the first fifteen years of the work of the Association. Both Martin Lawrence and Kevin Ward then expanded on themes that led to an examination of future directions for the BLHA in discussion groups during the afternoon.

He suggested last year's conference, organised by Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society in conjunction with other smaller societies, as a model for the future, in that smaller societies could join forces to run a conference. It had been a most successful day.

He thanked Brian Lazelle for his sterling work in editing *History in Bedfordshire*, and stressed the need for someone to offer help with the upkeep of the Association's website.

The Chairman thanked all who had served on the committee. He pointed to the need for others to join the new committee to implement new initiatives, stating that to maintain the high standards set in previous years, the support of the members county-wide was essential.

Mike Turner presented the Treasurer's Report. The Accounts for the year 2007/8 had been inspected and signed by an independent suitably qualified professional, and copies had been distributed at the meeting. Mike recommended that membership fees remain the same for the coming year, as the accounts showed only a very small deficit on the year of £15.72. A motion to accept the accounts for the year, proposed by Elizabeth Adey and seconded by Pauline Wolsey, was carried unanimously.

The Chairman thanked Jacqueline Fillmore, Pauline Wolsey and Elizabeth Adey who were retiring from the committee. He specifically noted the long service on the committee of Elizabeth Adey and Stella Gibbs. The Chairman stated that both he and the Secretary, Stella Gibbs, had come to the end of their term of office, and both were retiring from the committee. He thanked Mrs. Gibbs for her service as Secretary of the Association, and expressing personal thanks for her help throughout the three years of his chairmanship, he presented her with a bouquet of flowers. **Martin Lawrence**, Vice President, thanked Barry Dackombe for his service as Chairman and Stella Gibbs as Secretary, saying how much their commitment to the Association had been appreciated.

No nominations had been received for the post of Chairman. Martin Lawrence stressed the need to take the Association forward, and called for someone to take on the office of Chairman. As no nominee was proposed from the meeting, Martin Lawrence then took the chair, stating that he was willing to act in the capacity of Chairman until the vacancy could be filled. Brian Lazelle agreed to give some thought to the possibility of taking on the office, but pointed out that he already had a heavy commitment as Chairman of Maulden History Society, Vice-Chair of A&DA&LHS, as well as editor of the BLHA newsletter.

No nominations for the post of Secretary had been received. Rex Skinner offered to help in any way that he could, and it was suggested that he might act as the electronic point of contact via the website, his email address being that linked to secretary@bedfordshire-lha.org.uk. He agreed to take on this role.

Mike Turner had been nominated as Treasurer. Martin Lawrence praised him for his efficient management. His re-election was carried unanimously. Nominations had been received for Martin Lawrence, Brian Lazelle and John Pitts, who were unanimously elected en bloc. Martin Lawrence explained that his nomination had been for purposes of practicability.

It was desirable that additional persons come forward to support the work of the committee. Janet Thornton, a member of the affiliated Family History Society, offered her services.

G.Aynsley was appointed to inspect the accounts for the coming year.

A RECORD FOR LUTON

Barry Wolsey

The Dominion Record Company came to Luton in 1929. Their attractive label proclaimed 'Dominion Records Encircle The World' and went on to state that they were made at 'Luton, Beds., England'. The factory was situated on the corner of Dunstable Road and Chaul End Lane.

Dominion had started business in London on 21st March 1928 with offices in Great Marlborough Street and a factory in the Old Kent Road. The lease on the factory cost £3,500 and was, for reasons unknown, sold for £325 when the production transferred to Luton. Why Luton was chosen can only be put down to the fact that the Chairman of the Board, Horace Brightman, lived in the town.

At the start, all looked well for the company, their first advertisement making the extravagant claim "Every Industry Produces Its Masterpiece – The Gramophone Industry Has Produced The Dominion Record". With a Peer, a Member of Parliament, a prominent financier and the president of four American companies, the investors were well and truly hooked. Dominion were expecting to produce and distribute 5,000,000 records annually. The company claimed they would make an annual profit of £60,000, based on the selling price of one shilling and three pence a record.

Sadly, things did not work to plan. Competition was strong from more established record companies, sales went down, and after a year of production the Annual General Meeting reported a loss of £29,000. Most of this loss was claimed to be the high cost of materials at the Luton factory. Shortly afterwards the Board Chairman, Horace Brightman, resigned. It was the beginning of the end; the company continued to go downhill. By 1930, the company was in a bad financial state, and in July of the year was taken to court by creditors, and Dominion was wound up.

Despite the many problems faced by Dominion, they produced many interesting and entertaining records, while relying heavily on imported

American record 'masters'.

Consequently, there was a predominance of American Dance Bands such as Sam Lanin and his Troubadours, the Society Night-Club Orchestra, and the Dixie Daisies, to name a few. This type of record was very acceptable to the public at the time, when jazz and dance music was the vogue. The main British band that appeared on the Dominion label was that of Jay Wilbur who used American-sounding pseudonyms such as the Broadway Broadcasters and the Deauville Dance Band in competition.

Much in evidence were the popular artistes of the day such as Tommy Handley (billed as 'the wireless favourite'), the singer Cavan O'Connor (hiding under the pseudonym of Patrick O'Moore) and Charles Penrose, the Laughing Policeman. Looking through the catalogue we find early recordings by George Formby, the Savoy Hotel Orpheans, and surprisingly the Margate Municipal Orchestra. Dominion set up its own Light Opera Company to record selections of Gilbert and Sullivan and the musical shows of the time.

Dominion was the first record company to bring out what is now known as "Talking Books". In a special series of records, authors read pieces from their own works. For example, 'Winnie the Pooh' was read by A.A.Milne, Hugh Walpole read from 'Winter's Moon' and 'Rogues and Vagabonds' was read by Compton McKenzie.

For those who like statistics, Dominion produced a catalogue of 376 records (752 sides) in the short time the company operated. Nowadays, for collectors, they are quite rare, and some sides may not be in existence.

The 'AE' series of 26 records were produced and only issued in Sweden and Denmark. Only one 'AE' record has been found in this country to date.

After reading the above, it is now time to visit your attic and sift through your old records. If you are lucky, you could find a Dominion record that was made in Luton over 70 years ago.

Recent Deposits in the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service by the Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society

The following reports have been given recently to the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service by the Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society:

- a) "The History of the Development of the Waterways at Wrest Park" by M.J.B.Turner. This report updates a previous report dated Feb 1991.
- b) "Accounts for the King's Manor of Ampthill 1533-1534". Transcript in modern English by M.J.B.Turner of MS Rawlinson D.776 ff235-242 held at The Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- c) "Accounts for the King's Manor of Ampthill 1536-

1537". Transcript in modern English by M.J.B.Turner of MS Rawlinson D.780 ff218-246 held at The Bodleian Library, Oxford.

d) Also extracted from the last two is a list of workmen's names, their trades, pay rates, etc., who worked at the Manor of Ampthill during those years, which may be of interest to family historians.

The author would like to acknowledge the help given to him by BLARS staff, both in the Record Office and at the recent Palaeography Workshop organised jointly by the BLHA and BLARS.

BLHA Meeting held at Clapham Village Hall Celebrating Fifteen Years

A Member's Report by Pauline Wolsley

The first speaker, Dr. Kate Tiller, told us how the history of Bedfordshire had been recorded over the centuries, and who had been involved.

She showed us the results of local researches on one special project that had started over a cup of coffee, and expanded into the whole community and gained outside funding.

History is the present and also the future, and how will that be preserved and recorded? Items such as supermarket till receipts are thrown away.

2011 is Bedfordshire's own millennium, and it was felt that local history needs to expand with various changes... Increased sophistication – Democratisation – Archive access – Non-documentary access – Changed/expanded learning – Conceptual reformulation.

The second speaker was Kevin Ward, the County Archivist. He started by comparing the archivist activities of 1993 and 2008. Fifteen years ago it was very academically slanted, with mainly research on paper records by visitors and outreach work.

Now there is a wider user group with extra access, and the service goes to and organizes events, goes to festivals and works with many groups with interests in local history.

Archives should be enjoyment and fun, and he posed the question "Where does history start?". Finally he set some ideas to be considered by Societies about their future and that of the BLHA.

- 1) Membership and Culture, exclusive or open/inviting
- 2) Age range? Young and old?
- 3) Number of new visitors
- 4) Realising potential impact of ICT
- 5) Partnerships/relationships with other Societies
- 6) Quality/extent of promotion and marketing
- 7) Positive role in local community?
Recognised/Appreciated?
- 8) Working with Parish and Town Councils and other groups involved in Culture and Environment
- 9) Seeking sources of sponsorship from/with the above
- 10) Undertaking project work
- 11) Take advantage of other local forms of communication, both hard-copy publications and websites – actively support and spread the message re Local History
- 12) Newspaper coverage? – better communication of Society programme.

The final speaker in the morning was Martin Lawrence, Vice-President and a founder member of the BLHA. He gave a brief history of the BLHA, its origins and goals. He looked at the achievements of the BLHA:

- 1) Leading academics as speakers
- 2) Outings to places of interest not usually open to the public
- 3) Research workshops
- 4) Conferences

- 5) Newsletters
- 6) List of speakers.

He then looked to the future, and emphasised that the BLHA committee has to be drawn from Societies. Changes have to be made, with much greater use of the internet and website. The pace of change had quickened, but everyone must ADAPT or go.

After a buffet lunch, the meeting reconvened, with the Chairman, Barry Dackombe, giving a review of a recent questionnaire sent to all affiliated Societies.

There had been only 16% response from the 28 societies, but he wondered how representative the answers were of all the members of the responding Societies, or had they been filled in by one member or just at a committee meeting.

The overall reaction seemed to be of some interest in the BLHA, but not overwhelming support, and 75% would not be prepared to serve on the BLHA committee.

We then split into four groups with four topics to discuss:

- 1) Is the BLHA serving a useful purpose? If not, why not?
- 2) Is there a better way of organising the Association to bring the BLHA into the 21st century?
- 3) Should the BLHA work more closely with member groups? If so, what are the options?
- 4) How can the transfer of information be improved between members of the Association and also with the general public?

Each group leader then reported back, and Martin Lawrence summarized the views.

- 1) Yes, the BLHA does serve a useful purpose in providing an overall picture and being the central body for organization.
- 2) Most people felt that e-mailing was the way forward, with all societies having an 'e-mail' secretary, a list of the e-mail addresses of all members who have one, and a central 'e-mail' secretary to filter and disperse information so it was a two-way arrangement.
- 3) This was difficult, as many groups do not respond to BLHA requests and offers.
- 4) Who saw the newsletters within each Society? How was the information given (a) to non-committee members (b) to members who do not attend meetings? Could Societies opt to have a larger number of newsletters to distribute to members for an increased subscription? Could the newsletter be distributed to public access, eg. libraries? The newsletter needed to be more eye-catching, with a coloured heading. There was an offer to help with this. Should more be put in the newsletter about the BLHA? The point was made that the Editor requests articles and society profiles but has very few responses.

Martin Lawrence closed the meeting by thanking all who had attended and helped to make this an interesting day, and felt that the committee had plenty to discuss.

BLHA Committee Elected for 2008/2009

As reported on Page 1, the following members were elected to the committee.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Society</u>
Martin Lawrence	<i>Acting Chairman</i>	(Vice President)
Rex Skinner	<i>Website Secretary</i>	Biggleswade H.S.
Mike Turner	<i>Treasurer</i>	A&DA&LH Soc.
Brian Lazelle	<i>Editor H in B</i>	Maulden Hist.Soc.
Janet Thornton		Beds Fam. H.S.
John Pitts		Toddington H.S.
Kevin Ward		BLARS (exofficio)

It is essential that the committee is increased in number to more widely represent the membership societies and bodies with interest in local history across the County, and of course those with individual membership of the Association. There is no requirement for society representatives on the BLHA committee to be members of that society's own committee.

The Committee is looking for support from the wider membership to take the Association forward in the coming months. If you can help, please contact us.

Diana Dalton, who set up the Association's website, resigned some time ago, and we have a very urgent need of a web master to update and continue to improve the site. Is there a volunteer out there?

Discovering British Quilt History – Talk
Sun 20th July 3pm – 3pm

Bridget Long, quilt historian, researcher and author, uncovers the rich heritage of quilt making in Britain over the last four centuries. Find out how outside influences have affected quilting styles and designs, and why patchwork and quilting has gone in and out of fashion during the period. There is also a chance to see items of the Museum's Luton reserve textile collection.

FREE. To book, please call Luton Adult Community Learning on 01582 490033.

Toddington Town Band

The Toddington Town Band in its present form is approaching its 100th anniversary. The exact date of its formation is not known to present members who wish to celebrate its centenary.

Toddington has a long history of brass banding. The first band started in the early 1900s, when Toddington held town status. In 1910, James Hyde became conductor, and with the exception of the First World War, conducted until his death 41 years later.

Under James Hyde's baton the Band had notable success in competitions. They won the 1937 Championship in Reading, and came 2nd in the 1947 Area Contest, going on to take 3rd place in the National Championship (Fourth Section) held at Bell-Vue, Manchester – a considerable achievement for any small village band. In those days, the Band practised in the Park Road band room, later moving to practise in the village Social and Services Club, near the Angel.

Denis Hyde took over the baton on the death of his father James in 1951. An accomplished musician, Denis was a trumpet and cornet player of note. He was also Musical Director of the Vauxhall Orchestra and Ladies Choir. Sadly, over the years Band membership dwindled, and the Band only met to play at special occasions. When Denis died in 1982, the band lapsed.

In 1987 Beryl Hyde, Denis' widow, asked local brass teacher Kevin Nichols to restart the band. Toddington Town Band reformed, and has gone from strength to strength ever since.

In 1993, the baton was taken over by John Farmer, a well-known brass player and conductor.

Deena Ingham is putting together the history of Town Bands in Toddington, and would be very grateful to receive any information about the early years, particularly anything that would confirm the date of formation of the existing band, and any details of earlier versions. Deena can be contacted by email deena@inghamink.co.uk.

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE is published by the **BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION**
 Editor: Brian D. Lazelle
 Springfield, 63 Ampthill Road, Maulden, Bedford, MK45 2DH
 Telephone: (01525) 402264

Contributions are welcomed and should be sent to the above address, together with a stamped addressed envelope if the contribution is to be returned. Contributions may be in any readable form, including on IBM compatible disc. If the latter is employed, please consult the Editor before despatch to avoid compatibility problems.

This document may be freely copied by local organisations for circulation to their members or employees. Always provided that it is copied and circulated in its entirety without modification, such copying is encouraged.