

2008 LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **2008 BLHA Local History Conference and Annual General Meeting** will be hosted by the **Caddington Local History Group** and will be held on **Saturday May 17th 2008** in the **Collings-Wells Memorial Hall, Caddington**. Parking will be stewarded and at the nearby school. The Church will be open for visits, and the village green is nearby. A hot lunch is planned, and the usual refreshments will be available. Full details of the programme and entrance fee will be available in January. The Annual General Meeting of the Association will take place immediately before the Conference, and as usual there will be no charge to members who wish to attend the AGM but not the Conference. Please note that the seating is limited to 80 persons, so to make sure of your place, book as early as possible after the issue of invitations in January.

15TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF BLHA

This **ANNIVERSARY MEETING** has been arranged to celebrate **15 years** since the formation of your County's Local History Association, and will provide another opportunity to meet like-minded old friends (and to make new ones) from around the County to exchange ideas over a glass of wine. The meeting will take place on **Saturday 8th March 2008** at **Clapham Village Hall**. **Dr. Kate Tiller**, Reader Emerita in English Local History, Fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford University, will be our keynote speaker, and will be supported by well-known local speakers. Full details of the programme and invitations should be available by our next issue. Make a note in your diary – this is a meeting not to be missed.

ENGLISH HERITAGE WEBSITES VIEW THEIR IMAGES FOR FREE

Did you know you can view online images relating to England's heritage for free? There are two great English Heritage websites you can visit when looking for historical or current photographs of England's heritage. Over 45,000 images, dating from the 1840s to the present day, can be found on Viewfinder, www.english-heritage.org.uk/viewfinder. The photographs cover the industrial age, architecture and archaeology, as well as some social history. Have a look and see what they have for our part of the country, or other parts of England you are interested in researching. Or you can search through more than 50 themes already selected for you, from Festivals and Fairs to the First World War or Fires and Floods.

Alternatively, the Images of England website, www.imagesofengland.org.uk, has nearly 280,000 contemporary colour images of England's listed buildings, covering everything from churches to phone boxes, mile posts to manor houses, bridges to barns. It is a 'point in time' image library, based on the buildings listed at the turn of the Millennium. You may be able to find images of buildings where you or your family have lived, worked and played. There may be a photograph of the church where your grandparents were married, the school they attended, or the bridge they walked over every day.

These are only two of the great resources brought to us by the National Monuments Record, the public archive of English Heritage. They hold over 10 million photographs, drawings, reports, records, and publications covering England's archaeology, architecture, social and local history. Look at their website, www.english-heritage.org.uk/NMR to see what you can discover.

Two Years in the Life of a Local History Group

Dorothy Jamieson

One evening in August 2005, in the middle of a thunderstorm, a group of enthusiasts shivered in the National Trust's 'Stables' at Willington and decided to form a local history group. The group hoped to stimulate and foster an interest in the local history of the area, share information with other people, and seek funding for a Willington Heritage Project.



Nicholas Cooper presenting the findings of his survey of the Tudor Stables to members of the Willington Local History Group and their guests

During the last two years our small group of enthusiasts has done just that, and the results are beginning to be seen. The Group's meetings, visits and activities have stimulated an interest in the history of the village and in family history. The programme of events and talks has run alongside the work of the Heritage Project, each depending on the other for enthusiasm and ideas.

We were helped in our application for Local Heritage Initiative funding by Cliff Andrews of the Countryside Agency. Under his guidance we obtained a grant of up to £8130 for a village archive of photographs and recordings; a Heritage Trail leaflet to be distributed free; a Willington Time-Line display to be put in the National Trust's Stables with roll-up copies also for the local school and the Danish Camp Visitor Centre; plus an interpretation board for the village. We were expected to involve volunteers, keep a record of volunteer hours worked, send in regular progress reports, and hold events to celebrate our successes.

The village archive has been tremendously popular. People from the village and much further afield have given family photographs or allowed us to take copies of their originals, on the understanding that our collection will be made widely available to other local historians. Some of our images have been included in the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service website. The collection has been shown to Willington 'Evergreens' and stimulated reminiscences and laughter; displays of photographs have drawn in people from the village and former village residents, including one or two who were evacuated here during the Second World War. Whenever a file of photographs is produced, a little group of people is sure to sit, chat, start remembering, and probably produce photographs and facts and figures of their own. Visitors from as far away as Canada have come specially to see the evidence of their family roots.

We now have about 500 photographs in our collection. In addition, all our meetings and some other activities have been recorded on tape. These provide an easy-to-use record of our activities, and some have been loaned

to members who have been unable to come to meetings.

Our search for accurate information about the village led us to ask a Tudor buildings expert, Nicholas Cooper, to survey the National Trust's Tudor Stables. The stables, together with the dovecote to its Northeast and fragments of a domestic building incorporated into the present Manor Farm, are all that survive of the house and associated structures built by John Gostwick around 1540. The Gostwick

family had lived in Willington since the thirteenth century. John Gostwick's employment, from around 1514 to 1529, by Cardinal

Thomas Wolsey, the Lord Chancellor, where he became a colleague of Thomas Cromwell, who in 1533 was appointed Privy Councillor and Secretary of State, enabled John Gostwick to advance his own position. In 1529 John Gostwick purchased the Manor of Willington for £1300.

During the dissolution of the monasteries John Gostwick served the King as Receiver General to the Court of the First Fruits and Tents responsible for the collection and accounting for all monies raised from the dissolution and all church revenues formerly paid to Rome. In 1541 John received King Henry VIII at Willington Manor, where the King held Council. Apart from the fine manor house and its ancillary buildings, John also largely rebuilt the Church in 1541, as recorded by an inscription inside the building.

Many of our questions about the building still remain unanswered, but we are now aware that it has a very unusual timber-framed roof. The report of the survey is to appear in the forthcoming volume 26 of 'Bedfordshire Archaeology' to be published later this year by Bedfordshire Archaeological Council. There will be several other articles and reports in this volume. For further information about this and their other publications, please contact the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council, c/o Albion Archaeology, tel. No. 01234 294010.

The Willington Heritage Trail Leaflet, designed and edited by a team of volunteers, is available free from outlets in the village. The leaflet describes the buildings of interest to be seen while taking a gentle stroll.

The Willington Time-Line display was officially launched by Alistair Burt MP on June 24th. The panels are attractively illustrated and put the story of the village, from the Iron Age to the present day, into a historic context. Copies were donated to Willington Lower School and the Danish Camp Visitor Centre for educational use. Copies in leaflet form are available from Dorothy Jamieson, 01234 404879.

TWO YEARS IN THE LIFE OF A LOCAL HISTORY GROUP (cont).

Work on the project has emphasized some important facts about the village history:

- There were absentee landlords in medieval times, and a surprising number of links with important aristocratic families: the Beauchamps, barons of Bedford, the Mowbrays and the Howards, Dukes of Norfolk; the Churchills, Dukes of Marlborough; the Russells, Dukes of Bedford.

- Many original manor records survive, including over 100 manor court rolls, about half of them from the fifteenth century.

- The Duke of Bedford's generosity to the village in the nineteenth century included: cottages for his workers; land for the Methodist church; village school building and houses for teachers; major refurbishment of the church, including the provision of a rare example of a Gurney stove, topped by the ducal coronet.

- The National Trust's Tudor buildings have unique features. These include the tall rectangular style of the huge dovecote, and the late medieval design of the roof in the stables. If you have information about buildings with similar design features, please contact Dorothy Jamieson and let her know.

As a tribute to one of our founder members, Bernard West the well-known Bedfordshire architect, artist and historian, a book is to be published by the Book Castle of Dunstable in co-operation with the Willington Local History Group and Bedfordshire Historical Record Society. It will consist of a selection from his sketch-book entries of drawings and commentaries, which appeared over time in the Bedfordshire Magazine and will be sure to interest anyone with fond memories of Bernard and links with Bedfordshire. Its title is "Bernard West's Bedfordshire", edited by Gordon Vowles, price £12.99. (For more information see the New Publications).

We wish to thank Bedfordshire Local History Association for all their support. We were helped very much by the secretary and others who generously shared their experience of writing a constitution and of finding interesting speakers and activities. Representatives of our group have enjoyed attending BLHA conferences and workshops, and have found them very helpful and enjoyable.

The Heritage Lottery Fund project ends in Spring 2008. This will be the end of a chapter but not the end of a book. We aim to go on producing high quality materials which will endure and continue to be of interest to people in the future. The story will continue to be written.



Photo. © Bryan Buckley

Alistair Burt MP being presented with a miniature of the Time-Line poster by Dorothy Jamieson at the official launch.

Willington Local History Project was funded by a Local Heritage Initiative grant provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund under a partnership scheme formerly administered by the Countryside Agency with additional funding from the Nationwide Building Society. Financial support was also given by Lafarge Aggregates, the National Trust and others.

New Publications

Bernard West's Bedfordshire edited by **Gordon Vowles**, published (Nov 2007) by The Book Castle in association with Willington Local History Group and Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Pb. Price £12.99. ISBN 978 1 903747 88 9.

For fifty years, from the Summer of 1947 until the Spring of 1998, Bernard West contributed his Sketch-book of drawings and comment to the quarterly issues of the now sadly defunct Bedfordshire Magazine, which provided a miscellany and review of Bedfordshire life and history. During that time on two occasions only – in the Autumn of 1958 and the Autumn of 1972 – did he not produce a sketch for publication. This was a remarkable feat, making him by far the longest and most prolific contributor to the Magazine. It was an achievement which not only demonstrated Bernard's commitment to the Magazine but also his extensive knowledge of and intense feeling for his native County.

Bernard was a man of many accomplishments: in his professional life he was a successful practising architect, and his 'spare time' interests included history, archaeology, natural history of all sorts, and the conservation both of the natural and the best of the man-made environment. These sketches display, in particular, his abilities as an artist of buildings and the landscape, although he was also a specialist in wildlife and botanical illustration. As much as he loved it, the sketches are seldom of the countryside alone. They are more frequently of village and townscape scenes. In some instances, a distinctive building is the sole subject of the drawing. Only in the case of church interiors are the sketches devoid of natural forms, usually magnificent and carefully observed trees. Public houses are frequently included, and are much referred to in the written commentaries. It is fairly certain that he would have crossed their portals and taken refreshment once his sketches were complete!

An important complement to the drawings of the Sketch-book is the accompanying written commentaries. It was in these writings that he shared with others his detailed knowledge of architecture and the history of

New Publications (cont.)

Bedfordshire. It was there, too, in a trenchant and often scathing manner that he waged his unrelenting campaign for good design and sympathetic preservation.

This is a book which should have a wide appeal, but especially to those who have an interest in Bedfordshire's past and its continued preservation.

The Bousfield Diaries: A middle class family in late Victorian Bedford edited by **Richard Smart**, published by Bedfordshire Historical Record Society with the Boydell Press, illustrated, hb, ISBN 978-0-85155-072-5. Price £25.

Charlotte began her diaries in 1878 on her silver wedding anniversary with the expression of her hope that they "will be profitable to myself & perhaps interesting to my children" and continued to 1896.

The diaries paint a vivid picture of the activities of the multi-talented Bousfield family of Bedford, led by a strong-minded matriarch.

The Bousfields were prominent in local life. Charlotte's husband Edward was an influential figure in developing agricultural machinery at the Britannia Iron Works, Bedford's successful modern iron foundry, important as a factor in the town's growth. Will, the ablest of the children, became a QC and Conservative MP whose election campaigns are described in lively detail.

Charlotte was also active, both in Bedford and further afield: her concern for the underprivileged in the town, a practical expression of her fervent Methodist beliefs, emerges clearly in her lifelong work for the temperance cause, locally and nationally. She founded a home for 'inebriate' women, which was ground-breaking for the time, and whose work she describes in fascinating detail. She was also a Poor Law Guardian, and a leading figure in the Bedford Workhouse scandal of the 1890s.

Throughout, the diaries bring out aspects of Victorian social life which are not always obvious: the dependence of the family on their servants; the ease of travelling using railways and horse-drawn transport; and the frequency with which family members would spend time staying with friends and relatives.

The Spy Capital of Britain – Bedfordshire's secret war 1939-1945 by **Stephen Bunker**. Published by Bedford Chronicles, an imprint of Bedford Borough Council, illustrated, hb, ISBN 978-0-906020-03-06, price £19.99 plus £2.00 p&p from Joanne Moore, Bedford Borough Council, Town Hall, Bedford, MK40 1SJ. Also available from selected outlets including Bedford Tourist Information Centre.

When, during the darkest days of World War II, Winston Churchill told the Minister of Economic Warfare to 'set Europe ablaze', could anyone have known that he would be creating what was later called 'the Spy Capital of Britain' in rural Bedfordshire?

The Spy Capital of Britain: Bedfordshire's Secret War tells a story of black propaganda, radio surveillance, ingenious weapons and special air squadrons that dropped agents into occupied Europe on moonlit nights.

This well-researched book brings together accounts of the striking array of covert warfare activities that centred on Bedfordshire in World War II. Secrecy was ingrained in all who were involved, and the many individual operating units and subunits worked in isolation from each other, knowing little or nothing of the other operations. Some chose not to speak of their work until three to five decades after hostilities ceased, some never did and died with their secrets. Many documents were destroyed immediately after the war, and some activity was too secret to commit to paper. Despite such problems, the author has succeeded in producing a fascinating account that incorporates material that has never been published before.

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE is published by the **BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

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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.

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