

BLHA AUTUMN MEETING

This year's Autumn event will take place on **Saturday 22nd November 2008** from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm at Clapham Village Hall, and will be a talk by **James Collett-White**, entitled **BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL – its History and Personalities**. A very appropriate subject in light of the current Local Government reorganisation occurring in Bedfordshire, which will see the end of the County Council by March next year.

The meeting will be free to members of Bedfordshire Local History Association, which of course includes all members of member societies and bodies. **Advance booking is necessary** and should be sent to BLHA Secretary Rex Skinner, by email to rex_skinner@hotmail.co.uk, or by post to 6 Rowan Crescent, Biggleswade, Beds., SG18 0PF.

2009 LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **2009 Local History Conference and Annual General Meeting** will be hosted by the **Clapham Historical Society**, and will be held in the Clapham Village Hall. The date of the meeting has not yet been finalised, but provisionally Saturday 13th June 2009 has been earmarked. The chosen central theme will be World War II, and a visit to Twinwoods will be included. Full details will appear in our next edition.

MAULDEN MAUSOLEUM VANDALISED BY LEAD THIEVES

Maulden History Society regret that the opening of Maulden Mausoleum and crypt on the Heritage Open Day, Sunday September 14th 2008, had to be cancelled at short notice, due to a destructive visit by lead thieves, who severely damaged the stonework of the parapets and created the risk of injury to visitors. Bedfordshire County Council have had the damage surveyed, and plans for restoration are being progressed. It is expected that next year's programmed opening on the second Sunday in May will go ahead as normal.



Maulden Mausoleum

picture left above shows some of the parapet and gutter damage
picture right above shows fallen parapet stonework and debris

A CHANGING VILLAGE

John F. Pickering

We often read in the local or even the daily papers that villages are changing, or even disappearing. I was born in Clapham, and have lived here for over seventy years, and I can confirm that the village life that I once knew is changing.

Clapham has had four Manor Houses over the years, the first one being in the hands of the monks of Ramsey in 998. It was pulled down in 1813. In 1812, John Thomas Dawson bought some land which was surrounded by a spinney, and built a manor house on the site in Green Lane. This was to become Woodlands Manor. In 1873 James Howard, owner of the Britannia Iron Works in Bedford, had built a large manor house in Clapham Park. James, along with his brother Frederick, also experimented with a scientific farm in the park. Sometime in the 1850s, a large manor house was built on the Lodge estate, up at the Folly end of the village.

It was during the 1800s that other large buildings were built. In 1872, the Clapham Church of England School was built. The Wesleyans had built the Methodist Chapel in 1876. James Howard had a Social Club built in 1870, which was to become the Working Men's Club. Apart from the Church, the oldest building in Clapham is the farmhouse at Park Farm. In 1894, Clapham had its first Parish Council, and it still has one today.

In the 1700s, farming was the main industry, and employed the most labour from the village. Many of the farm labourers would have been skilled in animal husbandry. Clapham had three blacksmiths during this time, who would have been kept busy by the three or four farms that were around the village.

Both the village carpenter and the wheelwright were kept busy, not only with the carts and wheels, but with making and repairing the gates and stiles, as well as water wheels that were around. All these people were skilled in their jobs and played an important part, not only to the farming industry, but to the village people as well.

It was during the 1700s through to the late 1800s that coaches coming through Clapham would, after they had paid their toll, stay overnight at the Horse and Jockey Inn, with their horses resting on the land nearby, which was known as 'the resting ground'. After their overnight stay, the coaches from London went on their way to Northampton, Leicester or wherever.

In 1851 the population was 445, made up of 209 males and 236 females. By 1870 the population had risen to 607, and by 1901 to 788. The main village road in the 1800s was just a dusty gravel

track in the summer and like a ploughed field during the winter time. It remained like that until 1906, when the County Council decided to tar-paint the road.

The blacksmiths have long gone, along with the shire horses; also the village wheelwright is no longer needed to maintain the village water wheels. Agriculture is not the main employer today as it once was, and the old cottage industry of lacemaking is only kept alive in the village by just a few women doing it as a hobby.

Clapham was a thriving village until the early twentieth century, when the large factories started to emerge in Bedford.

Some of the men began to leave the old industries such as farming to learn other skills for higher wages and to improve their living conditions. When the gas, electricity and mains water were laid on to the village in the late 1920s and early 1930s, everything changed.

Over the years, Clapham has lost many acres of land to the developers, more so since the 1960s. In the last ten years there has been an intense building of new houses, making the village more like a suburb of Bedford than a village.

Now that we have the by-pass, we do not have quite so many heavy lorries passing through, but with the three to four hundred houses which have recently been built up at the Folly on what was once farmland, also a development of houses and apartments on land nearby, it all adds up to more cars, more lorries and vans on the High Street.

The once leafy Green Lane, where the shire horses would be seen going up and down, is almost a main road nowadays. Also the lovely Clapham Park and the large Manor House surrounded by parkland and woods have all been built on, with large houses around the old Manor. All around the seventeenth century Park Farm, the once busy barns, with the sound of cattle and milking machines and the noise of milk churns being rolled about, are all quiet now, the barns having been converted into houses. Where have all the barn owls gone? The historic Woodlands Manor is now a hotel and restaurant, with houses in a spinney nearby. The old school was pulled down to make way for a small development of houses. All this is progress, I suppose, but that is the downside of the village.

We in Clapham are lucky in one way, for the village has a thriving Post Office – let's keep it that way by using it! We also have three mini-market grocery shops all doing well, despite the large Sainsbury's store just along the road. We also boast a variety

A CHANGING VILLAGE (cont.)

of shops in The Parade, with the chemist probably the most essential one. They are all vital to our needs, from Barclay's Bank to the Tea Shop, even the Travel Agents so we can book our holidays, and there is also a dentist in the village. So, from the Post Office to Diane's Hairdressing shop up at the Folly, all are doing well, and all giving excellent service. The village also has four public houses and a clubhouse, also an Italian Restaurant, all serving our social needs. We also have three motor garages, with all three in motor sales, and one selling petrol. With the County Golf Course and the Riding School, what more do we want? How many villages have all this?

We have a lovely playing field and a good bus service, vital to any village. With the increase in our car culture, let's hope the bus is here to stay. The Church and Chapel both play their part, not only on Sundays but with their various groups of organisations for both young and old. Ursula Taylor School did extremely well at the Festival of Music and Drama in 2006. (There must be some dedicated teachers at the school). All that is going on for the young – it makes an old villager like me feel that Clapham has got a future as a village.

To sum up, Clapham is a thriving village. Perhaps it is suburbia, and not one of the disappearing villages after all.

SUGAR FROM BEETROOT IN 1869 CLAPHAM

*James Howard (1821-1889) was of a family settled in Bedford for at least two centuries, the son of an agricultural implement maker in the High Street. He built the "Britannia" works on the site of Caldwell Priory in 1856. He represented Bedford in Parliament from 1868 to 1874 and the county from 1880 to 1885, helped to found the Farmers' Alliance, and was its President for many years. He used his **Clapham estate** for experiment, and published many of his results, and as long ago as 1869 tried to attract public attention to the manufacture of beetroot sugar in England.*

(from 'Bedfordshire' by C. Gore Chambers, 1917)

Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education Retirement Education Centre, 6 Rothsay Gardens, Bedford

The following selection of local history courses are scheduled by Cambridge University at The Retirement Education Centre, 6 Rothsay Gardens, Bedford, during the academic year 2008/2009.

All courses cost £42 + £32 registration fee. Further information from: Mrs. A. Samain, Tel: 01234 302203.

Romans in Britain: Heroes or Villains? Paul Palmer.

10 meetings, Thursday 10am, from 18th September 2008.

There are many ways of studying Roman Britain; using archaeology, this course assesses known individuals and their achievements and contributions to the development of our country some two thousand years ago.

Anglo-Saxons and Vikings: Misunderstood Ancestors? Paul Palmer

10 meetings, Thursday 10am, from 8th January 2009.

Branded 'ruthless' invaders, does the archaeological evidence suggest that the successors to the Romans did far more to successfully develop the character of the British people than we give them credit for?

The English House in the Late 18th Century. Madeline Edmead

10 meetings, Thursday 2 pm, from 23rd April 2009. Houses are changing rapidly in the later eighteenth century in England. There is a new elegance of taste that we associate with Adam, and family life is dictating greater comfort and informality. We will see how this affects architecture, layout, and the garden styles in this engaging period.

Strong-Minded Women: The Early Suffrage Movement. Madeline Carter

10 meetings, Thursday 2 pm, from 18th September 2008.

Move over Mrs. Pankhurst! Starting with the late eighteenth-century writers, this course looks at some remarkable women and men, some famous, others not, who changed the social and political scene in eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain to give women the freedoms we take for granted today.

Hark, Hark the Dogs Do Bark: Living on the Edge 1300-1834. Liz Carter

10 meetings, Thursday 2 pm, from 8th January 2009.

Discover the effects of the Great Pestilence, tramp the byways and skulk in the alleyways, visit the House of Correction and suffer the indignity and pain of being whipped out of the parish. All this and more. This course is social history with a decided emphasis on the ordinary working man and his family, between 1300 and 1834, using local examples.

New Publications

“We wouldn’t Have Missed it for the World” – The Women’s Land Army in Bedfordshire by **Stuart Antrobus**, published by The Book Castle, ISBN 978-1-903747-93-3. Price £16.99.

This book tells for the first time of the life-changing experiences of hundreds of young women who joined the Women’s Land Army in the 1940s and worked on Bedfordshire’s farms and market gardens. Their role was to take the place of men who went to fight in the Second World War, and help farmers feed the nation. Their work was physically hard, their hours long, and adjusting to life in the country was challenging.

Based on extensive research and on numerous interviews with former Land Girls, this book takes us back to the days of wartime activity, of military airfields, and of the presence of American GIs. This was a period when the County War Agricultural Committee directed farmers to greatly increase food productivity, and working with horses began to give way to using tractors and the first combine harvesters. A definitive alphabetical list of almost 3,500 maiden names will enable family historians to find out if their forebears served as Land Girls in Bedfordshire between 1939 and 1950. The book is fully indexed, and generously illustrated with period photographs.

Mr. Metcalfe’s Congregational Chapel at Roxton by **Stella Gibbs**, published by Guilden Press, ISBN 978-1-898024-20-0. Price £10.99 + p&p from the author: email j.gibbs3@ntlworld.com or phone 01480 351931. Also available at Bedford and Sandy Tourist Offices, and Roxton Post Office.

A detailed generously illustrated history of the unique thatched Congregational chapel at Roxton, each chapter ending with a useful list of the author’s sources. The book opens with a short biography of the chapel’s founding Metcalfe family of Roxton Park, who as Lords of the Manor had influence over Roxton for 150 years. This history is very much more than the story of the building: it is the story of the people whose faith and ideals caused them to create the chapel, and the community that responded to use and maintain it every since; their interaction with the wider community, particularly with the established church, is not ignored. A detailed and informative history of nonconformist village life over 200 years.

The book is published in the year of the chapel’s 200th anniversary, and all income generated will go towards the £22,000 required to recondition the thatched roof of this Grade II Listed building.

How Bedfordshire Voted, 1685-1735 – The Evidence of Local Poll Books by **James Collett-White**, Vol.2 1716-1735, published by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, hb, ISBN 978-0-851550-71-2. Price £25.

This second volume of Bedfordshire Historical Record Society’s edition of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century poll books continues the story of Bedfordshire voting in the context of local and national politics up to the election in 1734. It contains transcriptions of the poll books for four Bedford borough elections and three county elections held between 1722 and 1734. Except for the 1722 county election, the poll books are taken from hitherto unpublished manuscripts.

Much of the political and local background to voting is recounted in Volume 1, which gave a fascinating insight into the structure of land-owning in Bedfordshire (from 40-shilling freeholders to the great landowners) and the patterns of local allegiance and loyalty. The reasons people voted the way they did are clearly revealed. Borough voters were freemen, burgesses and those qualified by ‘scot and lot’, and for all seats numerous voters came from the surrounding counties and London. The political allegiances of the Anglican clergy and the Protestant Nonconformists were not neglected. In Volume 2, each chapter has an introduction which draws upon letters to provide an insight into the political alliances and manoeuvres which occurred in selecting candidates, including the part played by the Duchess of Marlborough.

These volumes will be of great interest to county and parish historians. The poll books themselves are a mine of local information about Bedfordshire. The 10,000 names in this volume (fully indexed), added to the 8,500 names in the first volume, provide evidence for in-depth study of people, places and landholding in Bedfordshire. They will also help family historians find ancestors between the 1671 Hearth Tax and the 1841 Census.

Social, economic and political historians with interests beyond Bedfordshire will find much to interest them inside this well-researched volume.

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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