

2007 LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **2007 Local History Conference and Annual General Meeting** will be hosted by the **Amphill & District Archaeological & Local History Society** and will be held on **Saturday 19th May 2007** in the **Houghton Conquest village hall**. Please note the **May** date. The Conference date has been brought forward to avoid the clash of dates with local and national events that inevitably occur on Saturdays in June.

Registration will begin at 9.15 am. The Association's AGM will commence promptly at 9.30 am. BLHA members who wish to attend the AGM but not the Conference are welcome to do so – there will be no charge for AGM attendance. After a short break for coffee, the Conference will continue at 10.30 am, with the following programme. After the morning session, lunch will be served, and there will be time for a guided tour of Houghton Conquest Church with its wall paintings and statuary.

Amphill History through its Place Names Barry Dackombe, Amphill History Forum and Chairman of the BLHA. Illustrating how a study of local place names can contribute to the history of a town or parish.

The De Grey Family Homes in Mid Beds Mike Turner, A&DA&LHS. Mike worked at Wrest Park for 29 years, first as a research scientist and latterly as Estate Manager, when he worked closely with English Heritage in researching and restoring the gardens.

Searching for Amphill Castle Kevan Fadden. A follow-up to the previous talk by the well known independent archaeologist and Chairman of the A&DA&LHS. The actual site and size of the castle has long been a cause for speculation. Now geophysics and archive research has revealed more information.

Fares Fair – an entertainment Allan Boldero, Flitwick Local History Society. A potted history of bus ticketing given by an engineer who delights in the intricacies of machines and their use or misuse by humans. Not to be missed.

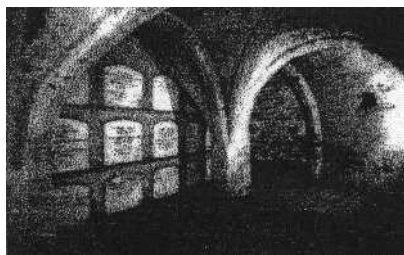
“Musick that goeth by a whele” Ted Bowman. After a long career as a research scientist, Ted became one of the country's leading experts on old music-making machines. He will give us a brief look at how music was brought to the population over the centuries, including demonstrations.

The day will be rounded off by the Chairman's summing-up, followed by refreshments and closure at 4.00 pm.

The cost for the day, including lunch and refreshments, will be £14. Programme and booking forms have been distributed, and the closing date for bookings is 19th April. Bookings should be through your local society, unless you are an individual member of BLHA. For further queries contact Mike Turner on 01525 862285.

GUIDED TOUR OF SOUTHILL PARK

The change of the Conference date has allowed the Association to arrange a group visit in June, and therefore a guided tour of **Southill Park**, the home of the Whitbread family, has been arranged for **7th June 2007** at 2.30 pm. An appropriate visit in the light of the publication of *“Plain Mr. Whitbread”* by S.C. Whitbread in February 2007. The cost will be £7.50 per head including refreshments, advance booking is essential and places are limited. Booking forms will be issued to members shortly.



AILESBUURY MAUSOLEUM – 2007 OPENING DATES

The **Ailesbury Mausoleum and Crypt** in St. Mary's Churchyard, Maulden, will be open to the public from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm on the following Sundays in 2007:- **13th May, 10th June and 9th September**. Guided tours throughout the opening to illustrate its and the family's history in Bedfordshire and the Royal Court. Entrance is free, and the car park is adjacent to the churchyard.

THE HIBERNO-SAXON RUNIC STONE AT THE CHURCH OF ST.PETER'S DE MERTON, BEDFORD

R. R. Evans

Although people have worshipped at St.Peter's for over a thousand years, few today are aware that the earliest construction on this site may have been between 585 and 827 during the days of the Mercian Empire and the early spread of Christianity. Even before a church was built, there may have been a stone cross on the site. By the 8th century it had become a custom in England for nobles, or good men, to erect a cross in some prominent spot on their estate. At this cross those who wished might pray, since not every Anglo-Saxon lived near enough to a church or oratory to be able to attend it for daily worship.

This custom is of particular interest in connection with the ancient carved stone which can be seen – set upside down! – in one of the jambs of the triangular-headed doorway in the east wall of the ringing chamber. This stone, measuring 10 inches by 15 inches, may well be the fragment of a cross, reduced to ruins by the Vikings, which stood at Bedford Green before the church was built.

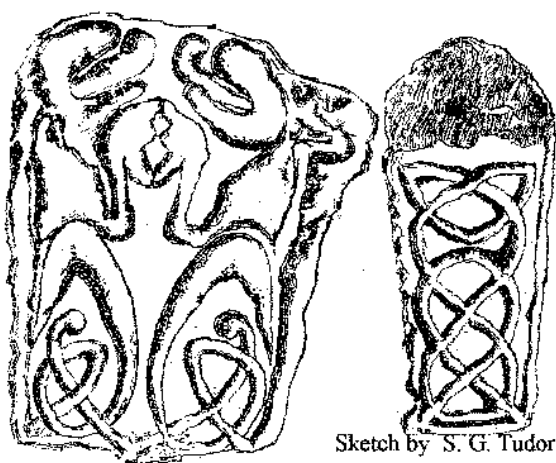
The two faces of the stone (see fig.1) that are visible today display carving in spiralling, plaited and interlacing patterns – a feature of that pagan Celtic art that was adapted by

Christian artists to illustrate sacred texts and decorate stones, as paganism became amalgamated with the newer faith. Early monasticism in Britain and Ireland had gradually developed this unique art form as scribes copied the Latin texts of the Gospels onto parchment or vellum and illuminated the borders of the book, weaving in intricate interlaced patterns and real or imaginary animals. Animals generally were regarded by the Celts as supernatural beings and therefore sacred.

One expert on Anglo-Saxon churches has described the heads of the two confronting bipeds on the runic stone in St.Peter's as "wolf-like" but it is obvious that their shape – with protruding tongues, legs, wings and knotted tails – was the result of artistic imagination. As such, the term "dragon" seems to suit them best. The development of the beasts' tails into intricate knots is fascinating. It is sad that the second face of the stone (facing east) is not easily visible, as the interlacement on it, based on a four-cord plait, is in a style frequently used on crosses in England between 750 and 900. It is often seen on old Cornish crosses, perhaps not surprisingly as Irish missionaries are known to have diffused northwards from south-west England.

A remarkably similar interlaced pattern can be seen on a Christian slab from Glamis, Angus. Both are thought to date from 700 onwards, and it was at this time that interlace designs began to make their appearance, the skilled mason first scratching a template or stencil onto vellum or wood. The reversed dragon could have been achieved using this method.

A grave-cover from the late tenth or eleventh century date, from the Church of St. Benet Fink erected in medieval times by Cornhill in London by Robert Fink the Elder, bears an almost identical pattern of interlacement. Unfortunately, the only other stone from Bedford with carvings characteristic of the late eighth or ninth centuries has disappeared. A semi-circular Anglo-Saxon font of local stone carved with crude figures of dogs, foxes and



**Fig.1 RUNIC STONE IN BELFRY (two sides)
(Sketch from 'Links with the Past, St Peter de
Merton' by A. Cross)**

THE HIBERNO-SAXON RUNIC STONE AT THE CHURCH OF ST.PETER'S DE MERTON, BEDFORD*(cont. from p.2)*

(on one side) birds pecking at a spray of wheat-ears (see fig.2), has been lost since the single record of its existence was entered in the Bedfordshire Times in August 1947 by a gentleman who had purchased it and removed it from a garden not far from St.Peter's Church. The runic stone in St.Peter's tower has thus become the oldest architectural relic in all the surviving ecclesiastical buildings in Bedford, stimulating some interesting discussion about its origins and place within Christian art.

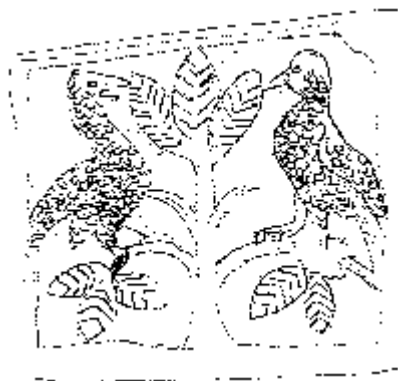


Fig. 2 CARVING ON SAXON FONT
(Sketch by Matt Edgeworth)

AMPHILL & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY**Kevan Fadden**

The Society was formed in 1962 part way through a three-year WEA archaeological tutorial run in Ampthill by Dr. John Alexander. John had an infectious enthusiasm for the subject which some of us who attended his classes still share. An inaugural meeting was held in the town to discuss setting up an archaeological society. Chaired by Kevan Fadden, it found favour, but we were advised from the floor that we should include local history, and after much discussion it became one of the first societies in the country to be formed with the combined objectives. At that time there was a definite rift between the two disciplines nationally, but I am pleased to say that now views have changed and it is normal practice. Time has shown that everyone benefits, and this society in particular attributes its longevity to the shared interests, even though it suffers from a long title.

In the earlier years the Society carried out extensive field walking throughout the district looking for archaeological evidence, and carried out excavations of a Priory at Beadlow, a Romano-British site at Ruxox and a Roman corn dryer at Manor Way, Flitwick.

Considerable research including aerial photography took place on the three proposed routes of the Ampthill by-pass. Rescue excavations were carried out during the construction of the one eventually chosen, including a Belgic kiln site, a number of new Roman sites, a Belgic cremation, and a lost 18th Century water mill. Excavations were accompanied, where possible, by research of the contemporaneous written record. This was

particularly useful for work on Beadlow Priory and other medieval sites.

On the Local History side, the Society published *Flitwick: A Short History* in 1973 and followed this up with *Ridgmont: An Edwardian Cameo* (1991) and *Flitwick: A Vanishing Village* (1992), the latter two recording pictorial scenes from the villages. In 2001 the Society reproduced *126th Coy Canadian Forestry Corps*, written by Sgt. Herman L. Porter – a booklet review of activities with the 126th Company Canadian Forestry Corps while stationed at Ampthill in 1917 and 1918. This booklet opened a number of avenues for WWI studies in the area, and destroyed a number of myths probably perpetrated by local people who resented the destruction of their beloved “Firs”, a plantation of trees to the southwest of the Alameda.

The combination of local history and “standing archaeology” put the Society in a good position to monitor and where necessary intervene in the care of a number of ancient buildings in the area. In 1981 we ran a campaign to prevent the destruction of Segenhoe Church which had been declared redundant. Letters were written to the newspapers and lectures given to interested societies. A book was quickly produced giving a pictorial potted history of the church and presented to all the involved County Councillors; this helped to gain a reversal of the earlier decision to destroy the building.

A campaign led by Professor Albert Richardson in the forties and fifties to have the Maulden Mausoleum restored was picked up by the Society

AMPTHILL & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL & LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY (cont.)

in the eighties and pursued in a low key for a number of years with little success. However, when the availability of grants improved, the opportunity was taken to increase the pressure. Records collected by the Society over the years assisted the County Council in making their bid for funding which enabled the Mausoleum to be restored, and for the installation of good quality reproductions of the original statuary.

The Society played a major role in preventing the Ampthill Town Council from clear felling the Alameda trees in 1986. The avenue consists of a double row of common lime trees 700 yards long, planted in 1827 by Lord Holland as a gift to the town. Although this type of tree has an expected life of over 400 years, it was said that the trees were too old and were a danger. Certainly a few were in poor condition following incompetent pollarding in the 1950s, but the rest were healthy. In conjunction with the Ampthill Preservation Society, a photographic exhibition was mounted in the town highlighting the value and true state of the Alameda, combining it with problems requiring attention in Ampthill's historic Park. Talks were given in the area and a petition raised asking for the trees to be saved. This proved to be a bitter battle, and it was only after it was taken to the Minister for the Environment that the Town Council decided to drop the plans.

In recent years the Society has acquired a TR/CIA resistivity meter, enabling us to carry out geophysical surveys of archaeological sites without destructive excavation. Work has been carried out in Maulden meadows, Wrest Park, and the castle site in Ampthill Park, sometimes with surprising results.

Normally four summer visits are arranged for Society members to sites of historical or archaeological interest. A winter programme

consisting of lectures is held in the Flitwick Library on the first Monday of the month. It is a proud boast of the Society that no meeting has ever been cancelled.

New Publications

How Bedfordshire Voted 1685-1735: The Evidence of Local Poll Books by James Collet-White, Vol.1 1685-1715, published by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, hb, ISBN 0 85155 071 1. Price £25.

This book contains transcripts of the poll books for the county of Bedfordshire and borough seats of Bedford, and also includes election accounts showing candidates' expenditure. The information from them and other sources is examined in depth to give a fascinating insight into the structure of landowning 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 Protestant Nonconformists are not neglected.

This volume and the promised Volume 2 (due September 2008) will be of great interest to county and parish historians. In particular the 8500 fully indexed names will help family historians discover 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 in 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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