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Notes and News

What's been going on in Willington?

Two 20-metre squares were laid out on the ground to the west of the National Trust's Tudor Stables in Willington on 30 June and then, on 13 July, Kevin Fadden and Bob Randall brought their resistivity surveying equipment and carried out a demonstration and training exercise for local people who were interested in archaeology in general and resistivity surveying in particular. Some were members of Willington Local History Group or Bedford National Trust Association, and others had heard about the demo in other ways.



Kevin and Bob explained how the machine used electricity to trace the position of the foundations of former buildings, or other material, under the surface of the ground. There were discussions about the importance of safe working practices and the dangers of lightning strikes, and the importance of laying out the survey grids accurately was emphasised. The 20-metre squares were divided into 19 strips with ropes marked into 1-metre lengths, and mobile probes were set up in the best positions.

The machine was demonstrated and Kevin and Bob helped four people to use it. The results were displayed on laptops and ways of enhancing the images were shown. The grid which was produced was later used by archaeologists to help to select positions for two trial pits, dug on the site on Sunday, 28 July, see below.



'Secrets below the Surface' at the Tudor Dovecote and Stables, Sunday, 28 July 2013

By 10 o'clock in the morning a table in the Stables was full of all sorts of equipment, including tiny trowels, garden sieves, seed trays, water carriers and a mattock. The

Willington volunteers welcomed two archaeologists, Angus Wainwright, National Trust Archaeologist for the Eastern Region, and Terry Spencer, who was glad to take up a trowel after a gap of several years. We also welcomed several local people and other helpers from Bedford, Amptill, Kimbolton and Stevenage.

Two trial pits were opened and the turf set to one side.



As the soil was removed and recorded, in layers which were 10 centimetres deep, it was sieved on to large plastic sheets, see left. Any finds were put into labelled seed trays to be washed later in the day. At the end of the

day both pits were filled in and made good. After some rain, they will be almost invisible.



The pit nearest the Stables (see left) yielded fewer finds than we hoped. There was a layer of material which may have been the surface of a path or courtyard, and a few finds which included the rim of a jar made

of yellow-glazed pottery (see below) which has still to be dated.

The pit further west produced quantities of materials which suggested that there had been a building nearby. There were bricks, stones, roof tiles, floor tiles, pieces of pottery and clay pipes, fragments of bone, some very rusty nails and two tiny fragments of glass. The bottom layer of the deposits may not have been reached so the pit was been lined with polythene ready for another dig, perhaps next year.



Lots of photographs were taken by Julie Scherrer and Robert Oliver and we are now thinking about how we can best display them. The photo on the left shows Geoff Saunders, the Bedford Borough Archaeologist,

(left) watching Katy Wiltshire removing the second layer of soil from pit 1, encouraged by Angus Wainwright and Terry Spencer (right).

We were delighted that some families came to see what was going on in the afternoon. The children were soon listening to explanations from Angus and getting on their knees to see what they could find.



The National Trust's Willington volunteers are very grateful to Mr and Mrs Godber for giving us permission to open these two pits on their land. We would also like to thank our friends who so willingly lent us their equipment, especially Kevan and Bob who lent their machine and shared their expertise; and the archaeologists, members of Willington Local History Group, and all the other people who gave their time so freely and enthusiastically to help us to find out more about Willington's history.

A more formal report will be written later this year, after the finds have been carefully inspected and analysed. The results of the dig have been described as 'promising' and several of the volunteers would like to do more digging, so we'll have to wait and see!

If you would like more information, contact Dorothy Jamieson at:
Dorothy.jamieson@ntlworld.com or telephone on 01234 404879.

Polar Medals. The medals awarded to Apsley Cherry-Garrard (see HIB 6.1, Autumn 2012), Assistant Zoologist to Scott's ill-fated Antarctic Expedition 1910–13, were offered for sale at the DNW auction on 19–20 June: 'Cherry-Garrard's Polar Medal 1904 (GVR, 1st issue), with clasp Antarctic 1910–13 (A CHERRY-GARRARD, BA, TERRA NOVA), in its original named card box of issue, together with The Royal Geographical Society's Scott Memorial Medal in silver, in its fitted case of issue.' They were estimated at £25,000 to £30,000, but were sold for a hammer price of £58,000 which, with a buyer's premium, meant that the successful (and obviously wealthy) bidder paid £71,920.

Self-sufficiency in mid-Beds villages in the 1920s and 30s*

Introduction

Between 2001 and 2004 a four-year oral history project, directed by Carmela Semeraro for the Marston Vale Trust, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, was conducted in mid-Bedfordshire. Over 250 interviews were recorded with a range of men and women, from a schoolchild up to a 102-year-old resident, from the predominantly rural area between Bedford and the M1 motorway, and between Cranfield in the south-west and Willington in the north-east.¹ The main aim was to record the tremendous changes in the area caused by the rise and fall of the brick industry.² The majority of the participants were interviewed about their work in the brick industry. Others had been in agriculture and horticulture or raised families in the area. Many brick workers lived in Bedford and their interviews tell much about life there, but others lived locally and their interviews give valuable insights into village life

in mid-Bedfordshire over the twentieth century.³ In this brief article I intend to show the kind of insights these interviews can give to local (and national) historians seeking to get an idea of what life was like in Bedfordshire villages between the two world wars.

Village self-sufficiency

One aspect which comes over in the interviews is how little villages had changed from Victorian times. Most had the basic infrastructure and services which enabled residents to live entirely locally, without the need to leave their village or hamlet, except for occasional visits to nearby market towns for special needs or occasions. All speak of there being a range of local village shops – grocers, cobblers, butchers and others – which would provide their food and household needs. Others took on the role of part-time midwives and undertakers. There were a range of specialist tradesmen, such as blacksmiths to service the needs of local farmers and others who relied on horsepower.



Haynes Village, Church End, line drawing, c1920s. (Line drawing by A E Baldwin, *In Bedfordshire Byways*, 1931)

Local provision was supplemented by deliveries from nearby Bedford, Cranfield and Ampthill – horse-driven in the 1920s but increasingly using motor-vehicles by the late 1930s. Most villages had a local school to which children could walk, although sometimes over long distances if they lived in outlying hamlets.

Individual households would practise their own self-sufficiency by growing vegetables and raising poultry or their own pig in the gardens and allotments around their cottages. Poaching on local landed estates would sometimes supplement the food supply, with fresh meat such as rabbits or game birds.

Local public-houses provided centres for social life, as did churches and Sunday schools, in a different way. They often generated sports teams and inter-village competitions. This was an age when there was no television, no electricity or gas for most country dwellers and little in the way of powered labour-saving devices. Candles and paraffin lamps were the main light source until mains electricity began to be provided from the late 1930s onwards. Few had any mains water or sewerage installed. Wells were relied on for water and outdoor lavatories, using

cesspits or 'nightsoil' collection from buckets were the norm.

Few had radios in the 1920s but this changed in the 1930s so that by the beginning of the Second World War, in 1939, most households had access to information, education and entertainment (and the influence of the outside world) via their 'wireless' sets, thanks to the public licence-funded British Broadcasting Service.

Below are just a few selected examples of the type of content to be found in these interviews.

Z1205/041, Walter Downing, born in 1913 and brought up in Wardhedges, had a father who was the horseman at a local farm and Walter went on himself to do farm work and then on to horticulture in a market garden. He remembered the time when 'London manure' (horse droppings) was transported to Flitwick, Bedfordshire, by train, collected by local farmers and spread on their fields as fertiliser. Poaching was a vital element in the feeding of his family.

Z1205/140, Enid Wisson, born 1926 at a Wilstead farm. Her father established a milk delivery 'round' to local villages.



Lidlington Milk Delivery, Mr Humphreys, c1920 (Bedfordshire and Luton Archives & Records Service)

Z1205/078, Joseph Denton, was born and brought up in Marston Caulcott. As well as working locally, the family kept poultry and rabbits at home to supplement their family income. Like most village cottages, his house had only a well outside for their water supply. The great breakthrough for his family was when electricity was brought to the area in 1935.

Z1205/113, Gladys Greenwood, born 1919, who had a Millbrook childhood, recalled the making of 'hedgerow' wine from cowslips and elderberries, and the large distances frequently walked between villages.

CS015C, Frederick Shayler, born in 1922 in Cranfield, had a father who suffered from shell-shock brought on by his experiences in the First World War. He records that the snaring of rabbits for meat was essential for the subsistence of many large rural families (his parents had nine children). They had moorhen's eggs for breakfast. Local 'shoots' provided some additional pocket money for local men employed as 'beaters', not just for the landed gentry but also for the London Brick Company which bought up many farming estates under which the

precious clay resource lay. On Sundays, local rural railway stations would receive hundreds of pigeons which had been sent by rail by their owners for release at set times, in order to take part in races.

Z1205/217, Peggy Gadsden, was born in 1921. Her father lost an arm in the First World War and could not return to his trade as a butcher. He bought a horse and cart and set up a greengrocery delivery 'round' to rural settlements.

Lack of space here prevents actual extracts being quoted, but reading the transcripts will give you access to a rich source of detailed insights into individual rural life experiences in a way which generalised social history cannot convey. Do dip into this valuable resource.⁴

Notes

* This article records the contribution of the oral history archive 'Changing Landscapes, Changing Lives' to the social history of Marston Vale. The author hopes to write further articles drawing on various topics in the archive in the future.

1. For 'tasters' of the original recorded interviews, you can hear a range of voices in brief extracts online at www.marstonvale.org/oral-history-project

2. Brief information on 'Brickmaking in Bedfordshire', based on the Marston Vale project, can be viewed at www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/beds_herts_bucks

3. The recorded interviews with Carmela Semeraro, as well as being archived digitally by Bedfordshire Archives at Borough Hall, have been both transcribed (by volunteers) and summarised (by Stuart Antrobus) so as to give access to a valuable source of social and industrial local history. Written transcripts and summaries of the Marston Vale oral history interviews can be consulted in Bedford at both Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Service at Borough Hall, and in the Bedfordshire Heritage Library at Bedford Central Library (check opening days/hours for both, in advance). Online summaries can be viewed at www.bedford.gov.uk/archivcatalogues>'clicking here'>'begin your search'>enter Z1205 into the Reference box>scan down the various numbered interviews and their summaries.

Full transcripts can then be requested personally at the two depositories (see above).

4. The following are further recommended interviews, full of details about village life between the two world wars (all prefixed Z1205/): 018 Violet Gillet, 019 Elizabeth Prince, 025 Henry Giles, 026 Cecil Caves, 028 Stanley Lovell, Herbert Slade, 146 Brian Crouch, 157 Norman Burrows, 162 William Cook, 176 Frank Denton, 188 George Pendall. You will see from the names mentioned in this article that the archive is also a potential source for family historians. In the case of married women, maiden surnames are also (usually) given near the beginning of interviews, as are parents' names.

STUART ANTROBUS

Book reviews

Colmworth and Neighbours History: Journal of the Colmworth and Neighbours History Society. Volume 2, June 2013. 38pp + 4pp cover. No price stated. Further information: www.colmworthhistory.org.uk and e-mail: cnhssecretary@gmail.com

This second issue of *Colmworth and Neighbours History* is again nicely printed on good paper and contains some very interesting articles all of which are well illustrated.

In the Middle Ages ale was a staple drink for all ages and the leading article by John Hutchings traces the story of the manufacture and disposal of malt from which the ale was produced. He has used such sparse records as are available and covers the malting process – the malthouse and its contents and the kilns and the sales and exports and Church malt, milling, offences concerning malt and malt bequests.

The second article by Declan McCabe relates Bedfordshire's stance in the English Civil Wars 1642–51, which was to side with Parliament. However, some of

Charles I's most loyal supporters had connections with the County but most of them left early in the conflict and had their estates sequestered. McCabe tells of the experiences of some of those on both sides, organised on a year-by-year basis and with short biographies at the end of the article.

Move on 160 years from start of the Civil War and we come to Bedfordshire's participants in the Battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's navy, an article by David Davies. This tells that there were 29 Bedfordshire men at Trafalgar and the article tells how they entered the Navy, the part they played in the Battle and what happened to them after. The article also considers other ways that Bedfordshire contributed to Nelson's navy.

In the fourth article Walter Landmann considers the history of processing animal hides in the county to make leather from its early days to the disappearance of the craft and industry.

Jeanne Rainford then relates the story of Martha Ann Topham, a teacher, then headmistress, of Colmworth School in the period 1884–1893, who was also a farmer's wife and mother – an early multi-tasking woman.

In the next article Sue Jarrett relates the story of Christopher Cooper who was born in Colmworth but had emigrated to Canada with his wife Jane, as a farmer, in the late 1880s or early 90s but returned to Britain in 1920.

The final two articles are by Alan Woodward, who writes on the sale of Francis Crawley's Keysoe Estate in 1912 and its effect on the village, and Thelma Marks on the foundation of a church choir in Colmworth nearly 50 years ago by Christine Tranah, then a newly trained nursery nurse.

The journal is nicely produced and printed on good paper and is a very interesting read. Strangely, I could find no indication of price or contact details apart from web and e-mail addresses, which is hard on those who are not online and might wish to obtain a copy.

Suggestions to improve future issues are: traditionally, pagination does not include the cover; medium italic makes a better subheading than just roman (medium); an ellipsis is just three dots (. . .); and a parenthetical dash is not a hyphen but is produced in Word by: num lock on, alt + 0150 on the numbers at the right hand side of the keyboard.

The Village of Biddenham Through the Ages. By Katherine Fricker, Mary McKeown and Diana Toyn. Biddenham Historical Trust/Bedfordshire Bugle, 37 Church End, Biddenham MK40 4AR. x + 394pp. Paperback. £20.

This is a thick and heavy book which in 15 chapters and a 'Conclusion' gives a very rounded picture of the village and its history and geology from ancient times to the present day. It is well illustrated throughout – nearly 80 in-text pictures – and the 'Conclusion' section contains many colour illustrations mostly in a 'Walk Round Biddenham Village' item, but there are others as well.

The width of the book (167mm) would have supported a text width of 120mm rather than the 105mm used and this, coupled with the use of a lighter text paper, would have meant a shorter and lighter book with a saving of postage and printing costs and perhaps a lower cover price.

The page margins do not follow usual bookwork practice, the typography is undistinguished in Times and there is overmuch use of bold type. I think that history books should be set in one of the beautiful 'historical' typefaces (Garamond, Bembo, Baskerville, etc) to give the right ambience. Book design is an industrial craft largely ignored by self-publishers today. They would do well to study it and improve their product. However, apart from

that, this is a very creditable production with many interesting chapters and something for everybody.

Starting with an opening chapter on the geology of Biddenham and then ancient life in the Biddenham loop (the 180 degree loop of the River Ouse) the chapters move on to Domesday 1086 and a very detailed history of St James's Church from the 11th or 12th century to the present day; then there follow chapters on the village 1500–1700 (the Boteler Dyve rivalry), 1700–1850 (social change and enclosure), 1850–1914 (high farming, agricultural depression and social change) and 1914–1939 (the impact of the First World War, with stories of the soldiers lives lost and the survivors and those billeted in Biddenham).

Chapter 9 covers the village school, 1832–1944 and chapter 12 continues the story with St James's School, St Gregory's Catholic Middle School and Biddenham International School and Sports College. The two education chapters are thus separated by 82 pages (chapter 10: the village in the Second World War and chapter 11 containing personal memoirs)!

The final chapters are on childhood in Biddenham, The Biddenham Society, and the flora and fauna of the village and the aforementioned 'Conclusion' on art paper. Five appendices cover subjects as diverse as gravel pits, wills, church incumbents and the family tree of the Botelers. There is a comprehensive index. If you want to know about Biddenham this is the book for you – if you can afford £20.

The Parish Church of St Thomas, Stopsley. By Dr James Dyer. St Thomas's Church, Stopsley, 585a Hitchin Road, Luton LU2 7UL. viii+ 76pp. Paperback. £10 (postage £1.50).

This book charts the history of the church from its consecration in 1862 to celebrate its first 150 years. Although Stopsley has now been absorbed into the Luton-Dunstable conurbation, the church remains at the heart of the village.

The book is nicely printed and contains 50 mono illustrations, a map of Stopsley in 1881 and a striking cover drawing of the church by Kenneth Munslow. The book is again set in Times but neatly designed.

As would be expected the book opens with a history of the village and church and then goes on to describe the new church, the absentee vicar, Thomas Henry Papillon, who lived mainly abroad and conducted only one funeral and two weddings during his incumbency! Items on the first vicarage, a vicar who started as an apprentice printer and founded a musical family and the First World War years follow. One vicar came from Australia but only stayed a short time and there was a cricketing vicar in 1922. The troubles about ownership of the Church Institute, the longest serving vicar, the organ and choir are covered and also the impact of the Bushmead Project and the attainment of a parish hall at last in 2010.

Of course, this well-written book will mainly be of interest to those who have connections with Stopsley and St Thomas's church but it also gives an interesting insight into life in a Bedfordshire parish over a century and a half.

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