SUCCESSFUL FIRST EVENT

The BLHA Local History Exhibition

The Exhibition held on the 25th of September was extremely well supported by individual members and member Societies, filling the hall and ante-room with impressive lines of stands displaying attractive arrays of books, photographs and other items (including a display on straw plait). In all twenty local history societies and other organisations exhibited, together with two individual members who had their own stands.

It was a pleasure to see Miss Pat Bell, the former County Archivist, with her material on the Jews in Bedford and Andrew Underwood with his books on Ampthill, each exhibiting in their own right. Two booksellers who specialise in local history - one in new publications and the other in old maps, prints and second-hand books - displayed good collections. The Bedfordshire Historical Records Society and the Bedfordshire Magazine were there with a display.

It was good to see that so many people are actually recording and publishing the results of their research. In fact, there were plenty of items to buy and many of us went home with our pockets lighter than when we went in. The exhibition provided a good opportunity, too, to meet again other people with similar interests, to exchange news and information, to pick up a few new ideas and make new contacts.

Unfortunately the report in one of the local papers of the county that 1,200 people had attended the exhibition was not quite accurate. The number of outside visitors actually recorded was 120 and someone had added an extra nought! However, those who did turn up had an enjoyable and profitable afternoon meeting exhibitors who had time and space to give them individual attention while discussing their interests.

Altogether a very successful afternoon and already there have been suggestions that it is an event that is well worth repeating at some date in the future, perhaps at other venues around the County. One additional bonus - even though there was no charge for admission the profits from the catering, with the addition of a donation or two, meant that the exhibition was put on at no cost to the Association.

Joan Curran

Winners of the Dunstable Historic and Heritage Studies' quiz were:-

All answers correct
RICHARD HOGG (Markyate) Tea for two donated by The Angel, Toddington.
EDNA POLLARD (Toddington) Tea for two, donated by Mentmore Stables Tearoom.
LINDA SWAIN (Toddington) Tea-towel and notelets, donated by Moores of Dunstable.

Runner up
MASIE BATES (Dunstable) Two tickets for Leighton Buzzard Railway.

Under tens
MICHAEL JOBSON (Houghton Conquest) Book on Henry VIII.

Annual membership fees are £5 for individuals and £10 for societies, corporate bodies and other groups. Membership applications should be sent to:-
Honorary Treasurer, BLHA, 14, Glebe Ave., Flitwick, Bedford, MK45 1HS.
FUTURE EVENTS

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

As a result of representations made during and since the Inaugural General Meeting in May, a sub committee was formed to re-examine the Constitution and to formulate alterations to reflect the views expressed. This demanding task has now been completed and in consequence an Extraordinary General Meeting is being convened for the 22nd January 1994 at 2.30pm in the Heritage Centre, Harlington. A number of proposals to alter certain clauses in the constitution will be presented. The official agenda containing the proposed modifications will be issued to members shortly.


Dr. Mark Bailey, Staff Tutor in Local History, Board of Continuing Education, Cambridge, will address the Association on the subject of MEDIAEVAL BEDFORDSHIRE - The Scope for the Local Historian at 2.30pm in the Elgar Room of the Weatherley Centre, Biggleswade.


Next year's A.G.M. will be held at 2.00pm at Chicksands Priory and will be followed by a talk by Dr. Margaret Bonney, Editor of The Local Historian, the journal of the British Association for Local History. The talk will be entitled THE WRITING AND PUBLICATION OF LOCAL HISTORY IN THE 1990'S.


This festival is being organized by W. Jordan & Son (Biggleswade) Ltd. and Charles Wells Ltd. and has as its theme Bedfordshire in the 1920's. appropriate costume will be worn. The BLHA is arranging for an area to be allocated for Local History so that the Member Local History Societies can make a co-ordinated impact. Now is the time to formulate your ideas of suitable displays.

BIOGRAPHIES

In a previous issue of 'HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE' we promised to publish potted biographies of our Officers and Committee Members to make them a little more familiar to you. Here are the first four, the others will follow in a later issue:-

MARTIN LAWRENCE - CHAIRMAN
Martin Lawrence moved to Harlington in 1977 and was for six years Head of History at a Bedfordshire High School. In 1981 he formed the Harlington Heritage Trust, which now has nearly four hundred members and its own heritage centre. He launched the Mid-Bedfordshire Conference for local history in 1989 and is a Council Member of BHRS. He has been chairman of BLHA since it's inception.

JOAN CURRAN - HONORARY SECRETARY
Joan Curran is a Chartered Librarian, now retired. Formally worked for the Counties School Library service. Secretary and founder member of Dunstable and Local History Society. Has been doing research on the village of Totternhoe for ten years. Specially interested in the local quarries and the Totternhoe stone, which was used extensively in churches and other religious buildings in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in the middle ages and in several large country houses in the area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

PETER WOOD - HONORARY TREASURER
Spent working life in Finance/Administration - last 20 years in the Motor Industry. Moved to Flitwick in 1982 - joined the Ampthill & District Society in 1984 and became Secretary in 1988. Since retirement has started family history research and become treasurer of the Friends of Chicksands Priory. Other interests include photography and music.

PAMELA E. ORMEROD - COMMITTEE MEMBER
At school, occasional lessons in church stimulated her interest in history. She has a degree with a history content but worked in scientific research libraries. Her current interest is Family History with the study of national and local events which effected her ancestors' lives. She lectures on family history for adult education and finds students' problems very stimulating.
About the year 1089 in the Lincolnshire village of Sempringham a son, Gilbert, was born to Jocelyn, a wealthy Norman Knight, and his Saxon wife. The boy had a physical deformity which prevented him bearing arms and he was finally driven to leave home for France where he studied for the Church.

When he returned to Sempringham he set up a school in order that the local children might receive an education. Although it was not primarily a religious school the pupils were taught morals and monastic discipline as well as basic subjects. The school was successful and Gilbert's fame reached the ears of the Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Bloet. The Bishop offered Gilbert the position of clerk in his household and in 1122 Gilbert went to Lincoln and studied to become a priest.

Following his father's death Gilbert returned to Sempringham and set about his lifetime ambition which was to found a monastery. This was the beginning of the only English monastic order - The Gilbertines. At first the order used a cloister built against the church in Sempringham but when it was seen how well the little community was succeeding the feudal lord, Gilbert de Gant, gave land to build a priory. This priory at Sempringham became the mother house of the Gilbertine Order.

Other feudal lords gave land to found priories and among these was Payne de Beauchamp, lord of Bedford, who was in possession of Chicksands and gave the land to the Order between 1147 and 1153. Although the land belonged to Payne it is to his wife, The Countess Rhese, that most of the credit must go for the establishment and success of Chicksands. After Payne's death the Countess spent much of her time at the priory and eventually became one of the first three Prioresses. The priory was for both canons and nuns, although they were strictly separated, and continued with varying degrees of prosperity until the dissolution.

In 1538 the priory was surrendered and in 1540 it was granted by Letters Patent to a London grocer named Richard Snowe and his wife Elizabeth. Following Richard's death in 1553 the estate passed in 1576, after some legal conflict, to the Osborne family, in the person of Peter Osborne. It was his son, John, who was to be the first Osborne to live at Chicksands from 1599. On 29th July 1605 John welcomed King James I to Chicksands and the following day attended Divine service in Haynes church with the King and Queen. John was knighted in 1618 and died in 1628.

During the Civil War Sir Peter Osborne supported the King and the family first took refuge with Lady Osborne's brother, Sir John Danvers, in Chelsea and then went to France. (Sir John reluctantly supported Cromwell and was one of the judges at the trial of Charles I: his signature appears on the death warrant). In 1648 while travelling to France Sir Peter's daughter, Dorothy, met Sir William Temple and there followed a great romance. After the Osborne's return to Chicksands in 1651 Sir William visited Dorothy but then departed abroad again. It was in the following two years that Dorothy wrote the 77 letters to him which have become famous in English Literature. Although their families were opposed to the union the couple were married in Westminster Abbey in 1654 and they were both buried in the Abbey at the end of the century.

Sir Danvers Osborn (the 'E' had been dropped to avoid confusion with other Osborne's) was born in 1720. He married in 1740 a daughter of the Earl of Halifax who died only three years later giving birth to her second son. Sir Danvers never fully recovered from this tragedy. He was appointed Governor of New York in 1753 by George II but committed suicide a short while after taking the Oath of Office. General Sir George Osborne (1742-1818) was appointed Major of the Bedfordshire Militia on its formation in 1759 and served with distinction during the American revolution.

A further tragedy hit the family when Henry John Robert Osborn was drowned in the English Channel in 1889 when the steamer 'Countess of Flanders' was in collision while en-route from Ostend to Dover. Henry's son, Algernon, and his younger brother were saved.

In 1936 the Osborn's sold Chicksands to the Crown: at the commencement of World War II it was used by the Navy for nine months until the Royal Air Force converted it into 'RAF Chicksands Priory' and it was used as a listening post for the decoding operations carried out at Bletchley Park. In 1950 the United States Air Force came to RAF Chicksands and now use it in a similar way to the RAF during the war.

The above facts are taken from Legend and Lore by the priory historian Roger W. Ward - although this book is at present out of print it is hoped that a revised edition will be available in the spring of 1994.

Peter J Wood
CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS.

Most of the contributions to this and previous issues of HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE have originated from committee members, it is time we expanded this base. The recent Local History Exhibition at Houghton Conquest demonstrated the wealth and variety of research and expertise distributed throughout the County, so please may we have some articles and letters from you, dear reader, to disseminate some of this wealth to others.

Assuming that the recipients of HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE within member societies are circulating the copies to their members we should have a very substantial readership, all of whom are interested in what you have to say.

The editor will, of course, be delighted to have feed back from his readers of their views on the contents, style etc. of past or future issues of HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE so that this publication can be fully tailored to the customers requirements.

Details of where to address contributions are set out below. The format can be typescript or IBM compatible floppy disc (returnable for next time) in a DOS or Windows word processor programme. In the case of a disc, phone first to check compatibility.

The editor looks forward to a very interesting post bag in time for the next quarterly issue.

B.H.R.S.

Have you thought of joining the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society?

Founded in 1912 by the indefatigable Dr Fowler, the society’s purpose is to publish documentary material relevant to Bedfordshire history, making it accessible to students who perhaps don’t read Latin or cannot travel to see original manuscripts.

Members receive each year’s publication as it appears and have the chance of buying back volumes at reduced (if you join now, very much reduced!) prices. There is an annual meeting in Bedford with a distinguished speaker on a subject connected with the year’s publication, and members can meet and talk over tea afterwards. The subscription for private members is now £8 (£10 from 1st April 1994) and for institutional members £12 (£14 from April) When you consider that non-members pay at least £15 for a volume, this has to be a bargain.

The 1993 volume, Bedfordshire Historical Miscellany, 16 essays in honour of Patrick Bell, editor for 13 years as well as a respected County Archivist, is full of gems - from a survey of population records to the story of a near riot at Elstow over a Churchwarden’s indiscretions; from a study of Potsgrove Church as an archival source to a group portrait of the medical community in 19th century Bedford; and many more.

More details and membership applications from:- Honorary Secretary, Betty Chambers, 50 Shefford Road, Meppershall, Beds, SG17 5LL. (Tel. No. 0462 813363)

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