ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1996

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Association will be held on Saturday May 11th, 1996 at 2.00pm. at the John Dony Centre, Hancock Drive, Luton. A map to assist members to find the venue will be issued with the official notification of the meeting in April.

After the completion of the AGM at approximately 3.00 pm. Marian Nichols (Principal Keeper, Luton Museum Service) will give a short presentation on the Social History of the Hat Industry.

This will be followed by a talk on the Buildings of the Hat Industry in Luton by David Bevan (Historic Buildings Team Leader, Bedfordshire County Planning Department).

By kind permission of the Curator, a special tour of the Luton Museum and Art Gallery, Wardown Park (1.4 miles from the John Dony Centre) has been arranged to follow the completion of the above programme, so that members can view the newly refurbished galleries, including the Luton at War and Beds. & Herts. Regiment Gallery also, if completed in time, the Archaeology and Natural History Gallery. The Museum will remain open until 6.00 pm. for this purpose.

Space will be available in the John Dony Centre for member organisations to put up displays and sell publications. Will those who wish to do so contact Dr. Adey on 01582 746723 in advance so that adequate provision can be made.

1996 BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE

This year the Bedfordshire Local History Conference will be hosted jointly by the Biggleswade, Langford and Roxton Local History Societies.

The date :- 22nd. of June 1996, the time :- 09.45 to 16.30, the venue :- Trinity Methodist Church, Shortmead Street, Biggleswade.

After registration, refreshments and introductions, Joel Carre will give an illustrated talk on The Kingfisher Way. This will be followed by a guided town walk until lunch. In the afternoon the delegates will be entertained by two further speakers, Drew Shotliff on the Stratton excavations and Eve McLaughlin on Surnames.

Invitations are expected to be despatched during March by which time the arrangements should be completed and the ticket price known.

STOP PRESS
Carlton & Chellington Historical Society announce that the talk by Brian Dix BA FSA entitled The Romano-British Farmstead at Harold-Odell will now take place in the Carlton Village Hall at 7.30 for 8.00pm on Thursday 25th. April 1996 (not the 25th. March as previously advertised.
The Bedfordshire Local History Association will be represented in May at a celebration of the life of Frederick George Emmison, MBE, the distinguished archivist and local historian. His contribution to the Bedfordshire County Record Office and local history in the area was so significant, we could not fail to note his passing and pay our own tribute to his work.

Fred, later known as Derick to his family and friends, was born in Bedford on 28 May 1907, where his father George was a railwayman. He was educated at Bedford Modern School, where he distinguished himself academically, gaining first class honours in the Cambridge and Oxford Seniors Local Examinations in 1922. Cambridge University would have been his choice, but he was denied the opportunity of a university education due to his father’s mistaken belief that a family investment had failed.

He had already developed a strong interest in history, which had been encouraged at school by the second master, the Rev. P.G. Langdon and at home by his father. In 1923, at the age of sixteen he was chosen by Dr. G.F. Fowler, Chairman of the Bedfordshire Records Committee since 1913, to be trainee archivist at the County Record Office. By 1925 he had been appointed Clerk of the Records, the only member of staff. Dr. Fowler had already created an appropriate system for cataloguing, storing and indexing archives and Emmison was more than an enthusiastic pupil. He gave himself totally to the listing and storing of historical sources, working in the evenings and weekends to move the project forward. He embarked upon his survey of the Bedfordshire parish registers, visiting each parish on a bicycle on Saturday afternoons to list the documents kept in the church and parsonage. As a result, he had considerable success in securing the deposit of parish poor law and settlement papers, many of which were in an advanced state of deterioration.

With regard to the Bedfordshire Parish Registers Series, he threw all his energies into transcribing and indexing the registers and was able to publish them when he found enough purchasers to cover the cost of each volume. The first volume (3 parishes) was published in 1931, when he was 24, and in the foreword he said he had in typescript the registers of 7 more parishes, besides 4 in manuscript. Later on his wife (also an archivist) helped transcribe the early years and his father took on the role of interpreting most eighteenth century entries. Emmison always checked the transcriptions and prepared them for publication. In addition, he wrote articles and pamphlets on both Bedfordshire history and also on record office management. Even after he left the county, he continued the publication of Bedfordshire parish registers until 1953 and in 1992, he attended the County Record Office for a small party to mark the completion of his visionary series.

In 1938 he was appointed the first County Archivist for Essex, where much more generous funding allowed him to improve upon his work in Bedfordshire. His energetic and imaginative approach impressed many who considered Essex the leading county record office system in the country and eight of his staff went on to be county archivists in their turn. The Essex Record Office became a publishing body for Essex local history and Emmison himself was a prolific author. His Tudor Secretary: Sir William Petre at Court and Home (1961) was a significant contribution to Tudor studies and his Elizabethan Life series demonstrated the richness of sources for the period and his ability to relate local material to the wider canvas. The Essex Wills series will extend to 12 volumes, of which 10 have already been published. The series demonstrates the tenacity and stamina of the man and the wealth of material for historians and genealogists to be found in probate records that he was determined to communicate.

Emmison was a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Scriveners, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of the Royal Historical and of the Society of Genealogists; he was a founder member of both the British Records Association and the Society of Local Archivists, and was honoured with the offices of President or Vice-President by the Historical Association, the British Records Association, the Society of Archivists and the Society of Genealogists as well as by many learned societies in Bedfordshire and Essex. In 1974 he was awarded the Julian Bickersteth Medal by the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies and in 1987 the Medlicott Medal by the Historical Association. He was appointed MBE in 1966 and he took particular pleasure from the conferring of an honorary Doctorate by Essex University in 1970.

Despite national recognition, he did not lose interest in his home county. He had worked with Dr. Fowler on publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, his first article on the meeting places in Stodden and Redbourn, and Sackville Hundred appearing in 1928 and his last in 1960. For many years he attended BHRS annual general meetings, a genial figure who was always interested in latest developments in local history writing in the county. He was amongst the founders of the Bedfordshire Family History Society, being its first president from 1977-1979 and continuing as Patron until 1987.

His legacy for Bedfordshire local historians is enormous and his reputation will remain undimmed for many generations to come.

The above article was based upon information supplied by Chris Pickford and Patricia Bell, to whom the Association is most grateful.
OUR FIRE SERVICE

Rex Skinner

There are no recorded attempts at fire fighting until Roman times. Although the Romans were quite well equipped with some sort of fire fighting equipment, they were never improved on. The Romans called their Fire Brigade “The Matriculare” and the firemen “Virgillis”. They were in use before the first century A.D. It is known that they used a manual fire engine as early as 150 B.C. Subsequent discoveries of Roman remains in this country proved that the “Matriculare” were in use here during the period of their occupation (A.D. 43 - 407).

The earliest known example of fire prevention in Britain was the institution of the curfew (couvre-feu) or cover fire. This was first introduced in Oxford by Alfred the Great (849 - 901) following a number of serious fires with heavy loss of life. This curfew required occupiers of premises to cover their fires at sundown, as a reminder the curfew bell was tolled each evening.

After the Romans, it was not until 1189 that we discover any official attempt at practical measures being adopted for the extinction of fires. During that year, the London City Authorities ordered the provision of water for fire fighting and demolition tools for making fire breaks.

In 1215 came the earlier Great Fire of London which the history books seem to ignore - 9000 people lost their lives and about three quarters of London was destroyed, starting at London Bridge which was made of wood. This still remains to this day the greatest disaster and loss of life through fire.

There appears to have been little advance over the next 400 years despite the growth of manufacturing works within congested urban areas, in consequence, the Great Fire of London in 1660 found the city quite unprepared. It started in a bakers shop in Pudding Lane and burnt for four days, destroying some 13,000 houses, churches, shops, warehouses etc. This fire was brought under control by the large scale demolition of buildings by order of the King.

Some sort of fire fighting equipment did exist - “the little squirt”, a container like appliance that was filled with water which was forced out by means of a piston that was pushed forward with a handle, forcing the water out under a bit of pressure. There was a manual pump but it was of very limited use, so the main fire fighting equipment was buckets of water. London burnt through a lack of fire fighting equipment. Even following this disaster, the main thought was for fire insurance rather than fire extinction.

It was not long before the first fire office came into being probably known as the “Phoenix” (out of the ashes came a bird). It was not until 1680 that this appropriately named fire insurance company decided to form a fire brigade in its own interests. This fire brigade consisted of part time personnel that worked only at fires endangering property insured by Phoenix.

Before long, other insurance companies were formed, each having its own fire brigade. Each brigade confined its operations to the property in which their employers had a financial interest. In order to define one from another, these fire insurance companies issued their policy holders with a metal plate or fire mark bearing the company’s trade mark which was fixed to the front of the building that was insured. There was a disadvantage with this system because if your building was on fire you had to wait for your insurance company to arrive. It could be the first or the last to arrive. Each company only put out its own fires, the others stood and watched.

In 1745, the first municipally organized fire brigade was formed at Tetley in Gloucestershire and in 1824 the first full or professional brigades were formed in Edinburgh and Manchester followed, in 1838, by London with the amalgamation of all the insurance companies’ brigades into the London Fire Engine Establishment under the command of Sir James Braidwood.

The 1867 Poor Law (amendment) Act required, ‘if the vestry of any parish where no town council, local board or other authority was competent to provide same, shall resolve that the overseer shall provide any fire engines, ladders or fire escapes for general use, the overseer shall provide same and pay out of the poor rate the cost thereof and of procuring a proper place’. In certain parishes, those that had adopted the earlier William IV Lighting and Watching Act, the lighting inspector was empowered to provide fire equipment from
OUR FIRE SERVICE  (Cont. from P.3 col 2)

monies he was empowered to receive. The Public Health Act required urban authorities to provide efficient water supplies and properly marked fire plugs in the streets in case of fire.

From this period fire brigades were formed in towns and parishes throughout the country; they all had their own type of equipment, nothing was standardized. There were eventually about 1440 different brigades. In the 1860's in London the name was changed to the Metropolitan Fire Brigade and again in the 1880's to its present name of the London Fire Brigade. This was the state of the fire service until 1938.

The Fire Services Act of 1938 improved the situation, it gave the power for water supplies to be legalized, the age old powers of entry for the fire service into buildings, removing the need to pay for fire extinction. Before the act could become fully operative, it was overtaken by the commencement of World War II. In 1938 the Auxiliary Fire Service was formed, a force of volunteers who joined the service to deal with air raid fires.

In 1941 at the height of the blitz, the fire service was nationalized, bringing it under control of the Home Office who standardized the organization procedures and equipment with the National Fire Service (known as the NFS). Appliances could be and were despatched to any part of the country where they were needed, to a town that was under fire attack, to back up and help the fire services of the town and the surrounding area. They all did very heroic work under fire from bombs and burning buildings.

The NFS remained in existence until 1947 when the Fire Services Act of 1947 came into operation. This gave control of the fire services to either the County or County Borough Councils. There were approximately 120 Brigades in the UK, each under the command of a Chief Fire Officer and Executive Staff and the Government through the Home Secretary controlled standards of efficiency plus fire cover (i.e. the amount of men and appliances required for a particular area).

HISTORY QUIZ

A Local History Quiz has been run annually for a number of years by the East-Beds group of local history societies, they now feel that if it is to continue to be successful its audience needs to expand countywide. With this in mind they have approached your Committee with the suggestion that the Association takes it under its wing. The Committee would like to hear the views of the other Societies on the popularity of doing so and ideas for putting it into practice. The editor will pass your answers on to the Committee.

New Publications


From the County Record Office and local bookshops. This slim volume will tell you how to start tracing your family history, what sources to use and their content. How to explore your family tree in detail and build a picture of how your ancestors lived. It also contains information on Bedfordshire, its parishes, markets and organizations, together with useful addresses and contacts.

Potton History Society

The Potton History Society announces that the address of their Hon. Secretary is now 8, Station Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 8AL.

Horse Engine House

The drawing used to illustrate the lecture announcement in the last issue of HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE and on the subsequent poster is of the horse engine house that stood at Priestley Farm, Flitwick. It was drawn by Miss Beryl Sewell in 1972 a few weeks before it was demolished by its owners, Bedfordshire County Council, after the adjacent barn was badly damaged by fire. Was this the last one left in Bedfordshire? Please let the editor know if you are aware of another.