HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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WARcMIE BEDFORDSHIRE

For its autumn meeting on Saturday October 16th the Bedfordshire Local History Association is to focus on relatively recent history with 'Wartime Bedfordshire - A Presentation'.

Starting at 2.15 p.m. in Clapham Village Hall this "workshop" session will feature three speakers. Martin Lawrence, our chairman, will set the scene by providing an introduction to life in general in 1940's Bedfordshire. This will include the impact of evacuation, blackout preparation and the imposition and effects of rationing, all drawing on a wide range of illustrative material. He will also examine relationships with neighbouring and other counties.

Stephen Coleman of Bedfordshire County Council will then concentrate on Bedfordshire's wartime defences, in particular using the records of sites recently compiled for the county as part of the Defence of Britain Project. A wide variety of sites and features still survive in the landscape, most buried in undergrowth. However, you will see many revealed again, from the complexity of airfield defences down to the humble spigot mortar emplacement! Do you know where the county's only mushroom pillbox survives?

Finally Martin Deacon will introduce us to the extensive wartime documentary sources available from the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service. In particular he will focus on material of interest to local historians and of most use in the study of individuals who were involved at the time. He will also explain sources useful for the wider picture, including social issues and the Home Guard.

During the morning it is hoped to arrange a visit to Bedfordshire's best surviving derelict airfield at Twinwoods near Clapham where a range of abandoned wartime buildings can still be found.

It is intended that the day will be a taster and inspiration for the World War II Exhibition the Association is to host in Ampthill on March 4th 2000 when member societies will be able to display the impact of the war on their own locality.

OTHER EVENTS

THE BEDFORDSHIRE MILLENNIUM FESTIVAL is being held at Shuttleworth, Old Warden Park, Biggleswade on Saturday, Sunday & Monday the 28th, 29th & 30th August 1999. In addition to the main arena and funfair, there will be exhibitions covering many areas of interest such as media and the arts, transport, industry, lifestyles and the future world. The Bedfordshire Local History Association has succeeded in obtaining the Russell Hall for the 'lifestyles' exhibits of our member bodies (not a marquee as stated in History in Bedfordshire No. 9). Please support the exhibitors, who have devoted their time to preparing and manning the exhibition, by coming along and visiting the hall.

LIFE IN MEDIAEVAL ENGLAND - Dr. Lucy Vinten, a mediaeval specialist, will take a 10 week course on this subject for the Harlington Heritage Trust/Cambridge Board Of Continuing Education starting on Thursday 30th. September. The syllabus states 'Mediaeval society was complex and this course will examine some of the different strands - aristocracy, peasantry, townpeople, women, clerics & monks, and activities such as agriculture, trade, pilgrimage, and feasting. The way people lived and organised their lives and the places they lived will be the main focus'. Classes will be held in the Harlington Parish Hall from 7.30 pm to 9.30pm, enrolment will take place on the first two evenings. Fees are £22 working adults and £17 concessions. For further information contact Meryl Parker, telephone 01525 873875

Harry Arch

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Harry Arch of Pavenham on May 30th. 1999. Harry, an indefatigable scholar of family and local history, was the Chairman of this Association from May 1997 until his death. He was also Vice President of the Bedfordshire Family History Society, Chairman of the Friends of Pavenham Church, at which he was Churchwarden for many years and a member of Carlton and Chellington Historical Society. We will sorely miss his enthusiastic support and advocacy of local history and this Association in particular.
Success and Failure of the Turnpike Trusts

Omer Roucoux

In the time of Queen Anne, at the beginning of the 18th century, we had great ships sending goods to America and India, but inside Britain sacks of coal were still dispatched on pack-horses because wheeled traffic would have stuck in the mud or broken in the ruts each time the road crossed a pocket of clay.

The section of road between Dunstable and Hockliffe was one of the most notorious stretches in England. Celia Fiennes, who passed there around 1695 calls it a "sad road, full of slough, in the winter it must be impassable". Fortunately "there is a very good pitched causeway for foots-people and horse that is raised up high from the road, and a very steepe chalky hill from whence it has its name Chalk Hill just as you enter Dunstable ... it is a good town ... full of inn's...".

There are various reasons why the roads reached such a pitiful state. During many centuries the care of the local roads was in charge of each parish. There was no effective highway authority either local or central. An act passed in 1555 'Act for Mending of Highways' officially put the parishes in charge of the upkeep of the King's highways but this act was a dismal failure. The surveyors were unpaid and most often unqualified and unequipped and the workers generally unwilling and not happy to be removed from their own work. The upkeep of the road was of no interest to the local people; they were used, for the most part, by long distance travellers. Travelling, including long tours on the continent, had become fashionable. Competition for speed between the coaches did not take the safety of the travellers into account but even less the damage done to the road surfaces. The increase in town population also caused more livestock to be driven from the countryside and everything, which could be carried by packhorse: coal, stones and market goods did not make use of wheeled vehicles, these were too slow!

**The Turnpike Trusts:** Soon some people realised that something had to be done about the roads. The act of 1663 shows the beginning of this. The first Turnpike Trusts gave the necessary legal powers to collect tolls from the travellers along some places on the Great North Road and use the money to repair the road. The trend was set and by the end of the 18th century more than 20,000 miles of British roads were under the supervision of Turnpike Trusts.

A trust was instituted for 20 years at a time, people considering that it would be enough to make the roads good forever. But it was not so and the trusts asked to be reconvened. Altogether there were thousands of acts legalising new trusts or reconvening old ones. The name 'turnpike' comes from the fact that gates were installed across the road to stop the traffic. The gates worked like turnstiles and were fitted with pikes on top. The Trust usually employed a surveyor to take charge of the surface of the road; he employed workmen and labourers. A toll-keeper was in charge of collecting the tolls, opening and closing the gates; he lived in a house specially built for him. All the workers involved were paid wages from the tolls collected and if there was any money over, the Trust kept it for themselves.

The existence of these Trusts was not enough to maintain the roads to a satisfactory condition. Many reasons can explain their unpopularity amongst the travellers and the local inhabitants. First the bad financial management of the Trusts ensured that they were practically all in debt. There was no way of checking the number of vehicles passing through the gate, so some dishonest gate keepers kept the profit for themselves, others accepted bribes to allow traffic to pass without paying their due. The leasing of the tolls was not a solution either: the Trusts were spared the trouble of collecting, but, since the point for the man responsible was to maximise his profits, they had inevitably to let the concession at a fraction of its real value. In fact only a small amount of the money collected for the upkeep of the road was used for that purpose.

Secondly the trusts were very often unpopular with the local people. In some districts the efforts to make good roads were even resisted by the inhabitants for the most unexpected reasons. In Sussex for instance, in 1710, the farmers petitioned against reconstruction on the ground that "the roads are better for cattle to go on as they now are, than amended, because the stones will cripple and lame them before they come to market." But the most serious reason for the trusts inefficiency was that the techniques were inadequate. The roads were looked after but the traffic was so great that they were deteriorating as fast as they were repaired. A paper read to the Royal Society in 1737 by Robert Phillips hit the mark in stating that the roads were made "bad by art", he goes on to say that the users "find the Roads grow daily worse. The Waggoners say, that whereas they had been told that, by paying a little money for a few years they should have the Roads so good as to be able to carry greater Loads, and use fewer Horses, they find out that now the Roads are so much worse that they are obliged to add an Horse or two instead of taking any off, and still pay the same Money; yet do not know when this Expense will end." He even went to add, certainly with some exaggeration, "if the turnpikes were taken down and the roads not touched for seven years they would be a great deal better than they are now."

**New road building techniques:** Appropriate techniques were urgently needed; there were many good ideas all through the 18th century about improving the foundations and the drainage to obtain a stable and durable road surface, but none of these were applied throughout the country or where the roads were at their worse. In 1772 an important Act prescribed that the wheels of the vehicles should be made so as to repair rather than wear out the roads on which they travelled. The wheels should be converted into rollers by which the roads would be levelled and consolidated. This prevented in some way a too rapid deterioration of the road surface but the essential progress had to be achieved when influential
architects were put in charge of the work. Thomas Telford, the son of a shepherd, was born in Eskdale (Scotland) in 1757. The importance of his work as a road engineer was the fact that he brought sound principles of engineering to bear on the problems of road construction. In place of the haphazard and largely hit and miss methods in use, he insisted on careful drainage, both beneath the road surface itself and in the adjoining terrain, to prevent possible landslides that would disrupt the foundation and surface. He also required the most careful grading of stones for the foundation and the surface, using uniformly sized large stones for the basis - 7 by 4 in. with stone chips wedged between them - and irregular but small stones for the top, to a depth of 6 inches and then above it a layer of small stones or gravel. Whereas earlier builders had attempted to bind the foundation and surface with clay or chalk, with dreadful results, Telford only used stones that were carefully washed and sieved. The surface of the pavement was moderately cambered to throw off the water without tilting the vehicles at an exaggerated angle. As the iron shoe of the horses and the iron tyres of the wagons ground down the sharp corners of the small stones of the upper layer, and the dust worked into the structure of the road, it was hardened and bound into a smooth and virtually watertight covering. One of the most important contributions of Telford's work was his magnificent highway from London to North Wales, which is followed roughly by the present A5. The General Turnpike Road Act of 1822 modified some decisions of previous acts attempting to cancel those that were ineffectual and introduce better ones and essentially tried to replace a great multitude of acts by a general one. It established the tolls due for diverse categories of vehicles, according to their weights, the number of wheels and their width, the number of horses pulling them, the prohibition of protruding rails. It listed the exemptions of tolls to some merchandise such as manure, hay or fodder for the cattle; or if only one tree, or one log of timber or one stone was transported. It prescribed the installation of weighting scales, milestones and signposts and much more. John Macadam was the other famous road builder of the 19th century. At the age of 60 he became the highway inspector for Bristol and its environs. He was consulted by Turnpike Trusts throughout Britain and before his death in 1836, his name had become a household name for the type of road surface he used. Although his work was mainly to repair existing roads he introduced a few modifications to Telford's methods. For the new roads he took great care for the drainage of the road subsoil because that was enough to ensure road stability. He dispensed almost entirely with the elaborate foundations laid by Telford. So his road building came much cheaper. The main change was to add a water-bound dust surface. This was very effective at first, the heavy, slow-moving, horse-drawn vehicles had pulverised the road surface effectively to provide the dust, which might be reinforced with lime, and produce the binding medium. The defects of this surface became evident with modern vehicles of the 20th century. The fast moving rubber tyres tended to loosen rather than compact the stone surface while, as traffic speeds went up, the dust problem, always present to some degree on a water-bound macadam road, became enormous. For this reason bituminous tar came to be used as the binding medium in this century, although the macadam principle remained basically unchanged. In the opening years of the 19th century it might have seemed that a new age of road travel had opened. Quite apart from the work of Telford and McAdam, the inauguration of the mail-coach service by the Post Office in 1784 geared the whole system of passenger transport to a new idea of speed on the road and, above all, of punctuality. Until that year the royal mail had been carried by post-boys on horseback; the service was slow - the journey from Bath to London took the best part of 2 days - and dangerous. Highwaymen often held up the riders and they might well be killed. When the stage-coach service opened the same journey took 17 hours. That was strong competition with the Post Office, which very soon, started using the stage-coaches for the mail. By 1800 mail-coach services were installed on all the roads travelled by the royal mail. The end of the Turnpike Trusts. Around 1850, the roads, so busy at the beginning of the century, were deserted. Things could have been very different. An automotive steam engine was developed by Guerney. His steam carriage, in 1827, ran along the Bath road at a speed of 10 mph. In the following years these vehicles started competing with the horse-drawn carriages. By 1831 there was a regular service of steam-coaches between Gloucester and Cheltenham and, in 1833, between London and Brighton. By 1878, an 'outstanding act of idiocy'. It limited the speed on the roads to 10 mph in the country and 5 mph in the towns. In 1864 came the notorious Man and Flag Act, which not only reduced these limits to 4 mph, and 2 mph in the towns, but required also the presence of a man with a red flag to walk in front of every mechanically driven vehicle on the road. By that time the effective speed of the steam-coach was able to reach an average of some 34 mph. In 1873 a Select committee recommended the abrogation of this ludicrous legislation but this was nevertheless confirmed again in 1878. This meant that all the progress made in the country to improve mechanical transport were wasted and allowed other nations to have at least a quarter of a century of advance in the field. The first practical motor car was produced in Germany by Daimler in 1887. The 'Man and Flag Act' remained in force until 1896. Towards the end of the coaching era the revenue the Turnpike Trusts drew from tolls was very large. Between London and
Success and Failure of the Turnpike Trusts
(cont. from page 3)

Manchester, for instance, each stage-coach used to pay in tolls £1,700 a year, and along several of the principal routes more than a hundred stage coaches and mail would pass every day. The coming of the railway cut off the greatest part of this large income at one blow. Almost as soon as a new railway opened, it was usual for the turnpike trust to go bankrupt. The only traffic they were now able to tax was local, that is the short distance transport which did not justify the use of the railway. There were riots, violence, destruction of the gates, first in Wales and then in the rest of the country. In 1864 a Parliamentary Committee was appointed which condemned the system reporting that the whole was "unequal in pressure, costly in collection, inconvenient to the public, and injurious as causing a serious impediment to intercourse and traffic". By 1881, the 1,100 turnpike trusts were reduced to 184, in 1890 to 2, and finally abolished in 1895.

So, was the Turnpike Trust a success or a failure? A bit of both, probably, but let us finish on a positive note by Lord Congleton, around 1830: "If the roads have been vested in the hand of government, it may safely be said that this plan would have failed, for government would never have been able to vote upwards of a million and a half a year for those roads only which now are turnpike roads. It is, therefore, to the turnpike system of management that England is indebted to for her superiority over other countries with respect to roads".

QUARTER SESSIONS
19th. December 1754

Recognizance by Edward Rust of Maulden labourer and others for the appearance of same Edward to plead to an indictment for unlawfully exercising the art, mystery or manual occupation of a baker not having served a legal apprenticeship thereto.

NEW PUBLICATIONS


A long-overdue introduction to the fascinating migration of thousands of Italian men and, later, women to Bedford. In the 1950s and early 1960s the brickyards of north Bedfordshire were desperately short of labour and resorted to a government-backed scheme to bring over hard-working men from the poverty-stricken lands in the south of Italy. The story is told both through the actual memories of individual men and women who settled here and are now in retirement. The volume contains informative introductions to each topic, to give historical context and gives a vivid picture of what life was like in their rural, agricultural homelands, contrasts it with the industrial world of Bedford in which they found themselves. Early privations and difficulties led, through hard work and a strong community spirit, to the establishment of an Italian community, which gradually became part of the life of Bedford. Many returned to Italy but those who stayed raised their families and contributed to the economy and culture of their adopted home town.

Now, as senior citizens, thanks to the WEA reminiscence classes and the tireless work of Carmela Byram in raising awareness of their distinctive culture and experience, they have been empowered to record their stories for future generations, both Italian and English, to enjoy and appreciate.

The book is bi-lingual, with Italian text on the left of each page and English on the right (two books for the price of one)! It is generously illustrated on every page with photographs from the personal albums of those whose recollections are included over 80 photos, with informative captions. A useful bibliography is included.

The author, a part-time adult education lecturer, is happy to give her lively audio-visual presentation on the history of Italian immigration to Bedford to interested local history societies. Tel. 01234 341971.

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