VISIT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF
THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY

The Workings of the English Parish, a talk by David Dymond, Chairman of the British Association for Local History will take place after our Annual General Meeting on Saturday 13th, May 2000 at the Village Hall, Houghton Conquest. The AGM will commence at 2.15 pm and, after a short break to allow entry of those visitors who do not wish to sit through the AGM, the talk will commence at 3.00 pm. Visitors are welcome. Entrance and car parking are free. Refreshments will be available after the talk. We are extremely fortunate in having a nationally known personality presenting this talk, so do come along and support the association, you can be sure of an interesting and stimulating afternoon.

LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE 2000

As previously announced the conference this year will be hosted by the Roxton and District History Group at Roxton on Saturday June 3rd 2000. Reservation forms have been sent to all members and need to be returned by 10th of April to benefit from the early booking reservation fee of £9, it will be £10 after this date. A very full programme has been arranged, including guided tours of the Parish Church, Congregational Church and the Great Barn at Roxton Park Farm.

The following guest speakers have been invited: -
Onslow Stocker, Family Historian - Rooted to the spot: the general decline of a Wyboston family c.1600-1900.
Stephen Coleman, H&EG, Bedfordshire County Council - Roxton: its Archaeological and Historical Background.
Don Clarke, Local Historian & Vice Chairman of Roxton and District History Group. - The Influence of the River Ouse on the Development of Roxton Village and Roxton Parish.
A representative from Eastern Region, British Heritage - The Work of British Heritage in the Eastern Region.

Further information from Mr. A Fletcher, Treasurer, Roxton and District History Group, 8, Walnut Close, Blunham, Bedford, MK44 3NB.

AUTUMN WORKSHOP

BLHA is holding a workshop in Bedford on 14th. October 2000 from 10.30am to 4.30pm, its theme, 'Breaking the Local Seal'. The workshop will be hosted by Bedfordshire & Luton Archives & Records Service. More details in the Summer issue.

NEXT COPY DATE

Copy date for Summer 2000 issue is set for 1st. June 2000. Please let me have your articles or short news notes by this date for inclusion. More items dealing with parts of the County that have not yet featured, together with highlight events and news items will be particularly welcomed.

WARTIME BEDFORDSHIRE

The exhibition held in Ampthill in March was an unqualified success, at times packed to bursting point. All visitors showed a keen interest in the wealth of photographs and artefacts on display, some taking two hours to complete the circuit, the children were particularly fascinated. The exhibitors are to be congratulated for the excellence of their displays and their ability in conveying the knowledge of their subject to visitors. Thanks to all for their very hard work.

BEDFORDSHIRE MAGAZINE

Mr. Coburn wishes to dispose of volumes 1 - 20 (bound) and 21 - 26 (unbound) of the Bedfordshire Magazine, asking price £200. Contact Mr. Leslie Coburn phone 01582 460621 if interested.
JOYCE GODBER

Joyce Godber passed away on 22 December 1999 aged 93. For many of us, our sadness is lightened by the knowledge that she felt her full, active and useful life had run its course and that she had been patiently waiting for the blessing of her release. Thus, our tone must be one of celebration of a life devoted to intellectual effort and scholarly output for the benefit of the historical community. Her ‘History of Bedfordshire’, published in 1969 is a masterly survey of a County, rich in analysis from the perspective of twenty five years hereulen endeavour and discovery in the county record office. Local historians, her three successor county archivists and all record office users owe her an enormous debt and many of us who were fortunate to know her will cherish our memories of her kindness and indomitable spirit.

Amy Joyce Godber was born on 24 June 1906 at Kempston, the second child and only daughter in a family of seven, the children of Isaac Godber, a nurseryman, and Bessie Chapman, his wife. Isaac was the scion of a Derbyshire farming family well known for hard work and frugality, characteristics inherited in full measure by Joyce. Isaac moved to Willington and later took up residence in 1912 in the Manor, where he and Bessie remained until their deaths in 1957.

Despite the number of children, it was possible for all the family to be educated at one of the Harpur Trust Schools in Bedford. Joyce went to the High School at the age of 11, travelling each day by train. She was not particularly happy, but her hard work and ability ensured two scholarships, one a Senior Scholarship at St Hilda’s College, Oxford, where she read history between 1925 and 1928. As a leisure pursuit her great pleasure was in art. Throughout her career she sketched and made watercolours of what she saw and in retirement enjoyed tapestry and patchwork.

At Oxford she was able to express her lasting sympathy for socialism through membership of the University Labour Club and she attended the Oxford Friends Meeting House.

After a short period of post graduate research in Germany, she taught history and German at Cheltenham Ladies College and Harrogate College, but found that she disliked teaching and enrolled for a secretarial course in London. This led in 1933 to a post at the Oxford University Press. There she learnt editorial skills, later to be employed for twenty years on behalf of Bedfordshire Historical Record Society.

In 1938 she moved to be Assistant Secretary at the Institute of Historical Research. In the library she saw the volumes of BHRB, which she joined at this time. At the A.G.M in 1939 she met its founder and editor Dr G.H. Fowler and F.J. Manning, its treasurer. The latter persuaded her to complete Dr Fowler’s work on an edition of the Bushmead Cartulary after the editor’s death in 1940. This was published in 1945 and at the next A.G.M in 1946 (the first since 1939) she was asked to take on the position of General Editor. This she did willingly and was later to be responsible herself for four volumes.

Manning was also responsible for persuading Joyce to take up the temporary post of Acting Clerk of the Records in 1942 at the old Shire Hall. Whilst Joyce was thrilled to have access to so many original documents, she was very lonely for there were no readers during the war years. To learn cataloguing, she used the guides prepared by Dr Fowler and F.G. Emmison and began by cataloguing the smaller collections. To raise interest, she prepared each week an exhibition on a different parish in the show case in the entrance hall, an account being sent to the Bedfordshire Times. It was at this time that she began a new parish card index.

She gave talks on villages to Womens’ Institutes, travelling by bus, and cycled to deliver WEA courses in Great Barrford. With the war-time drive for paper for salvage vast collections of documents in solicitors’ offices and country houses were at risk. She worked tirelessly in strong rooms in several counties and at weekends helped in the sorting of family archives, particularly the Orlebar archive at Hinwick.

Joyce’s exceptional energy and organising ability enabled a steady flow of catalogues of deposits, new and old. In January 1946 her position became permanent, her post being renamed County Archivist. Her assistant, Alan Cirket, had worked in the record office before the war and they were supported by a clerk. Her achievements were already beginning to be recognised more widely and in 1948 she was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

In 1951, when Bedfordshire County Council celebrated the Festival of Britain by acquiring and restoring the Moot Hall at Elstow, Joyce took over its running. Each year a special exhibition on a seventeenth century theme was organised, with supporting booklet and catalogue of exhibits.

Joyce’s powers of concentrated hard work was astonishing, her typewriter sounding like a continuous machine gun. It is difficult to think that the bedrock of the cataloguing base at the record office was undertaken by one person.

She had long wanted to produce a history of the county to help students and searchroom visitors by providing the broader picture within which specialist studies could be researched. When she reached 60 in 1966 the County Council allowed her to stay in her post whilst working full time on her project. It was completed in 1968, the year in which the record office moved into its purpose built accommodation in County Hall and Joyce retired.

(cont. on p.3 col.1)
JOYCE GODBER
(cont. from p.2 col. 2)

In her retirement she had much pleasure in producing smaller scale publications for the Moot Hall and elsewhere, as well as many articles for the Bedfordshire Magazine and other periodicals. In 1973 she produced an account of The Harpur Trust and in 1978 came ‘The Story of Bedford’.

Following Fowler and Emmison was a daunting prospect for any archivist, however industrious. Joyce was truly a worthy successor, who with them established the fine reputation and good management that her successors have built upon.

Yet, it is not only for her career and publishing successes she will be remembered. Her commitment to world peace, her Christian charity and humility which she displayed with complete modesty, her work with Muslim women and for Christian Aid. Influenced to the core by the tenets of the Society of Friends, she was determined to see every act in its best possible light and simply wanted to be useful.

In 1983 she moved to Charterhouse retirement home, where she organised the ageing residents in knitting squares for blankets for the Red Cross. She continued to be sought out by historians who wished to experience her wisdom and the pleasure of her company. She was particularly delighted by the many children amongst her relatives and friends and always had a special kindness for them.

Many of the biographical details of this article were provided by Patricia Bell, who kindly allowed the use of her material, for which the author is most grateful.  

Martin Lawrence

THE KNOLL - AMPTHILL
Barry Dackombe

On Thursday 29th September 1887, twelve acres of “valuable freehold building land” was auctioned at the White Hart in Ampthill. The land contained some “most eligible sites for the erection of Villa Residences, commanding magnificent views of the surrounding hills, with extensive frontages to the Flitwick and Station Roads”.

The purchaser was Robert French Stanbridge, a butcher in Woburn Street Ampthill. In later years he moved to a farm in nearby Houghton Conquest. This land was subsequently laid out as the ‘Knoll Estate’, consisting of 42 building plots and three larger ‘garden’ plots, with two new roads (Ashburnham and Sidney Roads). The oldest house is May House which was built in 1889 for Mr John Meek and his wife Mary Ann. He was a civil engineer and local councillor and supervising engineer for the construction of Ampthill’s second railway tunnel.

The Knoll History Project has been formed to collect and record information on the growth of this part of Ampthill (Ashburnham and Sidney Roads, 3-7 Station Road and 2-28a Flitwick Road). We are also keen to record the impact its numerous residents have played in Ampthill’s development during the twentieth century. This may have been directly or as a passive participant. We are still looking to talk to former residents and locate old photographs that illustrate changes over time.

The importance of combining photographic and oral evidence can be illustrated by the recent discovery of a 1920s postcard of a row of houses in Ashburnham Road, built by a local speculative builder. The postcard shows that originally these houses had ornate iron railings, which have subsequently been cut down. This was confirmed by one of the original residents:

“along the front we had them [railings] and iron gates and then they came along and pulled the blomin’ things up for the war or something. And took them somewhere and never did use them...”. Naturally the residents “...half grumbled, I mean it looked such a sight. We’d got our own little gates and a little iron fence, that was ever so nice...it spoilt the look of the houses altogether.”

Another discovery, in Suffolk, was of an early photograph of May House. This shows John Meek and his wife standing in front of their newly built house. The house has a simple iron railing fence in front and a wooden fence between his garden and that of Isaac Smith’s Gloucester House. Across this fence can clearly been seen the scaffolding around building work on the Gloucester House site. Such a view is no longer possible now there is a “...20 foot wall between May House & Gloucester House which Mr Smith decided upon to prevent being overlooked”

The results of our research will be made available in the form of a limited edition booklet, which is being supported by Mid Beds District Council’s ‘New Milestones of the Millennium’ as well as Ampthill & District Preservation Society and Ampthill History Forum. If you can help or wish to receive details of the booklet, please contact Barry Dackombe at 32, Ashburnham Road, Ampthill, Beds, MK45 2RH.

(cont. in col. 2)
NEW PUBLICATIONS

Historical Carlton through the Diary of Benjamin Rogers
Rector of Carlton, 1720 - 1771) edited by Charles D.
Linnell, AS, re-published by the Carlton and Chellington
Historical Society at £8.50. (£9.50 including p&p from Jack
Dancy, hon. treasurer, 3, High Street, Carlton, Bedford, MK43
71X.

This book will interest many people who wish to delve into the
local history of Carlton. It is a unique historical record of life
and times in the 1700s, faithfully recorded by Benjamin
Rogers. His observations go well beyond those expected of a
local Rector, his first entry in March 1729 notes that “Sir Isaac
Newton died.” Rogers was a man fully aware of and in touch
with life on a wide canvas, the great and good, as well as his
parishioners in Carlton.

Many local people of the day are mentioned, their way of life,
families, illnesses, costs of commodities and services at the
time, and their dwellings in the area. Rogers was quite fulsome
in recording medical matters and these are in stark contrast to
those of today.

The diary, originally published by the Bedfordshire Historical
Record Society, was edited and researched in a painstaking
and scholarly way by the late Charles D. Linnell of Pavenham,
who provided footnotes to relevant passages in over 300
cross-references to related historical records and known facts.
Thus Benjamin Rogers’ Diary is also a valuable source of
reference. For example there is interesting mention of Dr
Richard Mead of Harrold, who was clearly quite well known
to Benjamin Rogers. All interested in the history of the Carlton
area and of these times, will find fascination in the book.

In re-publishing the book, the Carlton and Chellington
Historical Society, has made available a unique source of
information 50 years after the original publication, which had
been out of print for many years.

JRC

AN APPEAL FOR LOCAL HISTORIES

More and more books are being published each year. This is
despite the Internet which was heralded as being the end of the
printed word. Local history is a good example. More and more
books and journals are coming off the presses, reflecting an
increasing interest in the history of communities and local life
up and down the country. Apart from the copyright libraries,
who by no means have everything that is published in the field,
no national body is collecting this material. Many of these
publications, which are of real interest to historians, amateur
or academic, could be lost to future generations of researchers.

The Society of Genealogist’s library is already a major
resource for local historians, with books and pamphlets about
many towns and villages in the United Kingdom, and, indeed,
abroad. The SoG is keen to build up its holdings and would
welcome donations of local histories and local history
journals, whether they come from local societies, Church or
WI groups, local authorities, or even private individuals.

It is these more ephemeral publications which the Society
wants to collect. As a start we are asking people to seek out
local publications and send them to the Librarian, Sue
Gibbons. They can be on any aspect of local history. The SoG
is not just looking for traditional local histories of parish or
place, but accounts of local friendly societies, breweries and
railways would also be very welcome. Anything really that
will throw light on the development of a particular place or
area. We are also very interested in non-British local history,
for it often provides important information on the world
British emigrants went to settle.

Readers could help the project along by donating material or
suggesting publications the SoG should buy or journals to
which it should subscribe. If you have material to donate, or
would like further information, please contact the Society’s
librarian, Sue Gibbons, at the Society of Genealogists. 14
Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Rd, London, EC1N4 7BA;
tel: 0207-250 0291 or email - library@sog.org.uk.

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE is published by the BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
Editor: - Brian D. Lazelle.
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63, Amphill Road,
Maulden,
Bedford, MK45 2DH.
Telephone: - (01525) 402264.
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ISSN 0968-9761