The Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at the John Dony Centre, Luton on the 11th. of May 1996. The attendance of members was lower than in previous years despite the interesting programme that was set to follow the A.G.M. It was with regret that the meeting learned that Martin Lawrence did not wish to stand for re-election to the role of Chairman (he had indicated his wishes to the committee some months before).

Martin Lawrence - retiring Chairman's report: During the past year your officers and committee have sought to consolidate upon the associations achievements. The years events and activities have been successful, both in terms of the quality of the local history and the enjoyment experienced by the members.

My thanks to Stephen Coleman of the Heritage Group who led a guided tour of the Bromham Mill, the mediaeval bridge and St. Owens Church following last years A.G.M. This was the perfect end to our meeting, the members having already been entertained and informed by a fascinating talk by Margaret Gelling, President of the Place Names Society.

The seventh Bedfordshire Local History Conference was held in Toddington on the 17th. of June 1995. The host village was explored through the themes of Topography, Economy, Institutions, Population and Lordship. Expert speakers prepared papers and once again the conference was well attended and enjoyed by all.

The finals of the Bedfordshire Local History Lecture Competition were held in the County Records Office in June 1995. Three lectures were delivered to an invited audience and the judges had the difficult task in choosing the winner. This was entitled 'An Eighteenth Century Mini Welfare State' and was given by the Caddington Historian Frank Sutton. Our thanks to our judges and our sponsor Paul Bowes. We trust that the competition be repeated in the future.

It is with great sadness that we report that Frank Sutton died earlier this year, and on your behalf, your association wrote to express our sympathies.

Last year's tour of Bromham and our previous visit to Leighton Buzzard in 1994 demonstrated that members were keen to explore historic sites in the County. With this in mind, your committee arranged a guided tour of Odell, as the guests of the Hon. Arthur and Mrs. Lawson Johnston. This took place on the 22nd. of October 1995 and proved to be a very popular and enjoyable event. 82 members were led in four groups to places of historic interest before gathering in the parish church for a talk by Miss Bell on 'Distinguished Families of Odell'. Finally the whole gathering were entertained for tea at Odell Manor by our hospitable hosts.

Last year I reported that the Association had been pleased to act as a means of co-ordination for authors from member societies to participate in the preparation of a publication to celebrate the 200th. Anniversary of the purchase of the South Hill Estate by the Whibread family. I am pleased to confirm that the project came to a successful conclusion shortly before Christmas and a most attractive publication was produced. I hope that there will be other opportunities for such collaboration in the future.

Dr. Nigel Agar gave a most interesting lecture entitled 'Behind the Plough in Nineteenth Century Bedfordshire' at Houghton Conquest on 24th. February 1996. Dr. Agar is best known as the author of 'The Bedfordshire Farm Worker in the Nineteenth Century', published as volume 60 of the Bedfordshire Historical Records Society publications.

Our newsletter, 'History in Bedfordshire', continues to keep the membership informed of activities and visits and provides an opportunity for local societies to promote particular events or publications. The editor is keen to encourage contributions from members on historical topics of interest in the County.

The meeting today marks my departure as Chairman of this Association. During the past fifteen years I have been privileged to be Chairman of either the Harlington Heritage Trust or this Association. The network of friends built up over that period has been an important part of my life. My time as your Chairman has been both rewarding and a source of great pleasure, particularly with the support of such an excellent committee who serve the Association so well. My thanks to all of them who have worked so hard. I am confident that the Association under new leadership will flourish and I look forward to participate in its future success.

Peter Wood, Treasurer presented the audited accounts of the Association and, in view of the continuing satisfactory financial position, he recommended that the subscriptions be held at the present levels for 1996/7.

Continued on page 2, col.1
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
cont. from p.1

Summary of accounts 1st. April 1995 to 31st March 1996:

Income for the year: £669.37 (£546.97)
Expenditure for the year: £524.31 (465.56)
Excess of income over expenditure: £145.06 (81.41)
Total balance at 31st. March 1996: £429.34 (284.28)

(the values given in brackets are last years figures)

Election: Elections were held in accordance with the constitution and your new Executive Committee is as follows:

Michael Kemp, Chairman
Joan Curran, Honorary Secretary
Peter Wood, Honorary Treasurer

Committee Members: - Elizabeth Adley, Harry Arch, Stephen Coleman, Ronald Gregory, Martin Lawrence, Brian Lazelle, Ray Selden, Rex Skinner and Linda Swain. All were elected unanimously.

Michael Kemp, Incoming Chairman: Martin Lawrence was the first Chairman of the Bedfordshire Local History Association holding office from the date of its inauguration at Woburn until the Annual General Meeting this year.

It is always easier to follow someone else than it is to start the work of an organization and the Bedfordshire Local History Association has not proved to be different in this respect. Martin had the difficult task of making the initial start to the work of the BLHA, a task which he set about with what I know now is his customary vigour and enthusiasm. As a result the BLHA has held successful events taking in venues at Luton, Chicksands Priory, Bromham and Odell.

However, the activities of the BLHA have not been limited to the holding of meetings. An interesting local history fair was promoted and many of the member societies exhibited on that occasion. A lecture competition was held in conjunction with the County Record Office. More of these events are planned for the future.

The forthcoming Annual Local History Conference so ably hosted each year by a local society, this year by Biggleswade, Langford and Roxton Societies, has become a feature of the Bedfordshire local history calendar and is eagerly anticipated by the host and participating societies alike.

However, none of these events would have taken place without the all important organization and liaison which Martin provided as the first BLHA Chairman. Bedfordshire local history owes him much for his work in steering the BLHA to its present position. Martin has agreed to remain on the Executive Committee and it is hoped will continue to contribute to the work of the Association which he did so much to create.

ARE THERE ANY AUSSIES IN YOUR ATTIC.

Norman Parry

Many historians have had contacts with their counterparts in Australia in their research but they may not be aware of the Heritage Retrieval Project of the Queensland State Library. The library is targeting the attics, garages and bottom drawers in Britain and elsewhere of people whose relatives emigrated to the settlement of Moreton Bay in the last century. The four-masted clipper ship Flying Cloud took over 2000 immigrants to Queensland in seven trips in the latter part of the 19th century, she was one of several ships carrying on the same business.

A lot of the settlers were illiterate but many wrote home explaining their journeys and the struggles to set up new homes. One of the most frequent letter writers whose correspondence has survived was Julia Cross who emigrated in 1855 with her husband George and their young children from Cambridgeshire, from then until 1872 she wrote regularly to her mother in Ely describing conditions in Australia and urging her brothers to join her. Many families emigrated from the Thame area of Oxfordshire where the Queensland immigration agent in the 1870s persuaded them that they would be far better off in Australia than in the Workhouse and helped many of them on their way even finding them jobs on arrival. Poor Law authorities in other parts of the country are known to have encouraged and even contributed to the passages of those who wished to leave.

Queensland librarians have visited Britain a number of times in the last few years on search and retrieve missions and one of their major finds in 1994 was a collection of 180 glass lantern slides taken in the 1890s by a clergyman who sent them home for fund-raising slide evenings for his church. The owner of the slides who lived in a Yorkshire village was happy to donate them and the cedar wood projector to the project. Historians are very keen to find photographs taken by travelling photographers J. Watson and E.T. Brisendon who advertised their photos for sale in Moreton Bay. It is likely that many of these were sent back to this country as mementoes of life in the colony. They would now have enormous historical importance to the library authorities and even the seemingly ordinary family portrait can often provide valuable information.

The collecting is not now confined to Queensland, that was where the project started, any items relating to other states will be passed on to the appropriate state library or museum.

If anyone in this area has material which they think might be relevant could they please contact Sandra Joyner, Queensland Heritage Retrieval Project, Australian High Commission, Australia House, Strand, London WC2B 4LA. telephone 0171 887 5261.
THE 1st. VISCONTY PEEL

Diana Mehew

it was an old photograph album which created an interest in family history. Then the invitation card I found behind a photograph led to an interest in local history. The gold printed card is headed "To meet the Rt. Hon. the Speaker of the House of Commons", and continues "The Committee of the Inhabitants of Sandy, charged with the duty of offering a welcome to the Right Hon. Arthur W. Peel M.P., request the honor of Mr. William Naylor’s company at a Public Dinner, at Sandy, on May 28th. 1884, at Half past 6 o’clock, in the evening.” William Naylor was my great great grandfather. Why was he invited and why was the Speaker coming to Sandy? The County Record Office archives provided me with the answers to these questions.

I discovered that William Naylor was a tenant farmer in Eyeworth and that “in 1861 A. W. Peel had bought the Ongley estate at Eyeworth” (Agar, 1981). A report on the Sandy & Eyeworth Estates (CRO X344/116) states that “The Eyeworth Estate is an ordinary agricultural property, comprising the whole of the parish of Eyeworth ... of the four farm Homesteads Mr. Naylor’s is in the best condition ... the Oak Barn floor is the only part nearly worn out and where necessary, it should be replaced with blue bricks or the plaster of the Country.”

A search among biographical dictionaries revealed that Arthur W. Peel was the fifth son of Sir Robert Peel, the 19th Century Prime Minister and founder of the Police Force. Arthur W. Peel was born in 1829 and was an M.P. from 1865 to 1895, holding the position of Speaker from 1884 to 1895. Although he was M.P. for Warwick and Leamington he lived at the Lodge, Sandy (now the headquarters of the RSPB).

I then looked at the old newspapers for information about the Public Dinner, and found the following report in The Bedfordshire Mercury of Saturday, May 31st. 1884. “The town of Sandy was en fete on Wednesday last to do honour to its most illustrious citizen, the Right Hon. Arthur Wellesley Peel, the Speaker of the House of Commons, on the occasion of his home-coming for the first time since his election to that distinguished position.” The article gives the names of the organizers, arrangements made and lists of those attending the event.

The Mercury reports that “the proceedings of the day commenced with the arrival of the five o’clock London and North-Western train from Bedford, attached to which was a saloon carriage to convey the Mayor and Corporation of Bedford. On their arrival .... The civic party adjourned to the waiting-room and donned their robes of state, His Worship also wearing his massive chain of office .... the party then crossed the railway and waited in the yard of the Great Northern Railway the advent of the Speaker. Mr. Peel had intended to reach Sandy by the train that arriving there at 5.37, and all the arrangements were made to this end; he, however, reached home about mid-day but not to upset the arrangements went quietly home and at the appointed time again reached the station just as the train came in from London.” It is amusing to think of the civic party waiting expectantly for the train and the Speaker suddenly appearing from a different direction. The party then processed through Sandy, led by the police, and followed by several organizations including “Sandy Cricket Club in full costume” and “parishioners, friends and neighbours, including nearly every man in the parish of Sandy.... The procession, which extended more than a quarter of a mile in length, moved slowly on amid constantly renewed cheers and waving of handkerchiefs from the fair sex at the windows along the High Street to the Market Place ....”

Following Arthur Peel’s retirement in 1895, he was created the 1st. Viscount Peel. From 1899 to 1907 he was a Trustee of the British Museum, and he died in 1912. This is the public man. However, when looking through the Bedfordshire archives I was able to catch a glimpse of the private man.

During the period October 1887 to October 1890 Arthur Peel kept an Estate Journal (CRO X344/26). This journal consists of informal notes apparently written in his own hand on notepaper headed “Speaker of the House of Commons”. One of the entries refers to his approval of a “hot house for Banes of Stratford [Sandy], for raising cucumbers. The costs will be 64£. I advanced him this money - charging him £5 p.c. but without payment of the capital; B is to keep the House in order - paint once every alternate year and acknowledge that the property is mine.” Arthur Peel goes on to say he does this “out of regards for Banes and out of a desire to try the experiment of forcing for the early market. out of a desire to prove what can be done by a little enterprise. and with a hope to benefit the neighbourhood by a successful venture.” Arthur Peel was by no means the first member of his family to take an interest in the finer points of farming. His father Robert Peel has been described as an “improving landlord” who “coupled repeal [of the Corn Laws in 1846] with measures designed to help landowners to undertake farm improvements, especially under drainage of wet soil.” (Mingey). In 1852 Robert’s third son William improved his estate between “Sandy and Potton, [which] at the time was of poor quality and used only in parts as sheep pasture. He planted the higher ground with trees and flowering shrubs and introduced market gardening to the lower lands. In order to improve the quality of the soil, sot and rags were ploughed into it.” (Smith).

Arthur Peel’s Journal demonstrates his awareness of the conflicting needs of people and the environment in which they live. On 18th September 1889 he reports “go over to Eyeworth, inspect the foundations which have been dug out

Continued on page 4, column 1
The 1st. Viscount Peel  
Cont. from page 3.

for two new cottages which I am to build. To enable the site to be cleared a very fine walnut tree has to be sacrificed” However, there is not always a conflict. In December of the same year he writes “The Parish [Sandy] desirous of a Burial ground I agree to sell them ‘Cabbage Hall’ for the purpose.”

So the search for my ancestors has led to curiosity about the community where they lived. Combining what could be considered separate interests, family history and local history adds enormously to the enjoyment of each.

Bibliography:-

Peel Papers, Bedfordshire County Record Office, X/344.

APOLOGY

In newsletter Volume 1 No. 11 page 4, information on a letter from a Cheshire resident to Malcolm Stewart was given. Unfortunately the lady’s name was given as Collins instead of Clayton. Apologies have been sent to the North Cheshire Family History Society who were asked if their members could add anything to what was known. Despite the wrong name a letter was received from a lady in Winchester, she had lived in the Manchester area in the 1930s and was a niece of Miss Clayton who died in 1993 aged 95, the last of the Clayton family who had been there for about 300 years. A copy of Miss Clayton’s letter has been sent to Winchester where it was very well received.

Norman Parry