BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL HISTORY
Regional Conference

The Bedfordshire Local History Association will host the Regional Conference of the British Association for Local History on 29th September 2001 from 10.30 am to 4.00 pm at the Forest Centre, Marston Vale, Marston Mortaine. Doors will open at 10.30 am for registration and coffee. A buffet lunch will be served between the morning and afternoon sessions and tea will be served before the discussion and final summing up. The Conference subject will be Promoting Local History Through Partnerships.

The programme of speakers will be as follows:
Welcome by Martin Lawrence, Chairman, Bedfordshire Local History Association.
Archives Services and outreach: sole trader or partnership by Kevin Ward, County Archivist.
How things began: the origins of the university in Bedford by Richard Smart, De Montford University.
Listening to history: recording reminiscences by Elizabeth Adey, Luton Museum.
The sum of the parts: the Bedfordshire Local History Association by Martin Lawrence, Chairman.
Sharing our heritage: networking for local, regional and national benefit by Stephen Coleman BCC.
Discussion and summing up by Margaret O’Sullivan, Chair, British Association for Local History.

During the second half of the lunch break there will be an optional walk around the surviving elements of mediaeval Marston Mortaine lead by Stephen Coleman, Historic Environmental Information Officer, Bedfordshire County Council.

This will be an important opportunity to demonstrate to visitors from the HQ of the National Association and its regions that Local History is actively being pursued and disseminated in Bedfordshire. So please support it by your attendance, advanced booking is required. The registration fee will be £10 and will cover attendance, morning coffee, buffet lunch, afternoon tea and a synopsis of the papers. Car parking is free. Booking forms available from Elizabeth Field Secretary BLHA, telephone 01525 633029 or Janet Thornton telephone 01933 410263. Facilities for display and sales of local history publications will be available please arrange details with Mrs Field soon if you have not yet done so to enable venue facilities to be finalized.

BEDFORDSHIRE LIBRARIES GATEWAY TO THE INTERNET

If you have access to the internet and are unaware of the Bedfordshire Libraries’ gateway to historical data you will find its facilities useful in searches for history information, their site can be found at http://www.bcclgis.gov.uk/gateway. This site provides many links to Internet sites chosen to reflect the questions most commonly asked by members of the public in Bedfordshire libraries. The sites are listed under headings which include several topics of interest to local historians, such as History and Archaeology, Family History, Libraries, Museums and Catalogues, Bedfordshire, Newspapers, Architecture. To give you an idea of the typical content, under Family History you can access 15 sites of potential interest such as the Bedfordshire and Luton Archive and Records Office, the Bedfordshire Family History Society and many national and international genealogical sites. Clicking on the category History and Archaeology reveals 13 sites including BBC History, Archnet (a gateway to archaeology internet sites world wide) and Compass Online (the British Museum).

The Gateway helps you to explore many other sites of general interest, including current topics like foot-and-mouth disease. Why don't you try exploring this route?
MAULDEN MAUSOLEUM
Brian Lazelle

Maulden Church & Mausoleum stand prominently on the Greensand Ridge visible from afar over the southern Bedfordshire plain from West and South. The Church was largely rebuilt and considerably extended in Victorian times around the medieval tower and wall of the original north aisle. The Mausoleum, is a Grade 2 listed building and has been on the buildings at risk register for some time.

The Mausoleum was built by Thomas Bruce, who came to England with James VI of Scotland, James 1st of England. The King granted him Houghton House and Park in 1624 and made him Earl of Elgin in 1633. The Mausoleum, constructed around 1656, comprised of an octagonal building with a crypt under and was connected to the north aisle of the church by a corridor, as recorded in the early 19th Century painting by Thomas Fisher q.v. Bedfordshire Magazine 1949. At this time there was a early North door but no windows in the North aisle wall of the Church. A plan dated 1824 shows a smaller nave with a gallery and only a single aisle, there were 248 seats in box pews in the nave and aisle, with a further 40 in the gallery. The stone steps down to the vault under the Mausoleum were situated in the passage from the Church.

The family was soon to be caught up in the turbulent period of the Civil war, the beheading of Charles I, the arrest of the Earl of Elgin’s son Robert Bruce in 1659 on suspicion of helping Charles II. Robert Bruce was taken to London and then released.

Colonel Okey, the Regicide, had leased neighbouring Ampthill Park, no wonder Lord Elgin decided to give his patronage to Maulden Church.

The steps to the crypt are now in the open under three stone slabs and a window replaces the entrance in the north wall of the church. On descent one entered a chamber with fine vaulting of evenly cut local sandstone forming six bays supported by two large pillars. In 1769 Lord Bruce’s agent inspected the vault and found the coffins placed on the floor. On his advice, separate niches were constructed in the three bays furthest from the entrance with a new wall containing the access, as seen now, with plaques sealing in the separate burials. In all 27 niches were constructed, some contain more than one burial and one plaque is blank. For example, one plaque records Henry son of Robert Earl of Elgin who died 25th. April 1664 in the second year of his age together with Henry Roll Esq., who was this Henry, buried with the son of the Earl? What year did he die? When was he put there?

The first burial in 1652 was 4 year old Robert Bruce grandson of Thomas 1st Earl of Elgin and the last Henrietta Louisa Frances Brudenell Bruce who died in 1836 aged 61 years. Thirty-four in all of which the last two to die were removed to the more recent family crypt in Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire in 1857.

In addition one may be able to make out the slab in the floor where Thomas Bowlby Esq., who died in 1795 aged 75, is buried. He is believed to be the Butler who served the Earl. It is said that the family who walked all over him in life can walk on him in eternity. Vandals have recently tried to dig under the slab.

The appearance of the Mausoleum has changed since Fisher’s painting. The building above ground was reconstructed in 1859 to be free standing from the church. Professor Albert Richardson said in a letter (in 1959) that it had been recased in Victorian times. The Mausoleum still bears a likeness to the painting but there are obvious differences particularly to the parapet, number of windows and buttresses.

In the latter half of the 20th. Century serious decay set in until finally, with the help of later vandalism, there were gaping holes in the roof. The ornate copper head to the down pipes had been stolen causing parts of the parapet to collapse. Inside the mausoleum the first sight that met the eye was a huge plastic sheet covering a robbed monument with a gaping hole in the roof above. How different when Henry Walpole of Strawberry Hill (1717-1797) wrote (pre. 1794) :- “An ordinary octagon Mausoleum of brick is annexed to the Church, in the middle of which is a most absurd & clumsy monument erected by her last husband, for Lady Diana Cecil Countess of Oxford

(Cont. on p.3 col. 1)
& afterwards of Elgin. On a huge base of marble stands a black marble Cistern, in which stands in white marble the Countess, in her winding sheet as rising from her tomb, in a niche on one side, is an Earl of Elgin, a bust, and on the ground another one of the family". Luckily there was a picture of her taken by Mr. Ronchetti, the Ampthill chemist and published in the Bedfordshire Magazine 1949. She is also known locally as the lady in the punch bowl, lady in the bathtub etc.

The County Council has found it difficult to establish the ownership of and responsibility for the building. As it is now detached from the church it is not ecclesiastical property. The Bruce descendants have, in the past, offered it to the church but, without an endowment, the ecclesiastical authorities could not accept. Some repairs may have been carried out in 1959 as a result of correspondence between Professor Richardson the well known Architect and Georgian Period devotee of Ampthill and the Earl of Cardigan. But Lord Cardigan’s replies suggest that if any were done they were the absolute minimum and would not have covered all the repairs to tiles, down pipes and copper heads considered to be essential by the Professor. In 1688, after James II fled England, Thomas Bruce 3rd. Earl Elgin and 2nd Earl Ailesbury was arrested and imprisoned in the tower. After his release he lived at Houghton House for a while but went into self imposed exile to Brussels where after many years he died (in 1738). In the same year the Bedfordshire Ailesbury estates were then sold to the Duke of Bedford.

The ownership of the mausoleum is disputed by two branches of the Bruce descendants.

In 1997 the Earl of Cardigan (family name Brudenell-Bruce), descendant of the 7th Earl of Cardigan of Light Brigade fame, present holder of the courtesy title as heir to the Earl of Ailesbury, told the Daily Telegraph "The 7th. Earl died childless and his title passed to a distant cousin, who was my distant ancestor. But we inherited nothing else. Not his house. Not his horse. Not his blood. Its not a Brudenell-Bruce Tomb, its a Brudenell tomb." The horse, house - Dene Park, in Corby Northants. - and money went to another branch of the family through Lord Robert Brudenell-Bruce, 4th son of the 3rd. Marquess of Ailesbury. The present occupant of Dene Park, his descendant, Edmund Brudenell told the Daily Telegraph in 1997 "I certainly don't own it, I don't. That's quite simple. We have part of one of the monuments which used to be in it, because the present Lord Ailesbury's father asked in the late Sixties whether we would have it'. The removal of the monuments has protected them from vandalism, or perhaps theft, during the recent period of the Mausoleum’s decay.

The County Council, supported by the Rector, the PCC, the Ampthill & District Preservation Society, the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society and others submitted a proposal for grant funds to enable it to take ownership of the Mausoleum Structure, to carry out restoration to its 1859 condition and to reintroduce replica sculptures, all at a total cost approaching £100,000. The County Council will then continue to maintain the building and its contents thereafter.

This proposal was prepared in detail by David Baker, who was appointed overall Project Manager, and submitted to the Heritage Lottery Commission at the end of 1977. One of the terms of such grants is that the public must have access to that end, at the time of the application, the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society together with the Ampthill Preservation Society offered to man the building for an Annual Open Day and special events. The recently reformed Maulden History Society is now in position to lead in this activity.

Grants were finally obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Landfill Tax Fund, Mid-Bedfordshire Council with other smaller donations from the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society, and a number of other bodies. Bruce Deacon was appointed Architect to the project and will supervise the restoration work.

After more than three years hard work, by David Baker, who continues as overall project manager, and his team, scaffolding has been erected and work on the site has begun. In the meantime high class reproductions have been completed of the 17th century memorial sculptures of Lady Diana, Thomas Bruce, her husband, and Robert Bruce, his grandson by his first marriage, who died aged 17 in 1662. The originals of the latter two are probably by John Bushnell. The original sculpture of Lady Diana may have been carved by Thomas Burman or his pupil John Bushnell, but it is nowhere near as fine as the other two.
BETTY CHAMBERS

A year after the sudden death of Betty Chambers on 20th May 2000 we pause to remember her valuable contribution to this association and to Bedfordshire in general. Betty died of a heart attack while returning from a holiday with a friend in Sardinia.

Before the Bedfordshire Local History Association’s formation Betty gave a substantial donation towards the expenses incurred prior to, and by its foundation, her continued enthusiastic help, advice and encouragement to the Association continued until her untimely death.

Betty Chambers was widely known throughout the County and beyond for her editorship of the Bedfordshire Magazine from 1974 until 1997. This quarterly publication, founded in 1947 by the Luton printer and publisher Harold White, of the White Crescent Press, had a very high reputation, under its two previous editors, Charles Freeman and James Dyer, for the quality of its presentation and the accuracy of its contents. Betty maintained this standard while extending its scope from its base of archaeology, local history and memoirs to include a wider range of natural history, current events and personalities.

In addition to editing the Bedfordshire Magazine, Betty Chambers succeeded Harold White as Honorary Secretary of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society in 1980, a post from which she was due to retire in the year she died. Founded in 1912, the society now publishes an annual volume of Bedfordshire documentary sources or original research. In 1983 the volume was her Printed Maps and Town Plans of Bedfordshire 1576-1900. This is the standard cartobibliography for the county, and was the fruit of some 18 years of research.

Betty Chambers (nee Vizard) was educated at Hitchin Girls' Grammar School, leaving in 1949, she became a general assistant, then education officer, at Luton Museum, where Charles Freeman, curator, developed her interest in natural history and landscape. In 1953 she joined the textiles department at the Victoria and Albert Museum, where her work was highly regarded by colleagues. At that time higher posts in national museums were reserved for graduates, so she moved to Norwich Museum in 1957 as assistant keeper of art with responsibility for ceramics and costume.

Betty married Dr. Victor Chambers in Norwich in 1961 and went to live in Harpenden to be near his work at the Rothamsted Research Institute. In Harpenden her love of gardening developed and she joined Vic. in working on Bedfordshire natural history projects, especially the Tottenhoe Knolls Reserve and Flitwick Moor. On her husband’s retirement in 1972, they moved to the former village police house in Meppershall, Bedfordshire where they created a wonderful garden with lawns and orchards. Vic. wrote and published a history of Meppershall, a revised and enlarged edition of which Betty had nearly completed at the time of her own death.

Every moment of Betty Chambers's time was employed usefully. She supported the Shefford WI market, the Bedford National Trust Association and the Friends of Meppershall Church.

Betty Chambers's husband had died in 1984 and Betty bequeathed her substantial estate to charities including a bequest to the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, which she had served so devotedly since 1980.