BLHA AUTUMN WORKSHOP

On Saturday 5th. October 2002 the Bedfordshire Local History Association in conjunction with the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service will be holding an all day Autumn Workshop:- Researching the History of your House at the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service, County Hall, Bedford. Registration will commence at 10.00 a.m. followed by coffee.

The morning programme commences with Kevin Ward (County Archivist) discussing private sources including documents of title, registration of title, manorial records, copyhold title, estate records, terriers and sale documents.

Clare Dyson (Archivist and author of the revised “How to Trace The History Of Your House In Bedfordshire” booklet) will then introduce government, public and quasi-public sources: printed maps, local authority deposit plans, tithe and enclosure records, rating records (local rates, land taxes, rating valuations), Register of Electors and Census Returns. Original documents will be viewed and utilized where possible. The value of illustrations will also be examined and a guide provided to useful publications. The morning session will finish at 1.00 p.m.

The Workshop will reconvene at 2.00 p.m. for a conducted walk to view the architecture of buildings in parts of Bedford led by Alan Cox (English Heritage - Survey of London) who will explain architectural means of dating buildings and examining the value of evidence such as street furniture and street names. During the afternoon there will be a break for tea and the walk will finish around 5.00 p.m.

Cost for the day is £3.00 including morning coffee but this does not include lunch or afternoon tea.

Due to space limitations at the Records Office the number of delegates will be strictly limited to paid for bookings and bookings will be treated on a first come first served basis so early booking is advised. Contact Elisabeth Field on Tel. 01525 633029, E-mail elisabethfield@aol.com

BEDFORDSHIRE IN THE 1950s

On Saturday 15th. March 2003 the Bedfordshire Local History Association will host an Exhibition on Bedfordshire in the 1950s, the venue will be the Woburn Village Hall 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Member bodies and individual members are invited to contribute displays. We will hire display boards from the same source as those used for the WW2 exhibition at Biggleswade in 2001, we need your information in good time to plan the layout and arrange the supply of tables and display boards. Please let Elisabeth Field (contact details as in previous article) know if you wish to exhibit and what tables and/or display boards you need by end of October at the latest.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2003

The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Saturday the 17th May 2003 at 2.15 p.m. in the Village Hall, Stewarthy. The agenda and other details will be sent to members in due course. After the completion of the AGM at 3.00 p.m. there will be a talk by Carmela Semeraro entitled Changing Landscapes, Changing Lives relating to the history of peoples who have lived or worked in the Marston Vale in the 20th Century. Visitors will be welcome, entrance free.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2003

The Bedfordshire Local History Association’s Annual Local History Conference for 2003 will be hosted by the Friends of Luton Museums together with the Luton and District Historical Society and Luton Museum Service. The conference will be held on Saturday 14th. June 2003 at the Pavilion, Bowling Green Lane, Luton commencing at 10.00 am, its theme will be Industry and Conservation, another important date for your diary. Bowling Green Lane is off the Old Bedford Road almost opposite the entrance to the Luton Museum. There is therefore no need to go near the centre of Luton. The pavilion is also blessed with secure parking. Fuller details and booking arrangements will be available in due course.
Luton Museum in Partnership with the Local Community
Elizabeth Adey

The Bedfordshire Local History Association’s Regional Conference in September 2001 held at Marston Vale Forest Centre, provided an opportunity to explore partnership working. Some of the outreach and exhibition work at Luton Museum is focused on recording people’s experiences and memories.

During the 19th century Luton grew from a small market town to a large manufacturing town dependent on the straw-hat industry. People were attracted to the town by employment opportunities. The coming of the engineering industry and General Motors in the 20th century led to an even greater expansion with people migrating from elsewhere in the British Isles to work in Luton. During the last half of the 20th century Luton’s population saw dramatic changes with workers coming in from the south of Ireland, the Caribbean and South Asia.

By the 1990s it was clear that the Museum’s existing permanent displays did not reflect the industrial or social history of Luton during the 20th century or the changing make-up of the local population. The displays also did not meet current museum practice in presentation, interpretation or care of collections. To rectify this a long-term community initiative was launched to increase the relevance of the Museum Service to a wider audience and attract more visitors and users of its resources.

The theme of ‘the Home’ was chosen for the first community exhibition as it was felt this was broad enough to allow everyone taking part to interpret it in his or her own way. This became ‘East West Homes Best’ which ran in the summer of 1997. Several working groups emerged as project partners - members of the Irish community, the African Caribbean community and South Asian communities.

The participation of the community groups was crucial to the whole exhibition. The information underpinning the reconstructions, text labels and audio presentation for the Irish and African Caribbean displays came from group reminiscences or oral history interviews with individual team members. Most of the information was presented in the first person, exactly as spoken. This gave a personal and spontaneous feel, and avoided generalisation and stereotyping. The fact that each group chose its own way of interpreting the exhibition theme was also important in terms of dealing with customer comments.

The community working parties themselves put on a linked programme of events. They commented that the enthusiastic response had boosted their confidence in the value of their traditions, had lessened the language barrier and made them more comfortable about talking to people. There was a general feeling that the display of minority cultural traditions in a ‘mainstream’ venue like the Museum was a mark of recognition and validation by the host community.

As well as a successful exhibition and raised profile among minority communities sustained in increased visitor figures, the Museum gained oral history tapes and objects for the collection.

Much of the oral history material for the African Caribbean community has often been loaned out. The African Caribbean archives are being digitised as part of a borough wide project. The Museum has been able to contribute to the ‘Moving Here’ project co-ordinated by the Public Record Office digitising material about migrant communities held in museums, libraries and archives across the country. The initial phase of the project website will be launched in November 2002 at www.movinghere.org.uk. Community partners have started to record oral history material on their own behalf.

As a Museum Service we have all become more aware of access issues and community involvement. When we wanted to involve perhaps neglected groups in a ‘Must Haves for the Millennium’ exhibition (young children, teenagers, the elderly in residential care, and adults with learning disabilities), we felt confident enough to approach them directly. Those taking part in the project were asked to identify significant objects in their current lives they would include in a ‘time capsule’ for the next millennium. The individual and varied choices created an interesting and engaging exhibition.

Luton Museum is now in the final stages of redisplaying the Luton Life galleries, a half million pound project part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The emphasis of the displays will be on the experiences of Luton residents over the last 150 years and oral history plays an essential part.

We needed to contact a range of local people and build up an archive of oral history interviews capturing people’s experiences working for local companies, living, and socialising in Luton. We developed an oral history project with the aims of building up an archive of oral testimony, which can be used in audio and written form. We aim to create and consolidate links with people in the local community, to ensure a balance of participants in terms of age, gender, cultural background and disability. We want to build a sense of ownership of and identification with the new displays through community participation.

By happy coincidence U3A (University of the Third Age) local history group approached the museum to discuss possible projects for their members! Members met at the
HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

Luton Museum in Partnership with the Local Community (cont. from p. 2)

museum and discussions were held with former employees of Leporates, SKF, Vauxhall (divided into engineers & clerical), Kents, Hayward Tyler and Electrolux. They gave us an appreciation of the tremendous versatility of Luton workforce, as people moved between the different factories. We learned about the social life of the firms and the changes in working practices generally. People from a variety of industries flagged up the 1970s as a time when apprenticeship training vanished, jobs were de-skilled and automation increased. We also learned about the terrific changes in office work.

The participants said they had enjoyed sharing their experiences and hearing about the work their colleagues had done. More than one person said they found out more about industrial processes and jobs at the reminiscence session than while they were working there. It was fascinating to hear of the changes in technology. The Hayward Tyler Company went from Victorian (steam) to modern (nuclear) technology in one man’s working life. Generally it seems that the engineers and people who had been through the excellent apprenticeship programmes offered by a number of Luton companies had gained an overview of the workplace as a whole, whereas people in offices were more isolated.

A proportion of the material gathered throughout the project will be used in the new galleries. The remainder can be drawn on for future displays, resource packs and publications. It will also be available as an archive for researchers. People will not represent a particular cultural or religious group, but will be included as Vauxhall employees, workers in the hat trade and chemical industries, or for their involvement in local sporting or social organisations. We have every hope that the final galleries will reflect the experiences of a wide range of Luton’s population. We see the project as a long-term initiative, which will continue after the ‘Luton Life’ galleries open in 2003.

Can you type?
Would you like to assist a local history project?

If yes, read on. Thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Carmela Semeraro is leading an oral history project at the Forest of Marston Vale entitled “Changing Landscapes, Changing Lives”. An archive of tape-recorded interviews with people who have lived or worked in the Marston Vale at any time during the 20th century is being created for future generations. Carmela is recording not only interviews with men and women who worked in the major industry of the area, the brickworks, but also the lives of all sorts of people who lived in the rural area of Marston Vale, roughly bounded by Bedford, Milton Keynes, Ampthill and Sandy. The project is progressing very well and 150 interviews have been completed. However, there is an urgent need for volunteers who can type in order to complete the project successfully. You could help by transcribing the tape-recorded interviews. If you would like to help but are unable or would prefer not to get to the Forest Centre you can still contribute by working from home.

If interested please contact Carmela Semeraro:
Telephone: 01234 762609
Email: carmela.semeraro@marstonvale.org

Post: Carmela Semeraro, Forest of Marston Vale, Station Road, Marston Moretaine, Bedfordshire, MK43 0PR

MAULDEN MAUSOLEUM

The completion of the restoration work on this historic monument was officially marked by an official ceremony on the 19th of August which included a dedication by Reverend David Powell.

Extensive work was necessary to the roof structure and parapet and a great deal was learned of the Victorian reconstruction. The monument to Countess Diana has been restored with replica half statue and cartouches cast from the originals, as have the busts of Edward and Thomas Bruce, the originals of which had been taken to Deene Park Northamptonshire in 1970 for safe keeping.

The Mausoleum is now owned by Bedfordshire County Council and a local management committee has been formed to implement its management. Public access to the mausoleum building will be by appointment through a key holder, it will also be unlocked on the occasions of summer Sunday afternoon openings of the church. The crypt below remains a place of burial and must be treated with appropriate respect, it will only be opened on special occasions such as heritage open days, village fetes and bona fide educational visits. Normally the PCC and the Maulden History Society will respond to appropriate requests and provide the necessary steward for safe entry, adequate notice must be given.
This year the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society celebrates 40 years of active archaeology and local history with an Anniversary Conference on Saturday 30th November 2002 from 10.30 am to 5.00 p.m. at the Millbrook Village Hall.

Speakers will include Simon House on Victorian Houghton Conquest, James Collett White on The Brookes of Flitwick Manor; Dr. Eberhard Sauer on Excavations at Alcester Roman Fortress (founded AD44); Barry Dackombe on the History of Ampthill Castle (where Catherine of Aragon was confined after Henry divorced her) and James Dyer.

The Society has commenced a geophysical survey of the site of Ampthill Castle or Palace using the up to the minute equipment developed for the Council for Independent Archaeology. Bob Randall, the independent archaeologist who designed the equipment will briefly describe its development and application and Kevan Fadden, A&DAA&LH Society Chairman hopes to present some initial findings from the survey.

After the morning session and before lunch, the delegates will visit the fascinating church of St. Michael including a trip up the tower for those with a head for heights. On a clear day it is possibly one of the best views in Bedfordshire.

The cost for the day will be £14.00, which will include coffee and a hot lunch. Members of the Association and its Affiliated Societies are invited to register, contact Mike Turner, 17, High St., Clophill, Bedford, Mk45 4BJ. or tel. 01525 862285 for booking and other details.

New Publications

WILSHAMSTEAD - HOMESTEAD OF FRIENDS Pb. publication date December 2002, price £8.99 from Miss C. M. Papworth, 17, Howard Close, Wilstead, Bedford, MK45 3JW. The history of Wilshamstead (Wilstead) from the Stone Age to Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee. Contains 120 photographs in more than 150 pages. Limited printing early ordering advised.


An era of enormous change, 1952 to 1977, is commemorated in this extensive collection of photographs, the best known from Bruce Turvey's professional collection. Originally published to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee, it has been re-issued for her Golden Jubilee. Changes include the disappearance of key old landmarks such as the Town Hall, the Red Lion and the California Swimming Pool. Here glimpses of outstanding events are recorded including visits from famous people of the period and, of course, hundreds of local people.


The valley of the Great Ouse in Bedfordshire is an area of rich, but diminishing, archaeological resources. This volume draws together, for the first time, current archaeological work in the area in an attempt to characterise the regions distinct, but previously unrecognised, archaeological identity.