HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE


BEDFORDSHIRE IN THE 1950s
An Exhibition

On Saturday 15th. March 2003 the Bedfordshire Local History Association will host the Bedfordshire in the 1950s Exhibition. The exhibition will be held in the Village Hall, Woburn and will be open to the public from 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. Displays will be mounted by History Groups from around the County together with Bedfordshire County Council’s Heritage and Environment Advisory Group, Bedford Museum and Luton Museum. All the stands will be staffed by members with an interest in Bedfordshire and its history. Books on many aspects of Bedfordshire and its people will be on sale.
All are welcome, entrance is free, as is car parking. Light refreshments will be available throughout the day so do come along and look back over five decades and see or remember Bedfordshire at a time when Britain’s first ever motorway was being built through the County and steam trains still carried passengers over its railways.

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, Stewartry. The agenda and other details will be sent to members in due course. At 3.00 p.m., after the completion of the AGM and a following short break, there will be a talk by Carmela Semeraro entitled Changing Landscapes, Changing Lives. Carmela is currently leading an oral history project in the Forest of Marston Vale on this subject, creating an archive of recorded interviews with people who have lived or worked in the Marston Vale at any time during the 20th. Century. The interviews have not been limited to the peoples that have worked in the brick industry but also people who live in the rural area roughly bounded by Bedford, Ampthill, Sandy and Milton Keynes.
Visitors will be welcome and there is no entrance free, refreshments will be available after the talk.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2003

The Bedfordshire Local History Association’s Annual Local History Conference for 2003 will be hosted by the Friends of Luton Museum 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. The rural nature of Luton in the latter half of the 19th. Century, the brewing industry and the traditional, if seasonal, hat trade form the springboard for this year’s conference. Guided tours between morning and afternoon sessions will include a visit to Luton’s oldest secular building. Conference fee: £12 (including lunch, refreshments and tours). The conference centre is easily accessible with secure parking.
Full details and booking forms from Dr. E Adey, BLHA Conference 2003, Luton Museum and Art Gallery, Old Bedford Road, Luton, LU2 7HA. Telephone 01582 546723.
The establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (now the Church Commissioners) in 1836 was dictated partly by glaring inequalities of clerical income. At one end of the scale the Rector of Doddington in Cambridgeshire had in addition to his free house an annual income of £7,306. This was at a time when in our own county the Harveys at Ickwell Bury had £5,000 a year, the Orlebars of Hinwick House had about £3,000, and the Brookses of Fliitwick with £1,630 a year could stock the park with deer, cultivate 13 acres of garden, and live in a house of seven principal bedrooms, three servants' bedrooms, and a domestic staff of six.

Doddington was an aberration, but there were still 186 out of about 11,000 livings in England and Wales with annual incomes in excess of £1,000 and a further 2,107 with incomes in excess of £400.

At the other end of the scale 297 livings had an income of less than £50 a year and a further 1,629 had incomes of between £50 and £100 a year - to say nothing of the several thousand Curates who were paid whatever their Rectors allowed them.

In E M Forster's *Howards End* (1910) we find in chapter 30 that a man may be "set on his feet" - that is given independence - with an income of £300 a year. With deflation during some of the nineteenth century this figure was probably perfectly valid from the 1830s onwards. In one of Samuel Butler's letters in 1879 we find a similar reference to subsisting on £300 pa.

Anthony Trollope in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, published in 1867, had the measure of the matter: in the first chapter we learn that Hogglesstock with an income of £130 pa was insufficient to allow the Rev. Josiah Crawley with a wife and two children to live with dignity. By chapter LXXXII he has been translated to St Ewold's with an income of £350 pa and all is happiness.

Bedfordshire was at this time in the Diocese of Ely. The fact that the Diocese included Doddington no doubt inflated the average income, and the Diocese came 4th in the Commissioners' league table with a net average annual income per living of £353.

Of the 125 or so Bedfordshire livings (1) at the start of the Commissioners' work, the best was Luton with an income of £1,350, followed by Toddington at £829, Marston Moretaine at £797, Sandy at £769, Blunham at £731 and Houghton Conquest at £599. There were 12 livings in the county with incomes in excess of £400 pa.

All of these were in private hands - that is to say an individual was patron and had the nomination ('presentation') of the next incumbent whenever a vacancy occurred. This was indeed the norm at that time, for 7,268 of the total in 1831 of 11,342 livings were in private hands. No doubt it was gratifying for the patron to be able to ensure that the incumbent was agreeable both socially and in his churchmanship. Naturally also the patron tended to favour members of his own family or connections such as tutors of his children. In 1846 no less than eight Bedfordshire patrons who were also clergymen had presented themselves (the Rev. H W Gery at Bolnhurst, the Rev. D J Olivier at Clifton, the Rev. H C Cust at Cockayne Hatley, the Rev. J R Wardale at Higham Gobion, the Rev. E 0 Smith at Holcot, the Rev. H Clutterbuck at Kempston, the Rev. J Alington at Little Barford, and the Rev. E S Bunting at Yelden), and two more had nominated people with the same surname who were presumably close relations (the Halls at Great Barford and the Alstons at Odell). It is to be noted that not all these livings were particularly valuable.

At the lower end of the scale, Bedfordshire had 13 Parishes (about 10% of the whole) with incomes below £100. Billington was the worst with only £45, followed by Husbourne Crawley with £46, Tilsworth with £60, Great Barford with £67, Bedford Holy Trinity, Elstow and Melchbourne with £75 each, Ravensden with £81, Sundon with £83, Ridgmont with £84, Wytoningham with £91, Heath and Reach with £98 and Eggington with £99. No less than three of these were suburbs of Leighton Buzzard (Eggington, Heath and Reach, and Billington). Some poor parishes were grouped together to provide a slightly better income; for example, Ridgmont and Husbourne Crawley together provided £130 to the Rev C W F Bentinck who as a grandson of the Duke of Portland no doubt could supplement the Hogglesstockian pittance from his own means.

The value of livings varied from year to year partly as a result of changes in agricultural prices affecting the value of the Rectors' glebe - i.e. land from which he gained part of his income.

Livings were bought and sold like any other piece of property. In the 1850s, J T Brooks bought Fliitwick for his youngest son for £2,850. As the income was £230 pa, this suggests the going rate was approximately 12 times the annual income - a very good investment for a young man.

Naturally the great county magnates accumulated livings as part of their patronage. In 1464 the Duke of Bedford headed the list with 14 livings in the county, followed by Earl de Grey and Lord St John with four each, and Lord Carteret and the Hon G R Trevor with three each.

Oxford and Cambridge Colleges accounted for a further 14. The Crown or the Lord Chanceller had a further 18. What is surprising is how few were in ecclesiastical hands.

(Cont. on page 3 Column 1)
The Bishop of Lincoln (in whose diocese Bedfordshire had once been), the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's, and the Dean and Chapter of Worcester had only one each. A further three were in the hands of incumbents - usually urban parishes carved out of a larger parish. Stanbridge, for example, was nominated by the Vicar of Leighton Buzzard. The income was only £100 a year.

The Commissioners, as livings fell vacant, redistributed income throughout the nineteenth century though they had also to contend with the creation of new parishes in urban areas, so that their progress was disappointingly slow. They also had to take note that as agricultural land values declined in the late 1800s so ecclesiastical income in the form of land also declined. Referring to an unidentified report from 1910 (the same year as Howards End), the Encyclopedia Britannica (11th Edition) wrote that:

"The poverty of many of the clergy shows in strong contrast to the wealth around them. Of 14,212 benefices 4704 are said to be below £200 a year net value."

By 1901, Bedfordshire had increased the number of livings to about 143. Luton for example had an addition of four daughter parishes. The number of parishes with an income in excess of £400 had fallen to six of which the two lowest valuable, Luton St Mary (£440 net) and Bedford St. Peter (£500), had additional funding from the Commissioners to provide curates. The remainder were Sandy (£800), Marston Moretaine (£650), Toddington (£580), Blunham (£540), Houghton Conquest (£510).

At the other end of the scale, 11 Bedfordshire parishes still had a net income below £100 - Tilsworth (£46), Melchbourne (£70), Eyeworth (£70), Moggerhanger (a new parish £76), Caddington (£85), Chalgrave (now divorced from Hockliffe £89), Upper Gravenhurst (£90), Wrestlingworth £90, Shelton (£92), Harlington (£96), and Bolnhurst (£96).

The patrons were still dominated by the county magnates; the Duke of Bedford had 11 livings in the county and another 13 in other parts of the country - especially Devon, but also including Stratham in Surrey worth £800 pa and St Paul's Covent Garden at £500. Earl de Grey's successor, Earl Cowper, now had six, with ten more outside the county. The number of private individuals holding livings had however declined somewhat with only two presenting themselves - the Rev. H B Allen at Colnworth, and the Rev. W H Jackson at Stagsden. But we also start to see a rise in ecclesiastical patronage. The bishop now has nine livings at his disposal.

In the hundred years since then the main change is the merging of parishes to form team ministries. Bedfordshire now consists of some 82 parishes - a little over half the 1901 figure and this despite further creation of urban parishes - now 11 in Luton and 9 in Bedford.

The effect of this on patronage is that the new combined livings are split between the old pre-merger patrons with alternating right of presentation to the new benefice: for example patronage of Clifton with Southill is split between the Bishop and Mr S C Whitbread, each having alternating right of presentation. Where three or more parishes are combined the effect can sometimes be bizarre: Caldecote with Northill and Old Warden is split as to two turns of presentation to the Grocers' Company and one turn to the R0 Shuttleworth Remembrance Trust.

A notable change is decline of private patronage: no one seems to have presented himself in the county, the de Grey family has gone and even the Duke of Bedford (or at least his Trustees) have less than 2 livings left in the county. The largest private owner is Mr S C Whitbread (2½). Lord Luke has 1½, and Lord Pym, Mrs P K C Hanbury, Mr R M Orebar and Mrs F A A Copper have one or a fraction of one each. Oxford and Cambridge colleges have also declined somewhat (4½ livings), though the Crown and the Lord Chancellor hold their own proportionally with 8½.

By contrast ecclesiastical patronage has increased vastly, with over half of all Bedfordshire livings in church hands. The largest Bedfordshire patron is now the Bishop (of St Albans) with some 39½ presentations, with the Diocesan Board of Patronage having a further 6½. Other ecclesiastical owners of livings include the Archbishop (1), the Dean and Chapter of St Paul's (2½), and the incumbents of Luton, Leighton Buzzard, Campton and Clifton with one or less each.

Another significant change is in the number of livings now held by charitable bodies interested in furthering a particular type of churchmanship: the Martyrs' Memorial and Church of England Trust holds no less than 5½ livings in Bedfordshire and the Peache Trust a further 2½. But there are no longer inequalities of value, so ecclesiastical livings are not to be thought of as providing a job for a friend or relation. The only issue now is the churchmanship of the incumbent, so it is hardly surprising if patronage has now gravitated into the hands of those professionally interested in this.

Notes:- (1) The precise number of livings is surprisingly difficult to compute. On the one hand there are amalgamated livings, such as Felmersham and Pavenham; on the other there are daughter churches whose Perpetual Curates, usually the vicar of the parent parish, are hardly distinguishable from ordinary curacies save for the Parson's Freehold - ie the Perpetual Curate was virtually unsackable. The 1846 Clergy List gives about 114 Bedfordshire Parishes on a minimalist definition of parish. For comparative purposes I prefer a somewhat higher figure.
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New Publications

This volume contains the returns from the Bedfordshire parishes to the triennial interrogations of the parish clergy by the Bishops of Lincoln.
The author succeeds in making the considerable information in these records easily accessible to all. Most Latin has been translated, dates between 1st January & 24th March have been given in old and new year style and the parishes placed in alphabetical order. The bishops requested various details of the incumbent & patron, income, the size of the parish, number of families, how many papists and dissenters, meeting houses, charities, schools, almshouses, hospitals etc. The bishops requested details of the frequency of reading the Public Service, administering the sacrament, catechizing and the instruction in the catechism particularly of children & servants, any public penances and matters relating to the proper administration of the parish. The resultant returns from the incumbents provide a very valuable picture of life in each of our villages and towns in this period.
This is a must for every Bedfordshire local historian’s bookshelf.

A CHRONICLE OF VICTORIAN LIFE IN PULLOXHILL 1875-1881 by Mrs. Emily Cowper Johnson (1851-1948), pub. by Parochial Church Council of St. James' Church, Pulloxhill, A5, ph, price £8.00 from village shop or £4.40 by post from Mrs. Collier (booklet), Rectory Farm, Pulloxhill, Bedfordshire, MK45 5HD.
Mrs. Emily Cowper Johnson’s memoir offers a unique glimpse of Pulloxhill in its Victorian heyday, a time when the church was the centre of village life. Mrs. Cowper Johnson arrived in Pulloxhill in 1875 as the 24 year old bride of its new vicar the Revd. Cowper Johnson, her first cousin, whom she had met a year before. Although they only stayed for 5 years, she clearly took it to her heart, and in 1913, when she set down her memories, she retained vivid recollections of that period.
This booklet is well illustrated with contemporary photographs and Mrs Cowper Johnson’s Chronicle is introduced with additional complementary information on Victorian Pulloxhill by Simon Houfe.

The Dunstablelogia was one of the earliest attempts to recount the history of Dunstable in some sort of scholarly order, included a number of beautiful engravings of local buildings, based on the work of a “photographic artist", James Tibbett Jnr. Dunstablelogia first appeared in booklet form in 17 installments throughout 1859. The chronological account of the town's story, as it was understood at the time, is augmented by eyewitness records of local events of the 1850s, including the heart-rending story of the early death of the daughter of one of the town's leading citizens; and the fate of a family of starlings who made their nest in the skull of a highwayman whose body had been left hanging in chains from the town’s gibbet.
Now a facsimile of this unique history of Dunstable has been published by the Book Castle in its series of new editions of rare books about the town. With copies of the original work so difficult to find, this new edition with a new detailed preface by John Buckledee, Editor of The Dunstable Gazette will be welcomed by anyone interested in Dunstable and the surrounding area.

This book, a combination of souvenir day book with nostalgic text and pictures, gives an insight into village life 100 years ago, its celebrities, special occasions and unique character. The diary format enables the reader to follow the course of events in the village calendar, whilst recording important dates of the present.

NEXT COPY DATE

Please let me have your articles, announcements and short news items by this date for inclusion. We require more articles that reflect members interest, if you have been exploring an area of local history or have a particular interest that we have not yet covered or on which you have a different view, please do not hesitate in contacting the editor.

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