WARTIME BEDFORDSHIRE - an Exhibition

Following the successful presentation on Wartime Bedfordshire in October the Bedfordshire Local History Association is hosting the promised exhibition BEDFORDSHIRE IN WORLD WAR 2 on the 4th March 2000 from 11.00am to 4.30pm in the Parkside Hall, Woburn St., Ampthill. There will be a wide range of exhibits illustrating how the Second World War affected the lives of the residents of Bedfordshire and some of their contributions to its progress.

Potential exhibitors who have not received an application form should contact urgently Mrs. J. Curran, Hon. Secretary, 7, Castle Close, Totternhoe, Dunstable, Beds., LU6 1GJ.

The hall will be available from 10.00am for erection of displays and from 4.30pm to 5.00pm for their removal.

All are welcome, the exhibition is free. Ample car parking is available on site.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - MAY 2000

The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 13th. of May 2000 in the Village Hall, Houghton Conquest commencing at 2.15pm. The agenda and other details will be sent to members in due course. After the official business of the AGM is finished, at 3.00pm, there will be a talk by David Dymond Chairman of the British Association for Local History, entitled The Workings of the English Parish.

Visitors are welcome, entrance is free. Car parking is available on site. Refreshments will be available after the talk.

Bedfordshire Local History Conference 2000

This year the conference is to be hosted by the Roxton and District Local History Group at Roxton in the north of the County. Please make a note in your diary to reserve Saturday 3rd. June 2000. Our members look forward to welcoming you to Roxton where our venues will be the parish hall, Roxton Parish Church and the Congregational Church. Speakers will include David Stocker of English Heritage, Stephen Coleman and Dr. D Clarke who will concentrate on aspects of the History of our locality. We plan to show delegates something of our village on a short walk and to tell them about the notable families of the parish.

A mid-day lunch will be served.

Reservation forms and further details will be sent to members early in the new year. Stella Gibbs (Chair).

Visit to the Imperial War Museum

Toddington History Society has organised a coach trip to the Imperial War Museum on Saturday 25th. March 2000 costing approximately £5 plus entrance fee. If you wish to join in contact Linda Swain on 01525 873054.

A Cry For Help

A student is researching ‘Urban and Rural Post Offices and their role in the community in Beds., Cambs. & Hunts, 1930 to 1950’. Any memories of working hours, pay & conditions, transport or lack of it, wartime difficulties descriptions of village or town post offices inside or out, transactions, uniforms etc. would be very appreciated, photographs will be returned, she will happily send a questionnaire and S.A.E. Send information to Betty Eveleigh, Box 55, St. Neots, PE19 6SJ or ring 01480 880454.
THE BEDFORDSHIRE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT RECORD

Stephen Coleman

The Historic Environment Record (HER) is maintained by the Heritage and Environment Section of Bedfordshire County Council as a database containing information on all known archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic landscape features in the county. It already holds information on more than 16,500 items of all periods from the earliest human activity (125,000 years ago) to World War II, including stray finds and industrial remains. All Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest are recorded together with historic parks and gardens and field systems. Buried remains and demolished buildings are also included.

Locations are marked on Ordnance Survey maps at scales of 1:10000 or 1:2500 and summary information held on computer can be searched to produce lists sorted by period, area or theme/site type or a combination of these criteria.

The bulk of the Record consists of record cards with fully referenced textual information derived from a wide range of bibliographic, documentary and other sources, including survey and excavation reports. Information on the development of Bedfordshire’s historic landscape in general is also available in the form of parish surveys, presented as archive essays and maps.

Photographs (about 45,000) and slides (nearly 7,000) are also held, together with historic and modern maps and plans. A collection of aerial photographs includes over 2,200 oblique views from a variety of sources and over 3,000 vertical prints of the county taken by the RAF, mainly during the later 1940’s. More recent countywide vertical aerial photography is also held in the Section for 1968, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1996.

The HER is a core information source for all aspects of Bedfordshire’s historic environment. It has a wide range of uses including:

- answering public queries
- as an educational resource for schools, colleges and universities
- academic research
- helping provide advice to planning authorities and developers on the implications of development proposals for archaeology, historic buildings or Conservation Areas
- inputs to Local Plans and Countryside Projects
- providing information for the management and interpretation of sites, buildings and areas
- providing information for leisure and tourism purposes

Additional information and newly identified sites or features are continually being added to the Record, from aerial survey, planning casework, documentary research and fieldwork (including fieldwalking, survey and excavation by both professional archaeologists and local societies or individuals).

The Heritage and Environment Section are always happy to receive further information or notification of new discoveries for the Record, whatever the source. It is important for all its users that the HER is as comprehensive as possible.

The Record is open to all and can be consulted in person at County Hall by prior appointment during normal office hours, Monday to Friday. If it is not possible to visit, written or telephone enquiries can be dealt with depending on the nature and quantity of the information required and subject to payment for any photocopies.

You should contact:

The Historic Environment Information Officer
Heritage and Environment Section
Environmental Services Group
County Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford
MK42 9AP

Telephone: (01234) 228072 Fax: (01234) 228232
E-mail: colemans@beds.gov.uk

Know your Committee

Your Executive Committee elected last May is made up as follows:- Martin Lawrence, Chairman; Stephen Coleman vice-chairman; Mike Turner, honorary treasurer; Joan Curran, honorary secretary; Brian Lazelle, editor History in Bedfordshire; Barry Dackombe; June Masters; Janet Thornton; Jean Williams and Peter Wood. Following the election the committee invited Kevin Ward the County Archivist to participate in their meetings during their current tenure. As the year progressed the committee has found it beneficial, in order to broaden the coverage of the County, to co-opt three further members onto the committee David Parker of Biggleswade History Society, John Curry of Friends of Luton Museum and Molly Foster of Clapham Historical Society.
Factory Inspector’s Report 1890
Elizabeth Adey

This article is based upon a talk given at the BLHA study day in October 1998 about a Factory Inspector’s Report of visits to hat factories in Luton in 1890. To give a little bit of background to factory inspections: the first Factory Acts applied to cotton mills which were originally known as ‘cotton manufactories’. In 1819 children younger than 9 were not allowed to work and older children only for a 12 hour day. In 1833 the daily hours of children under 12 were reduced to 9 hours and those aged 13-18 to 12 hours. By 1844 women were restricted to working not more than 12 hours a day as long as they like in those three months. They say that ‘shipping orders’ come in suddenly, which must be executed at once.”

They also reasoned that they couldn’t regulate the hours worked by homeworkers as “…this work is done at the people’s homes, and that children and young persons are worked very late hours by their parents…it is much better for the girls to work late in large, healthy work-rooms than in their poky rooms at home.” In fact houses in Luton weren’t generally poky.

In Luton the second half of the 19th century saw a decline in the local straw plaiting industry while there was an increase in the hat trade. The factory workers were on a piece rate system. At the height of the season (March to July) people could earn five or six times as much as at the start. The pay rates were a disincentive for unionisation and price fixing, while from July to February people were grateful for any work. No one took much notice of the Factory Acts as regards hours of work, however, public opinion was against all night work for the girls and Sunday work:

During the season most firms employed homeworkers. They worked at slightly lower rates and also worked later at night, earlier in the morning and on Sundays. It was commonly, although not correctly, thought that the Factory Act didn’t apply to domestic workshops. The Inspector could inspect any place employing children or women who were not family.

The work force in the factories was mainly female and it was universally agreed that the lot of a female sewer with a major firm was a happy one: she had pleasant working conditions, flexible hours and was well-paid. By 1893 the factories were described as ‘well up to the standard required by the Act - light and well-ventilated, the girls have a great advantage in being able to chat over their work- a facility which always produces cheerfulness, and in consequence, health.’

So what did our Factory Inspector have to say. Regarding hours he says that the “Luton manufacturers claim that their trade is peculiar to itself, that their season only lasts three months in the year, and that they ought to be allowed to work

He goes on to write that, “Many manufacturers agree with me that the hours allowed by the Act from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. are quite long enough for all orders…but the girls are masters of the situation, they will not come to work at 8 a.m. So we must (Cont. on page 4 Column 1)
Factory Inspector’s Report 1890
(Continued from col. 2 p.3)

work till midnight. On the other hand, some girls have
told me that if told to come at 8 they would do so, for they
know that if they lost their situation, there are plenty of other
girls to take their places. Some girls also say that if they did
come at 8 the work-rooms would not be ready for them; and
that girls will come early to work is proved by the fact that
some firms who had put up notices to work 8 to 8 and 9 to 9
were summonsed by me for employing girls at 7 a.m.”

He states that: “With reference to these remarks, it is, of
course, in reality, no concern of mine to criticise the way in
which the Luton people choose to conduct their business as
long as they keep within the law, but it is my concern to show
that the time allowed by the Act is sufficient for all the
requirements of their trade, that the excuses made for
excessive overwork are futile and that the summonses that
have been taken out were perfectly fair and reasonable.” The
Inspector ends the Luton section of his report by saying that
trade was bad owing to hats of fancy work not straw being the
fashion and loss of trade to France and Germany.

“Some people in Luton blame what they call the greed of a few
persons there; who, for a small premium, allowed foreigners to
come and be taught all about the trade...This shows how
foolish it is for any town to put all its eggs in one basket or rely
on a single trade. In Luton and Dunstable there are factories
and machines idle; in other towns the manufacture of boots,
corsets and other things is extending, but in Luton people do
not seem to care for anything beyond the straw hat trade.”

A New Local Society

The recently formed Risleley History Society has joined the
Bedfordshire Local History Association. Contact Mr. M. D.
Ives, 40 Kings Close, Risleley, Bedford, MK44 1EP.

New Publications

Strawopolis: Luton Transformed 1840-1876 by Stephen
Bunker, A5, pb. 290pp. illustrated, published by Bedfordshire
Historical Record Society, £15 + £1.50p&p. from Dr.
Stephen Bunker, Dept. of History, University of Luton, 75,
Castle St., Luton, LU1 3AJ. ISBN 0 85155 062 2.

Richard Cobden described Luton as ‘the Manchester of
Bedfordshire’ and Sir Robert Peel condescendingly dismissed
it as a place whose houses were ‘built of straw’. Luton or, to
give it its 19th Century designation, Strawopolis experienced a
social and economic transformation in the middle of the 19th.
Century. This book details the demise of the old institutions of
the old market town and examines the new elements that
replaced them. The author comprehensively analyses the
distinctive nature of the local economy, the challenges
presented by the unrestricted urban growth, temperance,
education, religion and political allegiance. The reader will
develop an understanding of the forces that created the
country’s principal straw hat manufacturing town which
contained the antecedents for its 20th Century growth as an
engineering centre.

School Year September 1943 - September 1944, Journal of
Mr. E. E. Wilkinson Headmaster, Clapham School
1943-1956 with foreword by Eileen Pickering, former pupil,
Clapham School, A5. pb. 65pp. published by Writers’ Own
Publications, 121 Highbury Grove, Clapham, Bedford, MK41
6DU. (for Clapham Historical Society). £2.50 from Mrs.
Foster, ‘Narly Oak’, The Baulk, Green Lane, Clapham,
Bedford, MK41 6AA.

Four years of wartime had taken their toll on Clapham School by
the time the new Headmaster arrived September 15th. 1943. He
decribes the general tone of the school as unsatisfactory, the children
as noisy, their work disgustingly untidy and their spelling
unbelievably poor. He describes his attempts to improve the situation
despite the teacher shortage, the influx of evacuees, a temporary
classroom without desks and other wartime problems. Life outside
the classroom is not neglected, driving across the county to give
A.R.P. lectures and gas demonstrations, night watch for the Home
Guard, church and home life are dealt with.

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