

BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

# HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

VOLUME 8, NO 1, WINTER 2017-2018  
[www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk](http://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk)

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*History in Bedfordshire* is published by the  
BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
[www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk](http://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk)

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ISSN 0968-9761

## Notes and news

**Did the Willington peasants revolt?** It's all a bit of a mystery. Did the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 have any effect in Bedfordshire? Joyce Godber wrote that 'the Bedfordshire villages were surprisingly quiet' but for one reason or another there appears to be only one surviving manor court roll for 1381 held by Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service.

Historians tell us that during the 'Revolt' many manorial documents were destroyed and the Willington records begin the next year, in 1382 with a series of bailiff's accounts and in 1394 with the manor court rolls. Something definitely happened in Willington because the lord let out his demesne lands to some of his tenants and they refused to pay the full rent for 10 years from 1382. Was there a riot or simply a relatively peaceful, determined programme of obstructive behaviour?

Dorothy Jamieson has spent almost 20 years translating and studying the Willington manorial documents dating from 1382 to 1522. Her new book for Bedfordshire Historical Records Society, *Willington after the Peasants' Revolt* is due out early in 2018, but why not go along to her talk 'Did Willington Peasant's Revolt?' at Willington Local History Group's meeting at 7.30 pm on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 in Willington Methodist Church, to hear what she has to say about it?

**The Bedfordshire Bibliography.** Bedfordshire Historical Record Society has completed its pilot digitisation project of *The Bedfordshire Bibliography*. The *Bibliography* and its three supplements, long out of print, are now available to view on the Society's website at:

<http://www.bedfordshirehrs.org.uk/content/publication/bedfordshire-bibliography>

The *Bibliography* was an initiative of the Society in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The main volume and two supplements were compiled by L R Conisbee and the third supplement by A R Threadgill. Mr Conisbee searched locally held collections of Bedfordshire material, including grey literature, identifying items on Bedfordshire in general publications, hunted for obscure items and gained access to private collections. It became an in-depth bibliography of publications on Bedfordshire history and remains a starting point for anyone working on the county's history.

**A Place in the Country.** The University of Hertfordshire Press has published *A Place in the Country*, by Judith Pettigrew, Rory Reynolds and Sandra Rouse, the history of the Three Counties Asylum from 1860 to 1999, opened as a result of the Lunacy Act 1845 with the intention of providing humane treatment to replace the harsh regimes of private madhouses, prisons and workhouses. The book gives a detailed account of the buildings, staff and patients down to its closure as the Fairfield Hospital in 1999. The book is priced at £12.99 and further information is available from:

[www.UHPress.co.uk](http://www.UHPress.co.uk) or [UHPress@herts.ac.uk](mailto:UHPress@herts.ac.uk) or tel: 01707 284654.

## **An American at Wrest: Wrest Park in Edwardian times**

Over the past five years the Wrest Park history research team has been unearthing new aspects of the history of this wonderful house and garden. One hitherto relatively unknown period is the first decade of the last century. For a short period Wrest flourished with a different emphasis after many years first as a quiet dower house in Victorian times, and later in the shadow of the other houses of its owner Francis, 7th Earl Cowper.

On the death of the Earl at the age of 71 in July 1905, Wrest Park passed to his nephew, Auberon Herbert, grandson of the 3rd Earl of Carnarvon. Although a keen countryman, farmer and bird-watcher, the busy young Auberon ('Bron') also had particularly strong political aspirations. His first foray was in 1903 as the prospective Liberal candidate for South Huntingdonshire. Following his inheritance, and taking the title of Baron Lucas, he was not eligible for the Commons so he successfully sought a seat in the Lords which he would achieve in 1907.

Needing to be in London much of the time, and with a preference for his father's New Forest property 'Pickett Post', Bron looked at ways of off-loading the running of his new Bedfordshire house and garden, (but not the farms or wider estate in which he kept an interest). In September 1905 he found a willing tenant, Mr Whitelaw Reid, the American Ambassador to the Court of St James. By early 1906, Whitelaw Reid and his wife Elizabeth had made Wrest the centre of their country activities.

### **Career in America – the rise of the politician and diplomat**

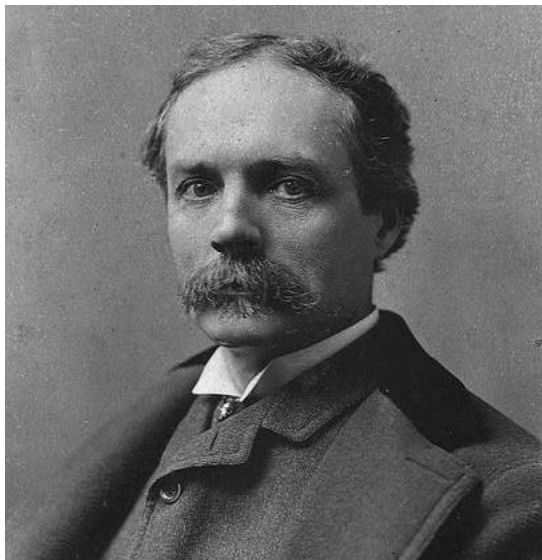
Born on a farm in rural Ohio in 1837, Whitelaw Reid attended his local Academy at Xenia and then Miami University, Ohio, graduating with a science degree. His forefathers had emigrated from the British Isles, on his father's side from Ulster and on his mother's from Scotland, and he was proud of his Ulster-Scots heritage.

With an avid interest in journalism, he started his career as editor and then owner of the *Xenia News*. After working as a noted war correspondent for the *Cincinnati Gazette* in the early years of the Civil War, he then moved to Washington and became Librarian to the House of Representatives from 1862 to 1865. His journalistic career advanced rapidly, reaching the heights of editor-in-chief of the strongly Republican *New York Tribune* in 1869 – one of the most powerful journalistic voices in the United States.

He married Elizabeth Ogden, daughter of Darius Ogden Mills, a wealthy Californian, in 1881 and they had two children, a son Ogden and a daughter, Jean.

Reid's political interests dominated the next few years and in 1892 he was named as Republican Vice-Presidential nominee to President Benjamin Harrison,

but lost the election to the Democrats Grover Cleveland and Adlai Stevenson. But Reid was not a man to accept setbacks and turned his attention to other opportunities – a career as a diplomat. By 1897 he had been appointed Special Ambassador to Great Britain conveying the congratulations of his country to the Queen on her Jubilee, and subsequently attending King Edward’s coronation. After a spell in France as Ambassador from 1889–1902, he ended his travels in London as Ambassador to the Court of St. James in 1905.



Reid as vice-presidential candidate (photo © Rookwood, 1982, Wikipedia)

### **The Ambassador at Wrest**

The Reids arrived in England in June 1905, but shortly after moving into their newly rented London home, Dorchester House in Park Lane (since demolished), concerns that the winter in London would affect his health led them to look for retreat out of the city. In September they took the lease of Wrest Park for £1,500 per year. One biographer writes: ‘They were as often at Wrest as at Dorchester House. The serenity of the place made it an invaluable scene to which to turn from the busy life and the searching fogs of London.’ The Reids are said to have employed 44 servants.

A mansion with such an historic past clearly held great appeal and although there was no electricity in the house this apparently did not matter to him. It offered the opportunity to ride and take part in many types of outdoor exercise and was ideal for lavish entertaining. It also had an excellent library, said to contain



many rare and first editions, and many paintings by world famous artists hung in the reception rooms.

Guests invited from London could either drive (just under 2 hours) or arrive at Flitwick by train (2-3 hours) where they would be met by Reid's car, painted blue with red coach lines and his monogram on the doors.

He often held shooting parties, described in letters to their friends Edith and Theodore Roosevelt. In 1907 he wrote of the total number of pheasants shot on one day to be 1,294, an occasion when Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught was a guest.

Ambassador Reid  
(Photo Beds Archives)

### **'Noblesse oblige' in Silsoe village**

Although clearly busy with affairs of state, the Reids frequently acted with generosity and apparently real interest in the affairs of Silsoe village and local people, entertaining the schoolchildren on several occasions. We have reports for September 1905 when 'jugglers and clowns from London greatly amused the guests for more than an hour' and in December 1905 Mrs Reid gave 'a monster Christmas tree for the schoolchildren'. In July 1907 the *Beds Mercury* again reported a school treat, in which the children marched in procession from the school down to the mansion, led by the Luton Red Cross Band (see page 13). The gates were decorated with flags and bunting in honour of the visit of Prince Arthur for the event. In the Orangery a conjuror from Harrods and the Royal Marionettes performed for an hour, afternoon tea was taken in the Bowling Green House with strawberries and cherries, and after that there was 'racing on the lawn' which lasted all evening. Prince Arthur then arrived and joined the fun. He was keen to 'ride the French

Horse which is always brought out on these occasions to test the skill of the lads'. We have the report of the winners of the various races – the Flat Race, Wide jump, Hopping Race, Three-legged Race, Egg and Spoon Race, Jacket and Gloves Race (for girls)! On leaving everyone received a bag of sweets and a bun – what fun!

The Reids were close friends of the Connaughts, and supported the Duchess's Hospital at Peshawar on the then Indian north-west frontier. In July 1908 they organised a 'Flitton and Silsoe Sale of Work' held in Flitton Vicarage gardens to raise funds. Apparently the gardens and rooms were decorated with the Royal Standard, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, and there were 'abundant and varied supplies of useful and fancy goods, also a fine lot of beautiful flowers' on sale. Mrs Reid, who had held a reception at Dorchester House the previous day, drove up to Flitton from London by car to declare the bazaar open. Greenfield schoolchildren performed Maypole dances and by the end of the day the bazaar had raised £40!

The event of the marriage of the Reid's only daughter Jean to John Hubert Ward (Equerry to King Edward VIII) in 1908 was a huge society event. It took place in the Chapel Royal, St James's Palace with the King and Queen in attendance, Princess Victoria, the Connaughts, the Princess Royal and the Duke of Fife, Grand Duke Michael of Russia, and many others. Importantly, Mrs Reid wanted the occasion to be marked at Wrest and arranged a luncheon in the Park for the employees and their wives, and tea for the school's teachers and children. A marquee was erected under the elms near the Lodge gates and over 100 people arrived for 2 o'clock, to be greeted by music from the Luton Red Cross Band (see page 13). In speeches afterwards the local doctor, Dr Nicholson, toasted the Reids saying: 'if they had not been Ambassador and Ambassadors their host and hostess would have passed as excellent types of fine old English gentleman and lady. Mrs Reid's name would be handed down in posterity in Silsoe and neighbourhood as the lady with the kind heart.'

In October 1910 Reid's friend the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie, one of the richest men in the world at the time, came to visit and together he and Whitelaw Reid opened the new Library in Luton. This had been sponsored by the Carnegie foundation, one of many Carnegie Libraries established in the British Isles at this period. His trust scheme was to provide half the money needed to establish a library in any town if the town itself would provide the remaining money, which in this case amounted to £1,600.

### **A keen motorist? The Bedfordshire Automobile Club Meet 1907**

In 1907 Mr Reid hosted a meeting of the Bedfordshire Automobile Club at Wrest Park at which approximately 60 cars participated. It was clearly quite a large event with a celebratory photo showing the participants on the steps of the south front. Was the event held due to a motoring interest of the Ambassador's or was it more

an interest in local affairs? We don't know, but this has featured in a previous edition of *History in Bedfordshire* (Vol 7, No 9, Winter 2016/17) with an appeal for any information known about the event. If any reader is able to shed light on any aspect of this event, the Wrest Park research team would be very pleased to hear from you.

### Visit of King Edward VII, July 1909

One of the ironies of Wrest's history is that in the 650 years of the Grey family's time, there is no clear record of any visit by their reigning monarch,<sup>1</sup> yet one of the highlights of the Reid's very short tenure was the visit of the King, Edward VII, on 24 July 1909.



The King's visit, 24 July 1909 (Photo Beds Archives)

The visit was covered by the *Bedfordshire Times* of 30 July, and what a great event it was for Silsoe! The whole village was decorated with flags and banners, children wore sashes or rosettes in red, white and blue and great numbers of spectators arrived in all sorts of vehicles. The gates at the Park entrance were decorated with large wreaths and flowers covered the iron railings.

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<sup>1</sup> There is some thought that Anne of Denmark, wife of James I, visited in the early 1600s but this is unproven.

The King arrived late in the afternoon in his limousine, but as the roof was up apparently it was difficult to see him. A flagstaff had been erected on the roof of the mansion and later the Royal Standard was seen flying from it to indicate that the King was in residence. A suite of three rooms over the Library was allocated for his private use (probably to give him the best view of the estate and countryside), having been lavishly redecorated with whitepaper, blue upholstery and a grey carpet. On Saturday evening, music provided by Cassano's orchestra entertained the dinner guests.



(Photos from the Ken Scott collection, by kind permission of Mr David Swain.)



On Sunday the King attended church in Silsoe, with the entrance path flanked by Boy Scouts, and some Girl Guides, of the Bedford, Luton and Harpenden districts, who were all duly inspected, no doubt with great solemnity. This was followed by a royal visit to the Church and Mausoleum in Flitton with Edward signing the visitors' roll in the vestry. Later in the afternoon, back at Wrest, a splendid tea was had with the local gentry, with extensive walks in the grounds.

### **End of an era**

Whitelaw Reid had suffered from a chest complaint for a long time and early in December 1912 he fell ill with bronchial problems. He died on 15 December in London. The King himself (George V) cabled the news to President Taft. A memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey later that month attended by representatives of the Royal Family, Prime Minister Asquith and many other British and foreign officials and friends. His body was taken on the armoured cruiser HMS *Natal* to New York where he was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.

For Bron Herbert this meant that Wrest again became his responsibility. We know that around this time he drew up plans for the sale of the estate, but didn't act upon them. He very much relied on his sister Lady Nan Herbert and Land Agent Cecil Argles to manage the estates. This they did until the outbreak of war in August 1914, when (as has been covered in a previous edition of *History in Bedfordshire*, Vol 7, No 6, Spring 2016), Wrest became first a military convalescent home and later a fully fledged military hospital. After the war the estate was indeed sold, marking the end of the family's association with Wrest of almost 650 years.

The Wrest Park research team would be very pleased to hear from any readers who are able to provide any further information on this interesting but relatively unknown period in Wrest's history.

[wresthistor volunteers@english-heritage.org](mailto:wresthistor volunteers@english-heritage.org)

## **The Rise and Fall of Hall of Crosshall**

In St Mary's churchyard in Eaton Socon Christopher Hall, his wife Jane and their son John are buried together in one plot. What first drew me to their grave was the monument on top of the plinth, an urn half-veiled. Never having come across this before, I wondered what it signified. According to the internet, it is called the veil of death for: 'A shroud conceals the partition between life and death, and is symbolic of mortality, sorrow and mourning. It is most commonly seen draped over an urn.'<sup>1</sup> Possibly a common Victorian memorial then, but by the time I had become aware of this I had already gone behind the veil of the Halls' story.

Nor was I the first, for the Halls featured in an Eatons Community Association publication of 2006. This explained that Christopher Hall of Little Paxton had taken

over Cross Hall farm as a tenant in 1859, employing 15 men and 5 boys on 500 acres. 'In the next few years Christopher must have made a considerable amount of money from the farm and by 1867 he owned freehold cottages and land at The Ford.'<sup>2</sup> By 1881 Christopher had passed the farm on to his son John and had retired to another property on the Great North Road, though still describing himself as a farmer and dealer in that year's Census. Christopher died five months after his wife on 3 July 1889 aged 75 leaving £4,775,<sup>3</sup> the equivalent of more than £300,000 today, to his surviving sons, 40-year-old James, who had moved to Rothersthorpe, Northampton, and John, then aged 37.



Cross Hall Farm House, Lot 3 in the 1920 Paxton Hall Estate sales brochure <sup>4</sup>

The Halls were tenants of the Reynolds of Paxton Hall, a family dynasty that lasted for almost 200 years since the property was acquired by the then Bishop of Lincoln, the Rt Rev Dr Richard Reynolds (1674–1744) in 1730. It then passed in 1737 to his son George Reynolds, the first of the family to attend Trinity Hall at Cambridge University, and who, as if in one of Trollope's Barchester novels, was both Chancellor of the Peterborough Diocese and Archdeacon of Lincoln. It continued down the family line to his son Richard in 1769 and then his grand-nephew Lawrence who died in 1839.<sup>5</sup>

Lawrence Reynolds had 12 children and his will specified that Paxton Hall should not pass to the oldest, Richard, then aged 31, until the youngest, then aged 10, should come of age. In the meantime Richard would receive £300 a year but would not receive his full inheritance worth £3,000 a year before 1850.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps for this reason: Richard Reynolds was then a captain in the 11th Hussars, with the added misfortune that his commanding officer was Lord Brudenell, better known as the 7th Earl of Cardigan who would lead them (the Light Brigade) into the valley of death at Balaclava.

Cardigan had a particular talent for falling out with his senior officers, sometimes court-martialling them, and destroying the regiment's reputation for

efficiency and comradeship in the process. He had been drummed out of the 15th Hussars previously after attempting to court-martial another captain, Augustus Wathen. Wathen was found not guilty, King William IV exonerated him and Cardigan was removed from command in March 1834 and placed on the half-pay list.<sup>7</sup> Two years later, however, he had bought his way back into the army for £40,000 as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 11th Hussars, joining the regiment in India just before it returned to England.

In 1840 Cardigan had Richard Reynolds court-martialled in a dispute that had started over a bottle of wine at a regimental dinner but swiftly escalated. When the court-martial took place on 25 September Reynolds was cashiered for disobeying orders,<sup>8</sup> but his case continued to be reported in *The Times* through October and November 1840 as people rallied to his defence, even going so far as to advocate a subscription in his support until his inheritance came through.<sup>9</sup> On 31 October 1840 Reynolds had written to *The Times* from Paxton Hall asking that this subscription not be raised, nor appeals made to Queen Victoria, on his behalf. However, he clearly did hope that her 'uninfluenced consideration' would take into account his 15 years of faithful service and decide that this one aberration was due to his honour being questioned.<sup>10</sup> However, his oblique appeal had no effect, but Reynolds did at least avoid Balaclava, becoming a highly respected magistrate and chairman of the local Poor Law Union instead.

When Reynolds took over the estate in 1850, Christopher Hall was still at Little Paxton, farming 311 acres at The Birches with 14 labourers. Broad asserts that Hall 'remained here for the next thirty years', with The Birches becoming known as Hall's Farm.<sup>11</sup> This is difficult to reconcile with the Eatons Community Association information which simply repeats that recorded in the 1861 to 1881 Censuses. In the 1861 Census Christopher Hall is described as farming 500 acres which, compared to his predecessor's 200 acres in 1851, might mean that the Cross Hall 'farm had more than doubled' as the Eatons pamphlet puts it. An alternative explanation, however, might be that the 500 acres comprised holdings at both Little Paxton and Cross Hall.

In 1867 the Paxton Hall estate was inherited by Reynolds' nephew Edward. Like the farm it was then flourishing, but over the next 20 years Edward Reynolds' relationships with Little Paxton people deteriorated, not least in a dispute over the village school, and Paxton Hall found itself eclipsed by the increasing status of the nearby Paxton Park. This had been sold in 1878 to Lord Esme Stewart Gordon, heir presumptive to his brother Charles Gordon, the 11th Marquis of Huntly, who had a castle in Aberdeen and a country mansion at Orton Longueville, near Peterborough.<sup>12</sup>

As Edward Reynolds' influence diminished, he wound down his interests at Little Paxton, buying land at Hail Weston and leasing out the home farm at Little Paxton from 1879. In 1888 the estate passed to his son Edward who, like his father,

had completed his education at Trinity Hall. He held on to the estate until 1920 when 1,696 acres were auctioned off, including Cross Hall farm which by that stage comprised 159 acres.



Paxton Hall (East), Lot 5 in the 1920 Paxton Hall Estate sales brochure

Meanwhile Christopher Hall seems to have picked just the right moment to hand on the farm to his son John. Huntingdonshire was primarily arable, with half the acreage in the county given over to wheat and grain<sup>13</sup> and, when the country went into agricultural depression at the start of the 1880s, Huntingdonshire proved to be the hardest hit in those early years: 'on average [in Huntingdonshire in 1881–1883] one farmer in 150 failed each year; locally the level may have approached one in say twenty or thirty.'<sup>14</sup>

John Hall did not go bankrupt but times were tough, partly because of the size of the farm for, if he was still farming the 500 acres ascribed to his father, this would have made it one of the largest, with the majority being no bigger than 200 acres.<sup>15</sup> His father had found size a benefit when times were good, but it was equally a disadvantage when circumstances changed. In addition, the situation was exacerbated by 'a series of unusually cold and wet years . . . on the heavy lands'.<sup>16</sup>

According to the Eatons pamphlet John Hall was forced to sell his stock and move out because of the depression. However, the sale did not take place until September 1890, a year after he had inherited Acacia House on the Great North Road from his father and two years after the younger Edward Reynolds had become his landlord. He may have struggled on through the 1880s, perhaps hoping for an upturn that would make the farm as profitable as his father had found it, but having less motivation to do so once his father had died. In the 1891 Census, not yet 40, he still described himself as a farmer but by then was living at Acacia House with his wife Harriette and their three young children. The family was well enough off to employ two teenaged servants and a governess. He died in 1894 and in 1901

his wife and daughter were living alone in the Honeydon part of Eaton Socon off the Great North Road. She also continued to describe herself as a farmer.

## Notes

\* Hugh Gault is an independent writer and historian, His books include the first biography of Kingsley Wood, the second and concluding part of which was published in May 2017. Further details at [www.grettonbooks.co.uk](http://www.grettonbooks.co.uk) He has written many historical articles for a variety of publications and recently co-edited an issue of *The Historian* on Asa Briggs. See <https://www.history.org.uk/hanews/news/3337/the-historian-133-out-now> (the digital version).

1. <https://wordsonstone.wordpress.com/2016/12/31/veil-of-death/> – accessed 3 July 2017.
2. Eatons Community Association, *Eatons People and Places, Part 5: Cross Hall – Farmers, Lemonade and Golfers, 1799–2006* (St Neots, 2006), pp 43–44.
3. Probate, 20 August 1880.
4. Both the Cross Hall Farm House and Paxton Hall (East) illustrations come from a sales brochure when the Paxton Hall Estate was sold in 1920. My thanks to Cambridge University Library, Maps Room, for supplying them.
5. David A Broad, *The History of Little Paxton* (Little Paxton: Broad, 2006), pp 207–241. Also, Paxton Hall Estate sales brochure, 1 July 1920. Lot 3 of 27 was Cross Hall Farm comprising 159 acres of market garden, arable and pasture land, a five-bed farmhouse, farm buildings and two two-bed cottages.
6. *The Times*, 9 November 1840, p 3.
7. Ernest Perceval (1807–1896), the youngest of the 12 children of the assassinated Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, had also been in the 15th Hussars, retiring a year after Cardigan joined them when already his ‘regime was arousing . . . a good deal of discontent’. Hugh Gault, *Living History: A Family’s 19th Century* (Cambridge: Gretton Books, 2010), pp 256–261.
8. *The Times*, 17, 26 and 29 September; 6 and 22 October 1840.
9. *Ibid*, 23 October–12 November 1840.
10. *Ibid*, 3 November 1840.
11. Broad, *op cit*, pp 293–294.
12. *Walford’s County Families of the United Kingdom*, 40th annual publication (London: Chatto and Windus, 1900), p 417. The Marquis sat in the House of Lords as Baron Meldrum.
13. E J T Collins (Ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol VII (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p 1794.
14. P J Perry, ‘Where was the “great agricultural depression”? A geography of agricultural bankruptcy in late Victorian England and Wales’ (1972) 20 *Agricultural History Review*, pp 33–45 (p 36).
15. Collins, *op cit*, p 1853.
16. Perry, *op cit*, p 36.

Hugh Gault\*

## Luton Red Cross Band

In the article on Wrest Park, above, there were two mentions of The Luton Red Cross Band as providing the musical entertainment for events there. From previous reading I happened to know a little about this illustrious band which was founded in 1883 by six members from the Ashton Road Mission Band, because the mission band was not allowed to take part in competitions.

By the early 1900s the band had built up an excellent reputation and in 1908 they were the first brass band to compete abroad, at the Brussels Exhibition; they were also the first brass band to broadcast ‘live’ on radio from Alexandra Palace and the first brass band to play in a film: ‘Up for the Cup’ in 1929.

In 1910, the band's professional conductor was William Halliwell who also conducted other bands in the north of England, including the famous Wingates Temperance and Fodens Motor Works. On his recommendation Fred Mortimer, from Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, was appointed bandmaster at Luton and in 1911, the entire Mortimer family came to Talbot Road and Fred found work in the local hat industry. The band had difficulty in paying the bandmaster, but fortunately Lady Zia Wernher of Luton Hoo became their patron and Fred was paid £2 a week. Fred's son, Harry (see below), with his brothers Alex and Rex, began to play in the junior band, but quickly moved to the senior band – Harry ultimately becoming principal cornet.

The *Luton News* (31 May 1917) said 'Luton has always been proud of its Red Cross Band', in that week it printed pictures of 20 bandsmen who had joined the Army. The newspaper featured the Army career of Lance-Corporal F W V Scott of the Royal Irish Rifles who joined the Luton Territorials in 1910 as a bandsman and was awarded the silver cup for being the smartest recruit. In 1914 he was mobilised with the 1/5th Bedfords and went to Gallipoli as a stretcher bearer, and into the 'big smash' when so many of the Bedfords were casualties. Invalided home with dysentery and jaundice, he was kept in hospital in England and discharged in 1916, starting work at hat manufacturers Carruthers Bros in King Street. After a short time his health improved so much that he re-enlisted. He joined at the same time and in the same regiment as band conductor Fred Mortimer and three others of the Red Cross Band and served in France.

Sadly, two days after publication of the band members' photos, Sergeant Alfred Mullett (Beds Regiment in France), of 142 Castle Street, Luton (who played the tenor horn), was killed in action as the result of a shell striking the parapet of a trench he was occupying with his Lewis gun team.

In those days the National Brass Band Championships were held at Crystal Palace (they had started in 1900, but were suspended during the war and reinstated in 1920). In 1923 the Luton band became National Champions of Great Britain, winning the '1000 Guinea Trophy' beating some of the best bands in the country – to date they are the only southern band ever to achieve that distinction. However, Ted Carter celebrated the event in an unusual manner because Fred Mortimer had asked him to switch to the flugelhorn for the competition. Ted vowed that, should Luton win, he would throw 'this damn coffee-pot' under the first train he saw. Which he did!

The Mortimers moved back north in 1924/1925, to join the Fodens Motor Works Band at Sandbach in Cheshire where they were to enjoy even greater success. When the Mortimers left Luton Ted Carter, Ernie Davis (a product of the junior band) and Albert Coupe led the band.

In the 1960s BBC radio programme 'Challenging Brass', each band performed a short programme which was broadcast and judged by qualified adjudicators. In

1965 Luton lost in the semi-final to Camborne Town. After the final, the four semi-finalists (Rushden, Camborne, Hanwell and Luton) joined together for a 'massed bands' concert.

On 22 April 1972 the band won the Championship section of the W D & H O Wills Brass Band Championships. These Championships ended in 1973 so the band were allowed to keep the trophy.

When in 1972 double-bass player Fred Hargreaves died he left about £10,000, and gave approximately £500 to his family and the rest to a trust fund for the band which provided them with a small income in hard times.

In 1978 on soprano cornet Eric Capron became solo champion of Great Britain. During the 1970s and 80s the band continued to make radio broadcasts and appeared on local television. They made a number of recordings and filmed a promotional video for London's Trocadero which was shown in MGM cinemas.

Their last win at contests was at the 1997 Aylesbury Contest when they won the 'Open' section playing 'Trittico' by James Curnow, conducted by Phillip Littlemore.

In May 2014 they held a reunion concert for the Luton Band and a celebration concert to commemorate the momentous achievements of the Luton Red Cross Band and the 90th anniversary of winning the National Brass Band Championship on 29 September 1923. It is not clear when 'Red Cross' was dropped from the band's title or what was the historic connection with the Red Cross.

## **Harry Mortimer**

Harry Mortimer became one of the greatest celebrities of the brass band movement. In later years he was also associated with the famous Luton Girls' Choir which arose from his lifetime friendship with its founder Arthur E Davies, a boy soprano and pianist. As young men they performed as a duo at the Luton Salvation Army Citadel. During the war years and after, Harry was brass and military band adviser to the BBC. At the 150th British Open Championships in 2002 at Symphony Hall in Birmingham tribute was paid to Harry on the centenary of his birth.

As a cornet player in the National Championships, Harry Mortimer made his playing debut in 1913 at the age of 11. With the Luton Red Cross Band he won four prizes: in 1920, 4th; 1921, 6th; 1922, 2nd; 1923, 1st. As mentioned above, 1923 was, and remains, the only time a southern band has won the National Championships of Great Britain. While living in Luton Harry worked for the Great Northern Railway and Vauxhall Motors but music always came first.

When he moved to the Fodens Band on 29 December 1924 Harry was not yet 23. With Fodens he gained 10 more prizes at the Nationals between 1925 and 1938 – in the years 1932 to 1938 taking first place.

As a conductor he had an amazing record at the British Open, National Championships and the Regional Qualifying Contests with various bands from 1945 to 1957, achieving 33 first places in all the Contests, and was the Guest Conductor at

the Grand Festival Concert following the National Championships in 1949–1955 and 1981.

He made 97 records, 21 as a soloist. As a cornet soloist he appeared at the Grand Festival Concerts in 1924, 1930, 1931 as well as a Command Performance at Windsor Castle for the King and his family in 1938. He formed the 'All Star Concert Band' in 1951 and conducted them on a total of 17 78 rpm and 16 45 rpm records followed by his 'Men O' Brass' whom he conducted on 28 LPs between 1958 and 1978. He organised the brass band movement's tribute the Queen for her Silver Jubilee in 1977 with a Massed Band Concert at the Royal Albert Hall. He organised the British Open Championships from 1976 to 1991 and when he died he had been awarded a Doctorate, CBE, Hon D Lit and was a FRNCM.

Harry Mortimer was born on 10 April 1902 and died on 23 January 1992. He was 89 years old.

My father and uncle were heavily involved in brass bands, my father as principal trombone and my uncle as a conductor. When I was young I heard a lot about Harry Mortimer and he was always spoken of with the greatest respect and almost with reverence. I saw him once on TV at a concert as a very old man listening to a young cornet soloist playing beautifully with the tears streaming down his face.

Harry Mortimer's life shows that with exceptional talent one can rise from humble beginnings to great heights. Harry's brothers Rex and Alex both became musical directors and led successful bands.

## References

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## Publication Received

*Bedfordshire Local History Magazine*, October 2017 ['September' on back cover], No 100, Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society. This issue contains articles by Stuart Antrobus on 'Some Significant Women with Bedford Connections'; Bob Ricketts on 'Consuming passions – Shops and Shopping in Georgian Bedford (1714–1837)'; Stuart Antrobus on 'Holidays at Home in Bedford during the Second World War'; and Stuart Antrobus again on 'Bedford's Commemorative Plaques'. Bob Ricketts reviews *Bedfordshire Archaeology*, Vol 27; *Newnham: a Roman bath house and estate centre east of Bedford*; and Part 2 of Richard Morgan's article on Dr George Witt which appeared in this publication in Spring 2017. There are also items on the Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society and the Royal Flying Corps Home Defence Squadron 75 at Goldington. The magazine costs £3.50 and is available from the Eagle Bookshop, 103 Castle Road, Bedford MK40 3QP.