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Notes and news

A brief history of St Peter de Merton, Bedford
A Brief History and Guide to the Parish Church of St Peter de Merton with St Cuthbert, Bedford, has been produced on behalf of the Friends of St Peter’s, Bedford. The booklet is illustrated and consists of 17 printed pages and appeared in December 2018.

Christians have worshipped for over 1,000 years on the site of this landmark building whose Saxon tower is believed to be the oldest man-made structure still standing in Bedford. Some stones in its masonry date back to the late 10th or early 11th century – remarkable survivors of the piratical Danish raids, withstanding fire and storm. The history of that small church is none too clear until its restoration some 200 years later when it was in the care of the wealthy Norman Augustinian foundation of Merton Priory in Surrey. Later, as Bedford's population grew, it was enlarged and extended further westwards by the Victorians, creating imitation medieval architecture in keeping with that already in the ancient church.

The booklet is available from Rosemary Evans at 15 Linden Road, Bedford MK40 2DQ. A minimum donation of £2.50 is requested to cover p & p together with Gift Aiding details, if applicable. Cheques should be made payable to 'St. Peter de Merton, Bedford'.

From Willington manor court rolls
Soon after she retired Dorothy Jamieson was introduced to a large cardboard box full of rolls of parchment which held, among other things, about 100 manor court rolls for Willington, the earliest of which dated from 1384. She was fascinated and began to try to learn medieval Latin which led her to become a part-time mature student at no fewer than six universities.

The translation and study of the Willington manor court rolls turned into a 20-year history project and Bedfordshire Historical Record Society volume 95, Willington and the Mowbrays; after the Peasants’ Revolt, to be published shortly, is the result.

In the years immediately after the Peasants’ Revolt the powerful Mowbrays became Dukes of Norfolk and Earls Marshal of England, that is, heads of the armed forces. They were close to Richard II, but fell from grace and lost their titles and land in 1399. When Henry V came to the throne in 1413 their lands and titles began to be restored and in 1432, after the death of John Mowbray, Willington became part of the dower of his
widow, Katherine Neville, and her further three husbands, until her death in 1482 or 83.

The Mowbrays held a group of manors in Bedfordshire but the records for Willington are the most numerous. They used a variety of management strategies but a key part of the management strategy in Willington was the employment of a local man as bailiff. Manor courts were held there in the autumn and the spring; the one in the autumn being the more important.

A pattern of consistent management by administrators and the lord's or lady's Councils emerges from the documents. Stewards visited the manor at least twice a year to hold the manor courts and took steps to try to protect the lord's or lady's income from the manor and the value of their timber, their buildings and other assets. An interesting feature of the documents is the number of inserthouses which they record. These buildings usually appear in ones and twos in documents elsewhere, but between 1408 and 1423, 21 different tenants had at least one of them in Willington. No detailed descriptions of the accommodation in this type of building have been found.

The men of Willington stood together to force their lords or ladies to reduce rents on some lands and at least 24 men participated in the juries in the manor courts held in the autumn. Several men also held manorial office as constables, assessors of fines and tasters of ale. Village women were influential in bringing offenders to justice in the early part of the fifteenth century and in the development of brewing in later years. Men took precedence over their wives but two high-status women were ladies of the manor between 1406 and 1483.

There is no evidence that the absentee landlords and ladies exploited their tenants or that religion dominated the lives of the tenants and their servants. In Willington debt, petty crime and violence is seldom recorded, in complete contrast to the neighbouring manor of Blunham Greys, held by the Greys of Wrest Park. Tenants in Willington took opportunities to better themselves and their families but most seem to have shared traditional community values and a sense of fair play.

There is some evidence that a few individual tenants tried to extend their holdings and increase their productivity by what might be described as pre-enclosure behaviours. In the early 15th century and then again in mid-century, some were fined for encroaching on their neighbours' lands, making illegal enclosures, by obstructing common watercourses and obstructing access by others to their lands by ploughing up or blocking tracks.
Katherine Neville, dowager duchess of Norfolk, outlived her four husbands (one of whom was about 40 years younger than her), her son, her grandson, her great-grand-daughter Anne, who was the last of this Mowbray line and Anne’s Royal husband, Richard, Duke of York, who disappeared into the Tower of London in 1480 and became one of the Princes in the Tower. After Katherine’s death in 1482 or 83 evidence of life in Willington under the Howard family, is sketchy. There seems not to have been a second jury at the manor courts, which were held less regularly between her death and 1522, though most of the records have not survived.

Great changes were made on the manor after it was purchased by local boy made good, John Gostwyk, and his wife Joan, in 1529. He left us a treatise describing his business approach to estate management, written for his son, and demolished the medieval manor; but he left us four splendid Tudor buildings at the west end of the village, three of which are open to the public.

Dorothy would be happy to give talks to local groups about how she became a historian and what her research has taught her about Willington and other Bedfordshire manors after the Peasants’ Revolt. Talks will last between 45 minutes and an hour and any fees which she receives will be donated to the National Trust. For more details contact her on Dorothy.jamieson@ntlworld.com or phone 01234 404879.

The Duchess of Bedford and the colour of naval uniforms
In his book *British Sea Power* (Robinson, 2003), David Howarth relates that, in the middle of the 18th century, the Admiralty decided that the colour of Royal Navy officers’ uniforms should be based on ‘the sober blue of the Duchess of Bedford’s riding habit’. In 1857 it was decided that ordinary seaman should have uniforms and this colour was again chosen for them and the colour was followed by navies throughout the world!

Bedford History Timeline
The Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society has published a *Bedford History Timeline* by Alan Crawley and Bob Ricketts which charts the history of the town from AD 571 to 1938 with introductions on the town’s early history and early churches. Copies cost £8 and can be bought from the Eagle Bookshop at 103 Castle Road or direct from Bob Ricketts. See the review on page 18.
‘Holidays at Home’ in Bedford during the Second World War

Enter any railway station in Britain during the Second World War and you would be faced with a poster carrying the challenging question ‘Is your journey really necessary?’ The reason was simple – the railway system was vital to the flow of troops and war equipment and had been taken over by the wartime coalition Government. It was essential that passenger movements were kept to a minimum, particularly if they were for inessential purposes. Similarly, the use of petrol was rationed because of the shortage of imported motor fuel and the use of cars for recreational purposes became more and more difficult. Many car owners simply gave up the use of their vehicles and kept them jacked up, in their garages until the end of the war.

One of the many effects of these wartime restrictions was that the traditional idea of going on holiday to the seaside or to relatives in another part of the country was made more difficult and officially discouraged. Conscious, however, that war workers, often doing arduous 12-hour shifts in munitions and others factories, would need to have alternative outlets for recreation and recuperation during their week-long summer break, the Government came up with the idea of promoting ‘Holidays at Home’ (or ‘Stay-at-home’ holidays). (Figure 1)

Left: Figure 1: Reginald Mayes poster for the Railway Executive Committee: ‘Holidays: Passenger to stay at home’. (Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum: ArtIWM PST 4934).

Local authorities were asked to provide a wide range of free or inexpensive events and facilities for entertainment and recreation locally and the Government provided national propaganda publicity to try to persuade citizens that this was not only attractive but also a key part of the war effort, saving scarce fuel and resources which would otherwise be used up with long journeys away from home.
Bedford was no exception. Starting in the summer of 1941 and continuing until the summer of 1944, the Borough Council worked with a wide range of local sports and entertainment venues, facilities and societies to lay on daily programmes of daytime and evening activities locally which would, they hoped, attract both young and old and provide a sense of being on holiday, away from normal working lives.

Not surprisingly, Bedford’s range of parks, river frontages and surrounding countryside were sites which were exploited to provide all sorts of entertainments and opportunities to try new activities, some provided by local groups and societies, others engaging professional performers and entertainments providers such as fairgrounds and circuses. Exceptionally, Bedford, as host town to the BBC music departments during the war already had ready access to top-class orchestras, singers and musicians who provided extra popular concerts, often at lunchtimes as well as in the evening. Fortuitously, Captain Glenn Miller was in Bedford for six months with his top, big-band musicians, using the BBC recording facilities to record and transmit music to American forces over here. His American Band of the Supreme Allied Command gave two public concerts in the Corn Exchange on 9 July and 11 August 1944, during the ‘Holidays at Home’ period.

Well-funded national organisations such as the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA)\(^3\) and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA)\(^4\) provided additional concerts as part of their touring remit to take entertainment and the arts to where people lived and worked and maintain morale. As a result, more people saw and heard ballet, drama and opera during the Second World War than at any other time because companies were charged with taking these art forms to all parts of the country.\(^5\)
In Bedford, the Mayor organised a committee under Mr L W Bond, as Honorary Secretary, for the years 1941 and 1942. In March 1943, Will Spens, Regional Commissioner in Cambridge, circulated a letter headed ‘Holidays at Home: Summer Holidays for Workers’ to all towns with a population of over 5,000, outlining good practice. He pointed out that travel for workers would be even more restricted than in the previous two years and that it was again desirable for war workers to enjoy their holidays in their home towns. Councillor J B Hansford took on the responsibility of Honorary Organising Secretary.

Figure 3: Bedford ‘Holidays at Home Programme’ advertisement Bedfordshire Times, 17 July 1942, p 7.

Bedford’s ‘Holidays at Home Committee’ in planning for the summer of 1943, looked at measures which had proved successful in previous years: the encouragement of entertainments but also personal activities which cost little or nothing but provided relaxation and were enjoyable. These latter included such things as walking, cycling, swimming and athletic meetings, gardening, boating on local rivers and lakes. The aim was to encourage activities which avoided the need for special transport, due to the restrictions on the use of imported fuel. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Bedford ‘Holidays at Home’ 1943 programme, page 4 (back page): Bedfordshire Archives Bor BB 30/2/9.

Entertainments would be organised such as bands in parks and other public spaces, visits by concert parties and theatrical and variety
companies, and social dancing, both indoors and outdoors. As well as touring professional artistes there were events involving local semi-professional musical and performing talents, such as dance bands.\footnote{7}

Not surprisingly, the aim was for these campaigns to be self-supporting and to be no financial burden on the local authority. Any profits accrued from events for which there was a charge were to go to locally agreed wartime charities. An allocation of £800 was made for running expenses and the Borough Council agreed to meet any approved deficit out of the ‘general and war contingencies’ fund.\footnote{8}

\[\text{Figure 5: ‘Folk--Dancers Make Holiday at Home’, members of the Bedfordshire branch of the English Folk Dance Society give a display in the grounds of Bedford Girls Modern School, Saturday 25 July 1942. Bedfordshire Times, 31 July 1942, p 3.}\]

On 7 May 1943, the Bedford Committee produced a draft programme for the summer which shows the range of provision for workers’ relaxation and enjoyment during their statutory break from war work: four Sunday concerts to be held at the Granada cinema, Thurston’s Fun Fair\footnote{9} (to be held 18 August to 1 September), a fortnight’s circus, pet dog show, baby show, pony gymkhana, brass band competition, tug-of-war competition, concert parties and Shakespearian plays, whist drives, swimming gala, cricket matches, bowling matches, children’s regatta on the Boating Pool, Punch and Judy shows, children’s decorated cycle parade, physical training display, boxing, bridge-building competition, barge races, boating events and social dancing in Russell Park (\textbf{Figure 5}).

Surprisingly, perhaps, given the need to conserve electricity, the Embankment was to be illuminated in the evening up to blackout hours
during the Holidays at Home period (except during any earlier air raids, of course). The Corn Exchange was to be reserved on certain dates in order to provide alternative accommodation in the event of wet weather. Prizes were to be given for competitive events. The chosen charity to be supported by the Committee, should there be a surplus after all expenses, would be the Beds and Herts Prisoner of War Comforts fund. Catering facilities, if possible, were to be provided in Russell Park.

The District Board of the Ministry of Production wanted to stagger the weeks during which local firms were granted leave to allow workers to have their periods of recreation and recuperation, so that not all factories closed during the chosen Holidays at Home weeks. However, 95% of local firms agreed on 24 July to 9 August in 1943. The programme finally extended from 22 July to 4 September 1943.

Practical arrangements for putting on these facilities and events were considerable, as the Minutes of the Committee reveal. The curfew time on evening buses was extended for seven evenings during the programme to enable participants to get home. Not everything they hoped for would happen. For example, first, Dudeney and Johnston Ltd, then Messrs Lyons and Sons were asked to provide a Cafeteria Tent in Russell Park but both firms declined. Similarly, Charles Wells, Bedford (brewers), then Messrs Wells & Winch Ltd of Biggleswade were asked to provide a Beer Tent but both said it was not possible. Instead the local subsidised British Restaurants in the town, in Mill Street and Cauldwell Street, agreed to stay open until 6.30 pm to allow visitors to eat before evening events and works canteens of the firms which would be closing for the summer period said that they were prepared to make sandwiches each day for those employees who desired them.

Figure 6: 1944 Bedford Borough ‘Holidays at Home’ Programme of Daily Events programme front cover. Bedfordshire Archives Bor BB 30/2/9.

Because of the nationwide provision of ‘Holidays at Home’ programmes, it was difficult for councils to book the best bands and the limited number
of fairground operators and circuses. The Bedford Committee, in reviewing their success in 1943, determined to get in early with their plans for 1944 so as to not miss out on crowd-drawing attractions. Having learned from their catering difficulties, for 1944, they made early arrangements with the local factory canteens for them to provide catering, given temporary public licences for that holiday period by the Food Control Committee, while they were no longer needed at their work places (Figures 6 & 7).

The fact that for 1944 a paid professional Entertainments Manager was appointed for the summer period is testament to the scale and complexity of the ‘Holidays at Home’ programme as it had developed over four years in Bedford. Councillor Hansford, who chaired the Committee, agreed in December 1943 to continue to act ‘for the time being’ as Honorary Organising Secretary and make any necessary advance booking.

Other campaigns and events piggy-backed on to the Holidays at Home scheme. The Bedfordshire Book Drive was held during the programme to take advantage of advertising itself among the holiday crowds. A Military Tournament was held at the Goldington Road Rugby Ground and a Regimental Regatta held on the river, the proceeds from these events to be donated to Service charities.
As always, publicity was a key to the success of the programmes but with the wartime Control of Paper Order in force the numbers of posters and leaflets was limited. Bedfordshire Times agreed to publicise the arrangements for the Holidays at Home programme. With additional events before and after the main factory closure period to be put on, mainly in the evenings, this made concentrated publicity even more difficult.¹²

Not just musical, sporting and performance arts featured in the programme. The visual arts were not forgotten. CEMA made possible a month-long exhibition of drawings from the Tate Gallery in London to be put on in Bedford Library in July 1944, featuring the works of artists such as Edward Burne-Jones, Augustus John, William Blake, Aubrey Beardsley and William Hogarth.¹³

It is difficult to say just how effective these ‘Holidays at Home’ programme were, nationally or in Bedford, in reducing travel away from the home town during the summer holiday period. What one can say is that these programmes certainly enriched the provision of recreation and entertainment through both free or paid events. The Bedford Borough ‘Holidays at Home’ Committee concluded: ‘That there is every evidence that the programme met with approval and that many thousands of people from both town and country took advantage of the arrangements made for their benefit.’

John Turner, a schoolboy during the war, remembers ‘a massive programme of events and entertainments each year from April to September’, a combination of ‘Holidays at Home’ and BBC music concerts. He saw a ballet performance for the first time and heard the blind jazz pianist George Shearing one Sunday. ‘Much fades from the memory but these exciting and often dangerous times made a strong impact on my formative years . . . For one as young as I was at the time, these were amazing times, etched in my memory forever.’¹⁴

Acknowledgements
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We are grateful to the author and the Editor of Bedford Local History Magazine, for permission to reprint this article which first appeared in No 100, September/October 2017, pp 41–50.
Notes

1. Bert Thomas designed a series of these posters for the Railway Executive Committee. See:
   http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/26111. (See PST 0144, PST 0159 & PST 15142 on the Imperial War Museum website.)
   A cartoon by Giles from the Sunday Express, 9 April 1944, was later made into a propaganda poster. It shows Giles' eponymous extended cartoon family stuck in a passenger railway carriage sitting in the middle of hundreds of goods wagons in an enormous siding, and a railway worker saying to them, 'Perhaps This'll Teach You To stay at 'Ome Next 'Oliday' (See online, courtesy of the Imperial War Museum: Art.WM PST 2823).

2. The Railway Executive Committee (REC) was a government body which controlled the operation of Britain's railways during the Second World War, as it had also done during the First World War. The REC was re-formed on 24 September 1938 with a remit to run Britain's railways if war broke out. When war broke out the railways were brought under government control through the REC under the direction of the Ministry of Transport. The Big Four railway companies, comprising the Great Western Railway (GWR), the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), the London and North Eastern Railway (LNER), and the Southern Railway (SR), joined with the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) to produce, effectively, a nationalised railway.

3. See the Wikipedia online entry on ENSA:
   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entertainments_National_Service_Association

4. The Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was founded by Royal Charter in 1940, using funds provided by The Pilgrims Trust, to provide wartime arts and entertainment, and money was given to ballet, opera, orchestras and drama companies to perform in military camps and to civilians. It tended to promote classical music and the so-called 'high arts' as opposed to variety shows and popular music, which was provided mostly by the Entertainment National Service Association (ENSA). CEMA's motto was 'The best for the most'. After the end of the Second World War, CEMA led on to the creation of the Arts Council of England.

5. Ballet Rambert performed at the Town Hall, Bedford, on 27, 28, 29 January and at the Royal County Theatre, Bedford, 13–18 November 1944. Their ballet repertoire would have included: Bar Aux Folies Bergere by Ninette de Valois, Façade by Frederick Ashton & Death and the Maiden by Andree Howard. The Donna Roma Ballet Company performed outdoors in Russell Park during the 'Holidays at Home' programme, 2–4 August 1944. It has only recently been discovered that Ballet Rambert also performed at Bletchley Park for the code-breakers during their January 1944 visit and dancers stayed in hostels in the Bedford area.

6. Bedfordshire Archives Bor BB 30/2/9: Letter from Will Spens, Commissioner, St Regis, Montague Road, Cambridge, dated 24 March 1943, stuck into the front page of the ‘Holidays at Home Committee Minute Book’ prior to the report of the 30 April 1943 meeting.

7. Local dance bands featured in the Holidays at Home programmes included 'The Modernistics'.

8. In 1941 and 1942 the aim of making a profit was achieved. In 1943 and 1944, expenditure exceeded income and the Borough Council had to subsidise the programme. For the accounts for 1944, see: Bedfordshire Archives Bor BB 30/2/9: ‘Holidays at Home Committee Minute Book, 11 October 1944, para. 6/6.

9. Charles Thurston, President of the Showmen's Guild, joined the RAF during the war and became a Flight Lieutenant. Over 1000 showpeople from fairground ‘families’ joined the Forces during the Second World War and many more became Bevin Boys, working down coal mines, or in factories, as their war service.

10. For 1943, for example, John Edginton & Co Ltd was engaged to supply and erect a marquee in Russell Park at a cost of £195. Local dance bands were engaged from 24 July to 7 August inclusive at a cost of £1 per player plus £1 per night. An RAF band was engaged for five days and the Beds & Herts Regimental Band for 3 days, at a cost of £200 for the 8 days,
plus expenses. Prizes were to be given for competitive events. Materials and labour had to be negotiated for the construction of a stage in Russell Park. A raft bandstand was to be provided in the river by Russell Park to provide for waterborne concerts.

11. Over 1000 showpeople from fairground and circus ‘families’ joined the Forces during the Second World War and many more became Bevin Boys working down coal mines, or in factories, as their war service. This made it very difficult for both touring fair operators and circuses to continue but what they offered was even more important than in peacetime in terms of maintaining morale. Google ‘National Fairground and Circus Archive, University of Sheffield’ to view the online website.

12. When reviewing the experience of the 1943 Bedford ‘Holidays at Home’ programme, the Committee noted in the Minutes of their 26 October 1943 meeting: ‘in future years . . . efforts should be made to secure much greater publicity, for during the holiday period this year many people seemed to be entirely unaware that a programme has been issued or even that any arrangements had been made at all for their amusement.’ (Bedfordshire Archives Bor BB 30/2/9.)

13. For a contemporary wartime article on CEMA’s role in relation to the visual arts in England, see: http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/17th-september-1943/8/cema-and-art


Stuart Antrobus

One of the Few

Battle of Britain Day (15 September) commemorates the great aerial battle in the summer of 1940. During that battle, from 10 July to 31 October, pilots from 15 countries joined British pilots and 2,927 Allied pilots were involved. One of those brave men, from Czechoslovakia, became a resident of Langford and is buried in the churchyard.

Josef Jan Hanus was born in 1911 in a village near Jilemnice, NE Czechoslovakia. After leaving school in 1931 he trained as a teacher but left to enlist in the Czech Air Force. Posted as an Observer to the 1st Air Regiment on 1 October 1932, he retrained as a pilot, qualifying in July 1935.

Like many Czech airmen after the German occupation he escaped to Poland and from there travelled to France and joined the Foreign Legion and then the French Air Force and, by late May 1940, he was serving with GCIII/1, near Paris.

Following the French collapse he escaped to England via Algeria, Casablanca and Gibraltar, where he
landed on 12 July 1940. After being processed by the RAF, he was commissioned and went to fly Hurricanes in September 1940. In October he was posted to 310 (Czechoslovak) Fighter Squadron.

He remained with the squadron until May 1941, when he went to 32 Squadron at Angle. In September 1941 Josef Hanus moved to 245 Squadron. He later served with 600, 125, and 68 Squadrons flying Beaufighters. On 25 December 1942 he was in transit to North Africa where he rejoined 600 Squadron. On 16 March he damaged a Do217, destroyed Ju88s on 4, 21 and 24 April and was given an immediate award of the DFC. He destroyed a Ju88 on 16 September and was posted back to the UK in December 1943 to serve at HQ Fighter Command as Technical Liaison Officer. He was awarded the French Croix de Guerre, Czech Military Cross, Czech medal for Valour, Czech Medal for Merit, Commemorative medal of the Czech Foreign Army.

On 6 May 1944 he married Lilian Webb, they had two children. In 1944 Josef Hanus flew back to Prague in a single-engined Auster aircraft. He rejoined the Czech Air Force but like many ex-RAF airmen was purged by the communist authorities in May 1948. He had managed to send his family to England and escaped through Germany in July. Many of his friends and colleagues received very long and cruel prison terms.

Josef rejoined the RAF and served with 23 and 141 Squadrons and in 1951 went on to Flying Control. He lost his flying category in late 1954 and trained as an Equipment Officer, serving in this capacity until his retirement in 1968 as a Flight Lieutenant, retaining the rank of Squadron Leader.

It is believed that Josef was posted to RAF Henlow, hence residence in Langford, and after being discharged from the RAF worked at ICL in Letchworth or Stevenage. In 1991, the Czech government promoted him to the honorary rank of Colonel, and then in 1992 he received the honorary rank of Major-General. Josef Hanus died on 21 April 1992.

John Shipman

The Last Pillbox in Bedford

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939 and started the Second World War, Great Britain was not really prepared for a long war but with the German army just across the Channel it was thought in 1940 that an invasion of this country was certain so a defence building programme began.
About 28,000 army pillboxes were built around the country mainly to protect railways and vital war buildings. The Elstow pillbox was erected to protect the railway plus two munition factories, one in Elstow and the other near Marsh Leys. After the war, many pillboxes were demolished because they were on farmland but this last one was almost out of sight, overgrown with vines and weeds.

Walking around the boundary of Elstow with another Parish Councillor, checking on byways and common walk-ways and making a list of them because if they were not listed by 2020 and on the official Bedford Council map they would be lost forever, I spotted this small neglected building in 2017.

Over the next months I did research, but was told by Bedford Borough Council that they had no real interest and, if I wanted to do something, I could go ahead. After clearing all the vegetation I could see it was in a poor state but it is part of our heritage and history and I felt it must be saved for the future.

Money-raising was the next problem and, after approaching English Heritage, Bedford Lions and Harpur Trust and being turned away, I was lucky to get grants from the Gale Family Trust, local Borough Councillor Tim Hill, well-known Bedford roofer Malcolm Henrickson and famous war author Dr Michael Osborne. I was also very lucky to find a builder to do the work on this unusual project in Pelham Chambers from Kempston who did some work free.

In the photos on the next page you will see the various stages of the work to protect this unique wartime artefact. The final photo shows the finished pillbox which has been rendered’ I am sure a purist would not agree with this but it was done to protect the pillbox from the ravages of our winters. The inside, however, has been left just as it would have been when it was in use. It is on the Interchange Retail Park: as you reach the roundabout, instead of turning right to go to the stores, turn left and on the roundabout you will see the pillbox.

A metal door has been locked into place to keep it safe from vandals but should anyone wish to see inside please contact me on 07709 879 245 as I have the key to that large lock.

Jon Miles
The Interchange Pillbox 1940-1941

The small building is an important part of our heritage and dates from the 2nd World War; it is the only one left in Bedford as all others have been demolished.

By invading Poland in 1939 Germany began the 2nd World War. Czechoslovakia, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium and France were invaded, as Europe was dominated by the German Army. Britain, with the help of her Commonwealh partners and her other country, stood tall against the might of the German war machine.

It was thought that this country would be invaded by Germany in 1942, so thousands of this type of structure was built - it is called a Pillbox due to its shape and 20,000 of them were built across the country.

There are several types and this is a Type 22, it was built using the Quonset Hut-style of reinforcing.

This site, and many others, were built to protect the railway and munitions factories in Elstow, Ampthill Road and Kempston Hardwick. It would be manned by members of the Home Guard volunteers who were unpaid part-time soldiers, aged between 17 and 65 years of age. Inside would be a team of soldiers equipped with machine guns to slow up the expected German advance.

This whole area was once just farm land, in fact this area has a rich history. In the 1850’s it was a well-known horse racing course attracting 40,000 spectators; in the early years of flight the RAC told early flyers that this was a good field to land the aircraft if they had mechanical problems.

We are indebted to the following sponsors who had the vision to support this project:

THE GALE FAMILY CHARITY TRUST
ELSTOW PARISH COUNCIL
BOROUGH Cllr TIM HILL - LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
PELHAM CHAMBERS - BUILDER
MALCOLM HENRIKSSON - HENRIKSSON ROOFING
Dr MICHAEL OSBORNE - AUTHOR of “DEFENDING LONDON” - 20th Century Defences in Britain

JON MILES 2018  JOHN JORDAN
Book Reviews


In this book Paul Rabbitts, a qualified landscape architect and head of parks for Watford Borough Council, who lives in Leighton Buzzard, explores 50 of its most interesting, important and intriguing buildings and structures ranging from inns to churches and schools to houses. Leighton Buzzard is lucky to have many old buildings each with its own story. People have been living in the area since Saxon times. In the Domesday Book Leighton Buzzard was called Lestone and there was reference to its market which still takes place today.

The town is dominated by the 190-foot spire of the 13th-century All Saints Church, which has been called ‘the cathedral of South Bedfordshire’. The main local industry was sand quarrying, and when the Grand Union Canal and railway came, this led to an increase in population, industry and commerce which has continued. Leighton Buzzard’s has become a prime commuter location for London.

It is linked to Linslade by a bridge over the River Ouzel and the two were unified as a civil parish in 1965 and are referred to as Leighton Linslade.

This book is the latest in Amberley's ‘50 Buildings’ series and will be a valuable guide for residents and those with an interest in historic buildings and architecture. There is a two-page map of the area at the front. The book is well produced on good paper and printed in colour throughout. Measuring 234 x 165mm it is hardly a book to slip in your pocket, which might be a drawback for someone who wishes to wander through Leighton Buzzard with it as a companion. The paperback binding is very tight and this combined with the heavy paper makes the book difficult to open and it is too ‘springy’ to lie flat. The illustrations have been planned to bleed off the page which means parts of them disappear into the binding. So, in spite of the high production values and good design, the book is difficult to read because one is constantly fighting to keep it open. A lighter weight of paper and a more generous back margin would have helped. There is a very short Contents page and no index. Although the illustrations are keyed to the prefatory map an index would have been an aid for quick reference.
But the seductive, high quality illustrations and detailed historical text make up for these drawbacks and so for those with an interest in the area this is an essential work.

Ted Martin


In this publication the authors aim to present over a thousand years of Bedford’s history which they say ‘deserves to be better known and understood’. They have designed the Timeline to ‘provide a reliable chronological account of important events in Bedford’s development from before the Norman Conquest to the eve of the Second World War’. It can be read in its entirety or dipped into for particular periods or subjects and to help with the latter they provide a subject and date index and an index to the illustrations – other publishers please note: a good index is still an essential reference tool.

The authors admit that there are some limitations to using the timeline approach because, first, space constrains the subjects and detail which can be included and, secondly, there are some events and buildings for which there is not a discrete date which is true of Bedford’s early churches. With reference to this, they have included a section on early churches at the front of the book.

After the Introduction there are two pages on the origin of the town followed by the early churches section and the Timeline, Each entry in the Timeline, on a right hand page, has a brief description of the event with, helpfully, suggestions for further reading, citing easily available recent books. The left-hand page carries the appropriate illustrations. There is also a comprehensive Further Reading section covering magazines, useful websites, libraries, and books.

Although this is homespun production in black only, it has been produced in A4 as a spiral bound book that will lie flat, and is on good paper, which helps with the illustrations of which there are 120. The two maps at the front of the book could have been larger to bring up the detail, but the authors are to be commended for their knowledge and industry in giving us a valuable guide to the history of Bedford at a very reasonable price.

Ted Martin