

BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

# HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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The Association's 26th Year

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# Bedfordshire Local History Association

BLHA Autumn Event: a visit to

## The Walled Garden Luton Hoo Estate

**Wednesday, 11 September 2019, 10 to 3pm**

*There will be a morning talk and lunch is available to purchase at the Wood Yard Café, followed an afternoon guided tour of the Walled Garden or Victorian Farm Buildings*

Many of you may have seen the BBC Countryfile episode in July with John Craven in the Walled Garden. This visit by the BLHA will be an ideal opportunity to see the project at first hand. The day will begin with a talk about the general history of the estate including the garden project and the farm.

The garden tour will begin with Lord Bute who in collaboration with 'Capability' Brown built the Walled Garden and take you through its owners to Sir Harold and Lady Zia Wernher, After Lady Zia's death the Walled Garden was left uncared for. The present owner hoped to be able to restore it to its present state and approached an organisation in Harpenden hoping that volunteers might be interested in both the garden and the history of the Estate.

The Victorian farm buildings tour starts with the history from the 1860s when a Liverpool solicitor took over the Estate and spent a great deal of money making it into one of the most industrialised farms in England. At that time it was a mainly beef and sheep farm, it is now wholly arable.

**Date and time:** Wednesday, 11 September. The day starts at 10am and is expected to close at 3pm. Tea, coffee and biscuits at 10am; talk 10.30–11.30 plus questions and answers. Lunch can be purchased at the Wood Yard Café. Afternoon session starts at 1.30pm with either a guided historical tour of the Victorian farm buildings or guided walled garden tour.

**Location:** The Walled Garden can **only** be accessed from West Hyde Road which is off the A1081 Luton–Harpenden Road or from the Lower Luton Road. Take the Lime Tree Avenue to the Walled Garden car park LU1 3TQ.

**Cost and booking:** The cost of the event is £10 per person, this includes the morning talk and one of the afternoon tours. To secure a place, **cheques must be received by Tuesday, 3 September**. Full booking details are on the following booking form. Alternatively, download a copy from the BLHA website: [www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk](http://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk)

The Luton Hoo Estate website: [www.lutonhooestate.co.uk](http://www.lutonhooestate.co.uk)

We hope you will be able to join us for this fascinating visit

## Booking Form

Please reserve ..... place(s) @ £10 each for the 'BLHA Autumn Event'. I enclose a cheque to the value of £..... payable to *Bedfordshire Local History Association*. Receipt of the booking form will be confirmed by email.

Please provide names of those attending and tick your preferred guided tour. Address and contact details only required for whoever submits the booking form.

Name(s)	<i>Walled Garden Tour (please tick)</i>	<i>Victorian Farm Tour (please tick)</i>

Address:.....  
 .....  
 .....

Postcode:.....Telephone: .....

Mobile (for contact on the day).....

Email:.....

Your Local History Society .....

Please return the booking form with payment by **Tuesday, 3 September 2019** to: Colin West, BLHA Autumn Event, 14 Fieldfare View, Wixams, Bedford MK42 6BL.

## Notes and news

**Ralph Turner 1923 to 2019:** We have lost 'Mr Langford'. Ralph Turner, Langford's historian, lived his whole life, apart from war service, in Langford. He was born on 6 November 1923 in The Leys where his parents ran a newsagents' shop. He spent his working life in market gardening but spent his leisure time in serving the village in so many different ways. He was editor of the parish quarterly magazine, the *Langford Diary*, for 22 years and also served as its advertising manager. He was Chairman of the Parish Council and a churchwarden, and so made a great contribution to village life, but perhaps his greatest service for posterity was as Langford's historian.

Ralph started to do this before local history was fashionable and was driven solely by his love for the village. He was uniquely qualified to record Langford's history because he was born in Langford, was the grandson of one of the village blacksmiths and spent all his life there, apart from his service in the Second World War.

Ralph helped to found the Langford & District History Society and was its President. He was occasionally able to come to meetings for some years before his death at the age of 95. One of his stories at a meeting is remembered well. He had passed out from the Army Military Driving School aged 19 and found himself in 1944 driving a 3-ton Bedford Truck in Normandy. Another British truck approached him and he thought he recognised the driver: it was Gerry Seward a long-time friend from Langford (and later the Langford Society's Vice-President), and they had time for a quick chat in the midst of an invasion!

On 20 March 2019 Ralph's war service was recognised by the French Government by appointing him as a Chevalier in Le Ordre National de la Legion d'Honneur.

His contribution to the history of Langford was immense. He has left us his *Langford: A Village Walk*, published by the Parish Council for the Millennium, which guides you round the village as it was in 2000. His descriptions of buildings are interspersed by the stories of some of the people who lived in them, because he knew many of these people. He was a major contributor to the History Society's books on Langford's past and in 1984 scripted and presented a film about Langford in which his comfortable Bedfordshire accent brought alive the history of the village. He also wrote the definitive history of St Andrew's Parish Church.

In the past few years Ralph donated his albums of photographs, carefully annotated and his 35mm slides, all with accompanying scripts, to the History Society, as one of his major legacies.

If there was an inquiry which the Society could not answer the solution would be: 'Ask Ralph'. That can't be done anymore but he has left enough to try to find the answer. Ralph was always friendly and helpful to those wanting information about Langford and, before his mobility was impaired, would even bring it to your door!

Ralph had only a few months to enjoy being a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur and sadly died on 19 May 2019 having lived a long life to the full serving both his country and his village to the utmost. It was fitting that, after a touching funeral service in St Andrew's church packed with his family and friends, he was interred in the churchyard to be with his wife again in the middle of the village he loved and served so well. **Ted Martin**

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## **WarGen – can you help?**

I'm writing to you in my capacity as coordinator of WarGen, which can be found at [www.wargen.org](http://www.wargen.org). WarGen was founded by broadcaster and historian, Dan Snow and author and broadcaster, James Holland.

We're a small team with **big** ambitions. We're creating a crowd-sourced online repository of oral-history from the people who lived through the Second World War and we are asking you to help us. We are looking for individuals willing to join our volunteer team as interviewers and to go out into your local communities and record these important stories of a fast-disappearing generation or to let us know if they have a family member or friend or even know of someone who they believe would like to have their stories recorded. Please check out the website for the interviews that have already been carried out the length and breadth of the country.

I'm currently working my way through sheets of contact information for local historical societies and would appreciate if you could spread the word about the WarGen project and have any interested parties contact me at this email address: [shane@wargen.org](mailto:shane@wargen.org). **Shane Greer**

### **The War Generation**

That amazing generation who lived and fought through the Second World War is slipping away, their numbers dwindling daily. All too soon,

**WARGEN**

**DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO LIVED THROUGH WORLD WAR 2?**

MILLIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN SERVED AND LIVED THROUGH WW2, BUT SADLY NOW ONLY A HANDFUL SURVIVE.

World War 2 touched the lives of every man, woman and child in all the major combatant nations and yet none the memories of these people will be gone forever.

WARGEN was founded by broadcaster and historian Dan Snow, an historian and broadcaster, James Holland and aims to record the memories of as many of these veterans as possible. The organisation is currently seeking witnesses to the most catastrophic war the world has ever known.

If you have a relative or friend that is willing to be interviewed and recorded, please get in touch via email with the WarGen volunteer below for further information.

Your WarGen contact:  
shane@wargen.org

**WWW.WARGEN.ORG**

there will be none left at all and the War, like those conflicts before it, will fall out of living memory.

It is of vital importance that we capture as many memories while we still have the chance. Once they have gone, they have gone. Those men and women will not be able to speak to us from beyond the grave. But while they are still living, they remain crucially important witnesses to the most cataclysmic war the world has ever known.

### We Need Your Help

Help us to find these surviving veterans and civilians, and to then sit down with them and record their testimonies, their life

stories. They have incredible tales to tell – these ordinary men, women, and children and from all countries who were caught up in something completely beyond their control. Ordinary people made to do extraordinary things.

*This generation is so important. The Second World War was an incredible and destructive war – every man, woman and child – all were involved in that conflict. We need a record of these people before it's too late. Once they've gone that's it, their memories will have gone with them. Help us capture their stories.*

**Dan Snow**

*We want people to record interviews with a generation that is slipping away. Help us collect the stories of people who experienced the Second World War from all around the world. Help us record their stories before it's too late.*

**James Holland**

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## Harrold Priory

The former priory at Harrold has long since vanished, but it has left behind some interesting records. Regarding the priory buildings, they were once thought to lie near the river Great Ouse in the central Mowhills area of the village, but recent findings have shown that they were in fact close to Harrold Hall and the church of St. Peter.

The standard sources of historical information for the local area are:

*The History and Antiquities of the Hundred of Willey in the County of Bedford*, by William Marsh Harvey, published by Nicholls of London, 1872–1878,

*The Victoria County History of Bedfordshire*, Vol 3, published by Constable in 1912, and

*History of Bedfordshire*, by Joyce Godber, published by Bedfordshire County Council in 1969.

The first two of these make reference to an earlier work, *Magna Britannia*, written by the brothers Daniel and Samuel Lyson. Their intention was to cover, in separate volumes, the history and antiquities of all the counties of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. They started with England, and we are fortunate in that Bedfordshire comes first alphabetically among the English counties; it is therefore covered in their Volume 1, dated 1806. By 1819 they had got as far as completing the volume covering Devonshire, but then Samuel Lyson died and the grand project came to an end.

At the time when the Lyson brothers' account of Harrold was being compiled for their first volume, part of what was then thought to be the former priory was still standing – it was not demolished until about 1840, before the other standard references mentioned above were written. The Lysons stated that: 'The only part of the conventual building which remains is the refectory, now a barn, and known by the name of Hall-barn'. There exists an engraving of that edifice, dated 1730, which is reproduced below. I am indebted to John and Jane Tusting of Carlton for permission to photograph their copy of it (see page 8).

There has been much discussion over what this building actually was. Certainly, the water shown behind it bears the inscription 'R Ouse', which is consistent with a location in Harrold, but informed opinion is that it is not the Priory refectory that survived to 1830, but a building associated with Harrold Manor. By 1278 this manor was held by the de Grey family, but it was occupied by Ralph Morin or Moryn. There was a chapel associated with the manor house, and a document from 1291 contains (in modern English) the following wording [1]: 'To Ralph Moryn of Harrold, giving him licence to re-open the private chapel granted by Bishop Gravesend to his mother, Maud Moryn, on account of the distance of his manor from the parish church, the fact that the intervening road was often flooded in winter, and the poor health and devout temperament of the said Ralph.'



**Figure 1:** Engraving, dated 1730, by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck, purporting to depict 'Harwood Nunnery'. (Harwood was one of many variants of the name of Harrold). The inscription notes that the owner of 'these remains' was Henry, Duke of Kent, who also owned Wrest Park. Among his numerous other titles he was Earl of Harrold, though that short-lived earldom went extinct on his death in 1740.

The building depicted in the engraving may be this chapel, since it is now known that it was not the priory but rather Harrold Manor which lay in the Mowhills area of Harrold, close to the present site of the school [2]. A drawing by Thomas Fisher shows the interior of this possible manorial chapel (see page 9).

The history of Harrold Priory is reviewed on the Bedfordshire Community Archives website at

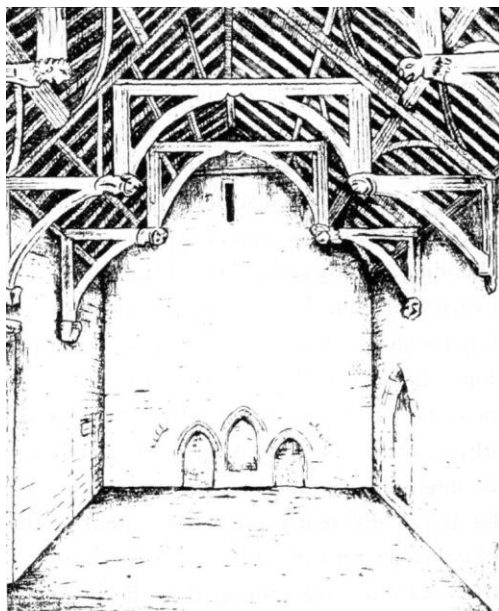
[bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Harrold](https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Harrold).

I will briefly summarise that history, and then move on to some of its aspects that are not covered in detail there.

Harrold Priory was established in the first half of the 12th century, probably in the 1130s. Its site, together with the churches of St Peter at Harrold and St Mary at Cold Brayfield, Buckinghamshire, was granted originally to Gervase, the abbot of St Nicholas of Arrouaise in Normandy, so that he could establish some nuns of his order there. The site of the Abbey of Arrouaise is not now known for sure, but one of its principal functions was to provide services for travellers through a great forest that then covered a large area of northern France.



**Figure 2:** The interior of the building shown earlier, taken from Thomas Fisher's *Sketches of Bedfordshire* (1823). The original (but misleading) caption was 'Interior of Ye Nunne's Hall, Harewold'. [3].



The Arrouasians belonged to a form of the Augustinian order which had additionally adopted the more austere philosophy of the Cistercians, though the distinction between Arrouaisians and Augustinians faded as time passed, and eventually the occupants of Harrold Priory were referred to simply as Augustinians, often anglicised as 'Austins'.

The nuns at Harrold were initially governed by a male prior, with a few canons regular (clerics who had renounced private wealth), to protect them from the outer world, to provide religious guidance and to celebrate the divine offices, which women were forbidden to do. The first prior was Guy, a brother of Gervase of Arrouaise, mentioned above.

Shortly after the priory was founded the church at Stevington was added to its assets and in 1416 it acquired a further church in Shakerstone, Leicestershire, to augment its income. The nuns petitioned for this on the grounds that they found it very hard to make ends meet. They had to bear the heavy cost of accommodating and feeding many travellers who passed along the major highway from London to Oakham, which passed over nearby Harrold Bridge. Additionally, being close to the Great Ouse, the priory was not infrequently flooded and in need of expensive reparations.

Over the years the priory managed to free itself from subjection to the Abbot of Arrouaise. In 1177 Arrouaise ceded control of the priory to its affiliated abbey at Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire. However, Harrold Priory objected to this new arrangement and negotiations with Pope Alexander III led to the matter being brought to trial. After several years,

judgment was finally given in 1188 by Robert de Bedford, Precentor of Lincoln Cathedral, and the priory became self-governing, though it had to make a yearly payment to Missenden Abbey in compensation.

Other changes also took place over the years. The prior eventually vanished, along with the canons. Their function was taken over by a master or warden and a small number of chaplains, most of whom held livings elsewhere, while internally the priory was ruled by a prioress and a sub-prioress. St Peter's church at Harrold, while close to the priory, did not serve as its conventual chapel. However, at least in the early 13th century the vicar of St Peter's was considered a member of the priory community. At the ordination of the office of vicar by Bishop Hugh de Welles of Lincoln in about 1225 it was written that 'the vicar shall have his food honourably at the table of the prioress', and the priory was required to provide him with accommodation 'within or without the priory as the Bishop shall decide'. It also had to pay his stipend and various expenses of his office, including the employment of a servant and a deacon. The prioress also had to provide the bread and wine for communion in both the parish church and the chapel of the priory.

The priory was originally founded by Sampson le Fort on land he held of the Scottish kings as part of the Honour of Huntingdon, an extensive collection of manors which included Harrold. Samson was not of a Bedfordshire family himself, but he held the manor as a life tenant through his wife Albreda de Blosseville; he was eventually succeeded by her son. He founded the priory at the suggestion of his kinsman Hilbert de Pelice, a canon of Arrouaise Abbey, mentioned earlier, which is why the foundation was initially Arrouaisian.

Because of its connection with the Honour of Huntingdon, Sampson le Fort's foundation charter for the priory was confirmed at various times by some very eminent persons. These included: King David I of Scotland; David's son Henry, Earl of Huntingdon; Henry's son in turn, the short-lived Malcolm IV of Scotland; William the Lion (Malcolm's long-lived brother who succeeded him); and Robert Bruce. More local 12th-century patrons, who donated property on which the priory could raise income, included the de Braoses, the de Blossevilles and Ralph Morin.

The cartulary of Harrold Priory is preserved in the British Museum; it is a list of the deeds to all the properties owned by the priory which provided its income. Most of the deeds recorded were not fully transcribed, but a summary of their principal content was given. This document was translated by Dr Herbert Fowler, founder of the Bedfordshire Archives, and his translation was published in 1935 by the

Bedfordshire Historical Record Society. The original document was written in the 15th century, and the earliest deed it records dates from 1136. Interestingly, the cartulary mentions gifts made to the priory in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, at which time such gifts to religious houses were infrequent. It may be that Harrold Priory was truly so impoverished, as the nuns claimed (see above), that donors were more inclined to give aid to it than to more self-sufficient foundations.

Another interesting surviving document from Harrold Priory is a set of accounts for the year dated 1401–1402. This, together with a similar document from Newnham Priory for the year 1519–1520, was found among the records of the Boteler family, which obtained some of the property after the closure of both priories following the dissolution of the monasteries. These manuscripts were translated and published in 1970 by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society [4]. Unfortunately the Harrold accounts are damaged; in particular, the heading section is missing and a small proportion of the rest of the document is also either missing or illegible. What remains contains much interesting detail, however.

In this year the accounts indicate that the priory made a loss of about £2, about 2½% of its income of around £40. However, G D Gilmore, who translated and edited the accounts, notes several accounting errors which, when corrected, turn that loss into a small profit. The accounts consist of four parts. First are rents received from properties owned by the priory, for example:

‘Rent of a tenement in Little Odell, and three acres of land in the fields, demised to Walter Frysshe . . . 5s od.’

Next there are items of income from farming activities on land owned by the priory, e.g.:

‘For 12 quarters of malt sold to Emma Dalehow at 7s 6d . . . £4 10s od.’

Third, outgoings: purchases, wages paid to casual workmen and to people associated with the priory, e.g.:

‘Dom John the priest, by the year . . . 40s od.’

This was presumably the stipend of the vicar of Harrold. The accounts concluded with a valuation of farm stock and produce in store.

On 16 January 1442/3 there was a ‘visitation’ of Harrold Priory by William Alnwick, Bishop of Lincoln, whose diocese included the priory at that time, a detailed account of which survives [5]. With the prioress and nuns assembled, the proceedings began with a sermon, preached ‘in the vulgar tongue’ (i.e., English rather than Latin) by Thomas Twyere, MA, a

member of the Bishop's entourage. Then the prioress exhibited to the Bishop the foundation charter of the priory and the certificate of her election as prioress, signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Then she 'swore fealty and obedience' to the Bishop 'in the form accustomed'. After these preliminaries there followed an interrogation of the prioress and each of the nuns.

The prioress, Dame Alice Watyr, said that the priory had an income of about £40 per year (which such an establishment would be expected to spend on charitable causes). She also mentioned that she was joined at her meals by a gentlewoman who was married. This last was a black mark against her, because the nuns were encouraged to have as little contact as possible with 'worldly' people, who should have been entertained in the priory's hospice, apart from the nuns.

The sub-prioress, Dame Emma Welde, said that the priory was 20 marks in debt. At that time the mark was an accounting unit worth two-thirds of a pound sterling, i.e., 13s 4d – the debt was therefore rather more than £13. At that time (according to The National Archives) £1 sterling would purchase one horse, or two cows, or about 44 kg of unspun wool, or would cover the wages of a skilled tradesman for 33 days. Dame Emma mentioned also that the accounts of the priory were not tallied yearly, as they should have been. Further, that a 'corrody' had been sold for 20 marks – this probably implies that a benefactor had purchased for that sum the right of free board and lodging at the priory for his or her lifetime. Such a short-term method of raising cash constituted another black mark against the establishment.

A third nun, Dame Alice Decun, confirmed that the priory's accounts were not prepared and submitted annually for approval by the community of the priory, and she raised some new issues. She said 'they all wear their veils spread up to the top of their foreheads', and that silence was not observed in the priory. Both of these violated the rules of their Augustinian order. She also noted that two small girls, aged six or seven years, slept in the nuns' dormitory (more on this later). Finally, she requested that the hour for the nuns' supper be kept between 5 and 6 o'clock. Dame Agnes Tyryngham corroborated these concerns.

Next, Dame Agnes Grene asked that, since 'she was stricken in years and feeble' she might be discharged from singing in the choir at services.

Dame Thomasine Courtney introduced several new complaints. She said that a laundress was employed to wash the nuns' clothes just four times per year, and that for the rest of the time they were compelled to do it themselves on the banks of the 'public river'. She also claimed that when

the prioress bought any necessities for the priory a price was agreed but no contract of sale was recorded, so that after some time had passed the merchants concerned came and demanded double the price. Regarding corrodies, mentioned earlier, she said that two people held them; one such arrangement had been agreed by the present prioress and another by a previous prioress. She confirmed that because no annual accounts were prepared and presented, the nuns had no idea of the financial status of the priory. Finally, she expressed concern that woodland belonging to the priory was being sold.

Two further nuns, Dames Grace Melton and Elizabeth Cotyngham, said that as far as they were concerned 'all things are well'.

Just two days after the bishop's visitation at Harrold, by which time he had moved on to Newnham Priory near Bedford, he wrote a letter to the prioress and nuns in Harrold. In it he said that his visit to them had revealed certain shortcomings in the conduct of the priory's affairs, which he then listed, ordering remedial measures to be taken, with specified penalties for non-compliance ('we send yowe thise our iniuncyons, commaundementes and ordynaunces here benethe writene to be kepped by yow and your successours vnder the peynes benethe folowing').

First, he ordered that the rule of silence of the Augustinian order should be strictly observed, and that the prioress and her deputy should punish transgressors in a manner calculated to deter others from following their example. Next, he ordered that the nuns' veils should be worn so as to come down to their eyes or their brows, 'vnder peyne of cursing'(!).

He directed that, under the same penalty, no sojourners, particularly married ones, be allowed to dwell among the nuns, nor children, specifically boys aged more than 11 and girls aged more than 12, without special leave granted by the bishop. Additionally, no secular persons, neither women nor children, were to be permitted to sleep in the nuns' dormitory.

Addressing the prioress directly, he then required her to prepare annual accounts of the financial state of the priory, to be presented to the members of her community, or to persons nominated by them. This was to happen yearly in winter, between the feasts of St Michael and St Martin. The penalty for non-compliance was suspension from her position.

Next, the prioress was instructed, subject to a similar penalty, not to sell, grant or give any corrody, pension or annuity to any person whatsoever without the consent of a majority of her nuns and permission from the bishop.

Further, he required her to make written agreements when purchasing goods for the priory to avoid payment of excessive charges.

Even the topic of laundry was not beneath the bishop's notice. He enjoined the prioress to make arrangements for a laundress to visit the priory and wash the nuns' clothes once every two weeks between Whitsun and Michaelmas, and during the cooler remainder of the year once every three weeks.

Next the prioress was ordered not to sell or give away any wood from the priory lands unless permission was obtained from the bishop, and to fell timber from them only when necessary to make repairs to the priory itself or any of the properties it owned. Finally, she was told that as far as possible the time of supper for herself and the nuns should be fixed at 'the halfe houre betwyx fyve and six'.

Clearly the bishop had taken into account all the concerns raised by the nuns with the possible exception of the one concerning the sale of woodland. In that case he addressed a slightly different issue, but that was possibly as a result of further discussion with the nuns or the prioress.

Bishop William's visitation took place in 1442/3, but less than 100 years later there was a much more malign visitation, not by a bishop but by the notorious Dr Richard Layton, a henchman of Thomas Cromwell and King Henry VIII in the matter of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Layton was an ordained priest, a lawyer and a diplomat, who made it his business to find reasons why abbeys, priories, convents and friaries should be closed down throughout England, Wales and Ireland. The King was then able to appropriate their income and their valuables, while making some provision for the sustenance of their former members. It is more than likely that Layton diverted some of the proceeds of the Dissolution into his own pocket. In his later life he was Dean of York and after his death in 1544 it was found that he had pawned some valuable silverware owned by the chapter of York Minster, which had to pay to redeem it.

It was in the autumn of 1535 that Layton visited religious establishments in Bedfordshire, including Harrold Priory. If the accusations contained in his subsequent report to Thomas Cromwell were true, the priory had ceased to be in any real sense a religious house by this time [2]. He declared that he found there a prioress and four or five supposedly chaste nuns, of whom one had 'two fair children' and another 'one child and no more'; he also describes how Lord Mordaunt of Turvey, at that time the patron of the priory, had induced the prioress and her 'foolish young flock' to break open the coffer containing the charters of the priory and to seal a document written in Latin of which they did not understand a word.

There is no evidence either for or against these accusations, but it has been pointed out that the story concerning Lord Mordaunt is entirely credible. The patron of such a small and impoverished establishment would be in a position to take a very high hand with its affairs for his own benefit or convenience, especially since one or two of the nuns may very well have been members of his own family.

After Layton's visit to Harrold the outcome was inevitable: the priory was closed down. Its site was sold, and Harrold Hall was later built on its former farmyard. The prioress, Eleanor Warren, was discharged from her office with an annual pension of £7 and in 1554 she was still living in Harrold, unmarried.

The landholdings of Harrold Priory were never very extensive – in fact in 1291 Pope Nicholas did not even bother to include the priory in his taxation of the church. In the Hundred Rolls of 1274–1279 it is recorded as owning 410 acres of land, though by 1340 this had fallen to about 360 acres. When the foundation was dissolved it was stated to have an income of £57 10s. Of this, £31 came from the four rectories mentioned earlier (Harrold, Cold Brayfield, Stevington and Shakerstone), £13 18s from additional land in Harrold and £12 12s from small rents in 17 different villages.

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**Mike Pratt\***

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## Gladys Louise West and the Women's Land Army/Timber Corps



My mother, Gladys Louise West (née Leech), April 1923–March 2012, was born in Tuebrook, Liverpool. She was a true city girl who probably hankered for the country life – cycling to the Lake District and North Wales with her brother and friends in leisure pursuits.

It was because of this love of the countryside that she decided to join the Women's Land Army. I am not sure if it was local recruitment or seeing an advertisement but, she ended up in Bedfordshire on the Hertfordshire border – a very rural environment. Her Land Army record card confirms she joined the Land Army on 19 September 1941, at just 18. This was whilst employed in munitions as a 'wire winder' at Cable and Wireless, Bootle. She transferred to Hertfordshire/Bedfordshire on 10 November 1941.

On 21 May 1942 she enrolled in the Women's Timber Corps and it was then that she worked in the woods in Hexton, Hertfordshire, but again, I am not sure if this was a direct transfer to the Women's Timber Corps as she always referred to the experience as being in the 'Land Army'! Once again, her record card is clear about the date of her enrolling in the Women's Timber Corps. Whilst working in the woods in Hexton, lodging with a family in Barton-le-Clay (Bedfordshire), she met my father who was born and brought up in Pegsdon (Bedfordshire), part of Shillington parish adjacent to Hexton parish.

My father, Reginald West, was educated at Hexton School and although employed by Mr Dale, a farmer of Green End Farm, Pegsdon, he must have been seconded to work in the woods at Hexton. It was here that he met my mother who also befriended two other Land Girls – one from Devon and one from Hendon, North London – who were to be friends for life and who became my 'adopted aunts', Eileen and Rene.

As mentioned, she was a keen cyclist and it was after seeing my father at Pegsdon one evening, she was cycling back to her lodgings when she had an accident, falling off her bicycle and fracturing both elbows. She ended up in the Luton and Dunstable Hospital with both arms in plaster



unable to care for herself. It was her future mother-in-law at Pegsdon who nursed her back to health, an act which my mother appreciated and never forgot.



At this point, and after recuperation, she was unable to return to forestry work. She was then billeted to a family in Turnford near Broxbourne, between Hoddesdon and Cheshunt in Hertfordshire, doing menial garden work. This must have been early in 1943 as I seem to remember her saying that she only did this for about six months. Her record card states that she resigned on 30 July 1943 because, on 14 August 1943, she married my father in Liverpool, when she was 20 years old.



Initially, the newly wed Mr and Mrs West lodged with my father's parents at Pegsdon, after which my father secured employment for a very short time at Milton Ernest, north Bedfordshire. Soon after, they moved to Upper Gravenhurst to employment with Arthur Young at Cartes Farm, Campton Road, where my father was in the Home Guard and where they lived for the rest of their lives, celebrating 63 years of marriage together.

Although it would appear her involvement with the Women's Land Army/Timber Corps was very short, it did enable me to apply for the recognition the government made available in 2007. She was given a signed certificate by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and a commemorative pin badge. **Colin West**

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## Book Review

*Willington and the Mowbrays: After the Peasants' Revolt* by Dorothy Jamieson, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Vol 95. By subscription to the society or £25 from the Boydell Press. ISBN 978-0-85155-082-4, 241pp, hardback.

In 1625 the Lord Chief Justice electrified a court by asking: 'Where's Bohun, where's Mowbray, where's Mortimer? Nay, which is more and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are entombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality.' Most of us know little enough about the Mowbrays despite their being one of the principal magnates of medieval England. In the 15th century they owned the manor of Willington and an astonishing array of manorial documents explain what went on there.

The first point to make is that during most of the period 1382-1522, although Willington was a Mowbray possession, it was in fact effectively in the control first of Queen Joan wife of Henry IV from 1403-1413 and then became a dower property of Katherine Neville widow of John Mowbray, 2nd Duke of Norfolk, from 1432 to her death at an advanced age in 1481. During that time she had three more husbands finally marrying, in her 60s, the 20-year-old John Woodville, brother to Edward IV's queen. Then

with the eclipse of the Mowbrays the manor came into the hands of the Howard Dukes of Norfolk from at least 1515 before being purchased by Sir John Gostwick in 1529. One would have liked to know more of the Mowbrays but the title of the book is not really justified and there is little enough about them. Worse still the main source on them appears to be an unpublished PhD dissertation.

Nor is the book about the Peasants' Revolt. Instead we have an analysis of the decline of serfdom and it is the book's argument that at least in the case of Willington there was an acceptance that old norms had been destroyed by the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt and a more gentle regime on the part of manorial lords was the only way forward. We see constant attempts to secure a higher rent, for (for example) Willington Mill, being frustrated by economic reality and the lord being forced to accept less attractive or financially less rewarding conditions.

Chapter 1 starts with the background: the geology and archaeology, and especially a series of over 100 manorial documents (primarily court rolls and bailiffs' accounts) which survive from 1382 to 1522. So far so good, but the next few chapters are very dense as the author delves into the documents to extract the facts that support her arguments. As each chapter deals with a different topic we get a good deal of repetition from describing different aspects from the same set of facts. For example, some villagers were fined for erecting dovecotes. This is discussed in three different places: under fines, under the place of dovecotes in the rural economy, and under the identity of the villagers. I therefore suggest the next chapter to read might be Chapter 5 on the Mowbrays and then Appendix 5 on the leading Willington families. Following this, the last chapter (Chapter 8) which is a summary of conclusions will make it easier to see where the author is going.

Chapter 3 compares Willington to two other Beds villages where a reasonable number of manorial documents survive from the period: Blunham Greys and Eggington. Sharp differences are revealed which suggest that progress from serfdom to what we might deem a less harsh form of land tenure and the evolution of copyhold were not part of a steady and uniform progress even in one relatively small county, let alone across England as a whole.

The book's only illustration is a simple map of the village which is useful as far as it goes. We also have several references to the best map available albeit from a period long after the Mowbrays had faded – Thomas Gostelow's map of 1779. Gostelow was a brilliant cartographer and while I do not know this particular map, the other examples of his work that I

have seen make me regret this was not also included as an illustration. Finally we really ought to have had a family tree of the Mowbrays. Almost all the males were called John or Thomas and they kept changing their titles – Lord Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham and Duke of Norfolk.

One further point: readers may be puzzled to see in quotations from the manorial documents a strange way of writing names. For example on page 21 we read 'John <sup>12d</sup> Abel caused damage'. This is for some reason not explained till page 136 when a footnote suggests the documents were written out before the court meeting and the fines (in this case 12d) were added afterwards.

This is the first publication from the BHRS for four years. It is a scholarly work, but for reasons I have described not an easy read. Nevertheless, the author has handled her difficult topic authoritatively and the conclusions are illuminating.

**Richard Morgan**

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## The Designed Landscapes of Bedfordshire

### Bedfordshire Gardens Trust Symposium: 22 June 2019

BLHA's annual gathering of Bedfordshire's local history societies and enthusiasts took place in the Learning Zone at the Poplars Garden Centre, Toddington. This was the first time a county-wide society (apart from the BLHA) had hosted the event, and possibly the first time when a single theme was adopted for a series of presentations.

The day began with the 26th Annual General Meeting of members of the BLHA. Mollie Foster ended her Chairwoman's report by asking that attendees encourage other society members to attend the annual conferences. She also requested that the societies which had not yet hosted a conference consider doing so in 2021. It was a great way to promote a local history society (and could be shared with a neighbouring society).



The symposium began with a keynote address on 'The Orchard as part of the Historical Landscape' by **Professor Tom Williamson**, a leading landscape historian and archaeologist with wide-ranging interests and a national reputation for outstanding work in his field.

He immediately engaged the audience with his informative and entertaining presentation which gave a Bedfordshire perspective on the Orchards East Project (see HIB 8.6: 17). This is a detailed study of the presence and important role which orchards have played over time, given their ubiquity, as evidenced in the detailed nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps, as well as earlier sources. Orchards produced a wide variety of fruit for human consumption, as well as providing, particularly when trees began to decay, a rich habitat for wildlife, enriching biodiversity.

Specific examples of specialised fruit-growing in Bedfordshire included damson prune production, a walnut plantation in Kempston, cherry tree orchards in the south of the county, Laxton's in Bedford, and Cox's Orange Pippin orchards at Cockayne Hatley, near Pottun. There was further mention of the ornamental use of orchards by the Arts and Crafts movement at the beginning of the 20th century and of the impact of commercialisation in increasing the varieties of fruit and of the growth of jam-producing businesses. If one had not thought of orchards as being of great significance in our history at the beginning of the talk, one certainly did by the end!

**Caroline Bowdler**, Conservation Officer for the Bedfordshire Gardens Trust and an active researcher, gave a fascinating overview of her research: 'From Medieval to Modern: the evolution of Designed



Landscape in Bedfordshire'. Looking at the ornamental and recreational gardens in this county over time, she showed what a wide variety of sources can be used to piece together the development of designed landscapes locally: from monastic gardens with their productive warrens and fishponds

providing food, psychic gardens to provide medicines, royal hunting parks for recreation and food, orchards (picking up on the earlier lecture) and on to mansion gardens of the rich, designed to impress visitors with their colour, shape and spectacle. She illustrated the move from formal patterned gardens, influenced by French and other continental examples, through to the more 'natural' parkland of Brown and Repton and so on. Caroline ended with the influence of garden magazines and nursery catalogues in the development of middle class gardens, with examples of a range of gardens in Bedfordshire.

**John Little**, at whose garden centre the symposium was held, gave a very engaging talk on how, as a boy, his interest in the local landscape

and history was spiked by an incredibly detailed survey drawing of Toddington in 1581, by Ralph Agas, an outstanding surveyor and map maker. This was originally held at Toddington Manor (but is now in the British Library and, thanks to John, a large facsimile can be viewed in the Learning Zone). This showed in minute detail the field names and landscape features and annotated each field strip usage by individuals, for the purposes of collecting rent. More than that, it also included drawings of the various wild and domesticated farm



animals just where they were to be found around the estate. The estate included an area known as Wadelows, named after Hugh Wadelow who sold the land in 1234 to Paulinus Peyvre who built the Great House there (now no longer in existence) with formal gardens and a deer park, which is shown on the Agas plan.

John's family members have been nurserymen for a number of generations. Jesse Little, John's grandfather, purchased the land on which the Poplars Garden Centre now stands in 1923. In 2005 John created Wadelows nature reserve to the rear of the commercial building, including a rare uncultivated meadow and ponds which attract a wide range of wildlife. After a buffet lunch, John treated a large number of those attending the symposium to a refreshing guided walk, including a woodland walk, the meadow, some wetland, which holds some rare orchids, and a river walk.

**Felicity Brimblecombe**, dedicated

Secretary of Bedfordshire Gardens Trust, and a volunteer researcher for the Luton Hoo Walled Garden restoration project, presented a very interesting and well-researched talk on Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932), the famous garden designer, outlining her life's work which included some 400 private gardens for middle-class patrons. Felicity concentrated, however, on Jekyll's single commission in



Bedfordshire for The Old House in Ickwell, which is still standing. Jekyll developed her own style of informal garden walks and published a book on 'Colour in Flower Gardens', suggesting the use of blocks of colour in planting. She never visited the site of the gardens for which she created designs. She relied on ground surveys to show levels, plans of the site,

photographs of the current gardens and information on the various vistas to be had from rooms in the house. She then drew plans and gave detailed lists of plants for execution by the patrons' own gardeners.

Felicity, through a revealing series of letters between the commissioning owner of the house, (from the Wells brewery family) with Gertrude Jekyll, was able to show how the relationship between the two parties developed over time. Jekyll had strong opinions as to what she preferred and what she did not, such as existing but huge Wellingtonia trees, and there was clearly a battle of wills as to who should prevail. In the end, both the owner and Gertrude got their way to some extent but not all her plans were fully completed.

A surprise component in the afternoon's range of talks was given by



**Corinne Price**, an experienced Head Gardener in the past for both the National Trust and English Heritage and currently Swiss Garden and Grounds Manager at The Swiss Garden at Shuttleworth. She gave insights into the world of current professional gardeners, including the wide-range of professional technical and management skills required.

She also pointed out how isolated professional gardeners can be, particularly in small gardens, and some of the range of support which they can seek, but at a price. Corinne's contribution in Bedfordshire has been to establish, for the first time, a self-help Bedfordshire Head Gardeners Network, building it up from an initial six responses from the 20 who were invited, to a current membership of 11, with a further four expected to join soon. They all agree that by meeting three times a year, hosting in rotation, they gain both moral support and know-how from each other and are also better able to respond to common and local problems relating to plant disease and security alerts, plant swaps, recommendations on plant suppliers and information on training and job opportunities. Corinne made a persuasive case for the role of head gardeners, together with special advisors, in garden conservation, as well as in working together across the Bedfordshire landscape.

The final speaker needed no introduction to local historians; few people know as much as **Stephen Coleman** about the archaeology and history of Bedfordshire. Currently the Historic Environment Information Officer for Central Bedfordshire Council, he previously worked for the former County Council.

He shared his detailed knowledge on 'Flitwick Manor Park and Grounds: a 19th Century Visitor Attraction and Botanic Treasure House'.



The Brooks family, which owned the house, developed what began as an agricultural park surrounding the Manor into a landscaped park in the 18th century.

Successive generations into the 19th century became more and more ambitious, surrounding it with a fence to allow a deer park, adding 'pleasure grounds', a cascade, 'ruined' folly, grotto, fish pond, labyrinth, an arboretum of specimen trees, an orchard and fruit garden, a pinetum, an American garden, and adding a range of rare plants. At its height, by 1881, it aspired to rival national collections such as that at Kew. The family promoted the gardens and park to visitors by producing maps of 'colour-coded' walks which would take in different aspects of the horticultural and landscape delights. Sadly, as family fortunes waned, there followed a slow decline. Little now remains of this once extensive attraction.

Some 60 local historians and enthusiasts attended the Symposium, representing the following 15 local history societies (as well as a number of individual BLHA members and the County Archivist, Pamela Birch): Amptill & District Archaeological & Local History Society, Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society [BAALHS], Bedfordshire Family History Society, Bedfordshire Gardens Trust, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, Clapham Historical Society, Harlington Heritage Trust, Leighton Buzzard & District Archaeological and Historical Society, Maypole Heritage, Old Warden History and Heritage Society, Pottton History Society, Sharnbrook Local History Society, Toddington Historical Society, Willington Local History Group, Wrest Park Volunteer History Research Team.

Kevin Levitt, Chair of the Bedfordshire Gardens Trust, and his small team are to be congratulated on a smoothly-run event which offered a well-balanced programme of stimulating and informative lectures and started on time and finished on time.

Bob Ricketts announced that **next year's BLHA conference** will be hosted by Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (supported by BAALHS) at Priory Methodist Church, 63 Newnham Avenue, Bedford, MK41 9QJ on the theme of 'The Home Front in Bedfordshire during the First and Second World Wars'. The date for your diary is: **Saturday, 20th June 2020.**

**Report and photographs by Stuart Antrobus**