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Contributions are very welcome **and needed**: please telephone or e-mail the Editor before sending any material.

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Update on the 2021 AGM and Conference

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to cancel the annual conference and AGM planned initially for June, and then for October. Given the current second wave, we are proposing to hold the AGM and conference at Priory Methodist Church, Bedford, on Saturday, 19 June 2021, hosted by Bedford Historical Record Society. The theme will be 'Life on the Home Front during both World Wars'. Depending on the prevailing public health regulations, we may be able to run it as a normal, though socially distanced, conference, or virtually via Zoom or webcasts, or a combination thereof. Your BLHA committee members along with the BHRS will take a decision on the format of the conference in the early Spring and let you know as soon as possible.

From the Editor

Unlike the national press *HIB* does not every day 'bring you violence'. However, by a happy coincidence, we are able in this issue to bring you Bob Ricketts' distillation of his much longer original article on 'Captain Swing in Bedfordshire' (see *Bedford Local History Magazine*, No 104, April 2020), and we also have an article on the riots and burning of Luton Town Hall in July 1919, largely compiled from the Bedfordshire Archives website, to whom we are grateful for permission to use this material.

To restore tranquility, John Shipman gives us a short history of the River Ivel which rises in Baldock, Herts, runs through Henlow and Langford to flow into the Great Ouse at Tempsford. This is followed by an article on Bedfordshire Dialect by Trevor Stewart which perhaps has a remote connection with the item below in which Barbara Tearle asks for information on words which appear in 16th and 17th century Bedfordshire probate inventories. This is for a project to publish those inventories by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society at a later date. **Ted Martin**

Treds and tilth

The preparation of a transcription of 16th and 17th century Bedfordshire probate inventories for publication by Bedfordshire Historical Record Society in a few years' time is producing a fascinating window on Bedfordshire homes. The inventories, which are lists of a deceased person's goods for exhibition at the church court as part of the process of obtaining probate, are

full of furnishings and equipment in their houses and stocks of cattle, sheep and pigs and wheat, barley, oats and rye in the fields and barns – to say nothing of hemp. There are of course many household items that are no longer used today or whose names have changed. The *Oxford English Dictionary* and other dictionaries and glossaries usually produce an explanation. Two words have been giving trouble and I wonder if readers of *HIB* can help to identify them.

tred

The word *tred*, also spelt *trede*, *tredd*, *tredd*, *tredde*, *tread* and *treadde* occurs 15 times in inventories between 1558 and 1625 in the context of the irons around a fireplace used for cooking, for example:

In 1558:

'Item In the kechyng a knedyng trought with other Implementes and with a spett cobyornes pott hockes and a trede' valued at 5s.

In 1611:

In the kitchen ' . . . iij Spittes iij dripping pannes A paire of Racks a Tread a Scummer A mouldinge . . . '

and in a slightly different context:

In 1619

In the milk house ' . . . three kettles, a pott, twoo posenetts, a paire of little andyrans, a tredd

with candlesticks 2os'.
As *tred* does not occur in any of the dictionaries and sources, nor in inventories from other parts of the country and is indicated as having an unknown meaning in Bedfordshire Archives and Record Service's catalogue, it looks like a local word for a piece of equipment. Has anyone encountered a *tred* in this context?

tilth

The other word is *tilth* in relation to agricultural land. It is in the *Oxford English Dictionary* but the definitions do not quite match its use in the Bedfordshire inventories. I remember my Bedfordshire-born grandfather talking about a lovely bit of *tilth* in relation to his allotment, which I always interpreted as a comment on the condition of the soil.

Does anyone have local knowledge of either word? If so, please contact me:

Barbara Tearle

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'Captain Swing' in Bedfordshire: Rural unrest and protest, 1830–1832



Figure 1: Rick burning in the 1830s

Introduction

The early 1830s were turbulent years in Bedfordshire for agricultural labourers, farmers, landowners, justices and parish vestries alike. Falling produce prices drove farmers to reduce wages, already barely sufficient to sustain life. Labourers were laid off and forced to rely on meagre poor relief, required to work on the roads or in parish sand and gravel pits. Vestries, in turn, cut relief to reduce poor rates. Mechanisation, particularly threshing machines, threatened further loss of agricultural employment and fuelled growing discontent, as did the zealous enforcement of the Game Laws.

Widespread discontent grew. Arson, rioting and machine-breaking broke out in Kent in the summer of 1830. Unrest spread to much of southern and eastern England, including Bedfordshire. In December 1830, there were large-scale wage riots at Flitwick and Stotfold, and arson attacks on farms at Hulcote, Wootton Pillinge, Wootton Keeley and Chicksands. Arson peaked in 1831, when there were at least 16 cases in the county and six in 1832. The 'Swing' disturbances in Bedfordshire, named

after the eponymous threatening letters signed 'Captain Swing', subsided after Spring 1832.¹

The short-lived unrest of 1830–32 left a legacy of increased mistrust and resentment amongst Bedfordshire's rural poor, whilst doing little to relieve their impoverishment, as temporary increases in wages and employment were soon reversed by cost-conscious farmers and poor relief reforms. That resentment surfaced in individual or collective action until the late-1840s. The reform of the Poor Law generated unrest during 1834, with disturbances or rioting at Biggleswade, Cople, Marston/Millbrook, Steppingley and Eversholt and Lidlington. In May 1835 the new workhouse at Ampthill was attacked. A contingent of the Metropolitan Police had to be summoned from London to restore order. Sporadic arson attacks continued in most years, but resurged in 1842 and 1843, when 24 cases were recorded in Bedfordshire.²

Rural protest in Bedfordshire before 1830

Direct protest by the agricultural poor, whether by threats, assault, riot or arson, was a sporadic feature of rural life in the late-18th and early 19th centuries, particularly at times of economic hardship. A F Cirket (1978) and J Godber (1969) documented protests by agricultural labourers and servants in Bedfordshire, discontented with the application of poor relief, low wages or use of transient Irish labourers (Felmersham 1824). Unrest was expressed through wages strikes (Kempston 1813, Marston Moretaine 1819, Keysoe 1822, Roxton 1826); riots (Shillington 1828, Toddington 1829); arson (Felmersham 1825, Husborne Crawley 1828, Arlesey 1829); and assaults on parish overseers (Eaton Socon and Eaton Bray 1829).³

The Swing disturbances in Bedfordshire, 1830–32

E J Hobsbawm and G Rude (1969) undertook the first systematic assessment of the Swing disturbances. They analysed the type and distribution of protest, characterising it as a rural social movement centred on the low-wage south and east. They identified 1,475 separate incidents in England during 1830 to 1832. Of these, 75% were in 10 counties: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex and Wiltshire. Bedfordshire, with only 16 recorded incidents, lay outside these 'core counties'.⁴ Subsequent research has shown that the authors significantly under-recorded incidents in the county, but not sufficiently to undermine their conclusion that Bedfordshire was on the margins of the main areas of unrest.⁵

Protests in Bedfordshire during 1830–32 took two main forms: riots (usually about wages and/or poor relief) and arson against farmers. Unlike

many 'core counties', there are no recorded incidents of agricultural machine-breaking or livestock maiming, and only two examples of threatening 'Swing letters' are known, compared to eight in neighbouring Buckinghamshire.⁶

Riots

There were two large-scale wage riots, both in mid-Bedfordshire:

Stotfold, 1-2 December 1830

Two consecutive days of rioting attracted national attention. *The Times* described it as '... one of the most desperate riots to have occurred of late'. On the evening of 1 December, labourers assembled, forcing inhabitants to join a growing mob. They went to the houses of farmers and others demanding increased wages. They were told that their complaints would be considered at a special vestry meeting at 10 o'clock the following morning and dispersed. Re-assembling before daylight on Friday, 2 December, they went from farm to farm compelling men and boys to join them. Those who had gone to the fields to plough were taken from their horses, which were turned loose. By the time the vestry met, a large group of 100 to 300 had gathered in the churchyard, many armed with clubs and bludgeons. The mob's anger fixed initially on Smith, the parish overseer. They demanded his dismissal, the exemption of rented cottages from parish rates and to be paid two shillings a day for their work. Some farmers were assaulted, but wouldn't concede the increase and the vestry broke up. The frustrated mob went through the village demanding bread from the bakers, beer from the publicans and money from householders. Those who refused to pay had their homes broken into. The disturbances continued until evening, when they dispersed, threatening that if their demands were not met the following day they would return that evening with greater violence.

Alarmed, the principal inhabitants had met that afternoon. They informed the magistrate, W H Whitbread, of the events, who acted to apprehend the ring-leaders. On Saturday morning a force of special constables were sworn from neighbouring villages, supplemented by a hundred constables despatched by the Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Grantham, to assist Whitbread. In total, 243 local people helped to suppress the riot. Ten of the ringleaders were arrested and committed to the County Gaol. They were tried at the Lent Assizes in March 1831. Five were charged with riotous assembly and conspiracy. Five were charged with shop-breaking and theft. All were found guilty. Five were sentenced to be imprisoned for

between 2 and 18 months. Thomas Millard, Robert Reynolds, James Gentle, Henry Gentle and William Saunderson were sentenced to death, commuted to imprisonment or, for Henry Gentle and William Saunderson, to be transported for 14 years.⁷

Flitwick, 6 December 1830

Between 20 to 100 labourers went from farm to farm, forcing men to cease work and go with them, demanding increases in wages, 38 ricks were thrown down. Peter Kempton, a Flitwick farmer, described how 30 or 40 men armed with sticks and bludgeons came into his son's farmyard. He saw two labourers dragging his son's horsekeeper across the yard by his collar, threatening to drag him through the pond if he didn't go with them. Another worker was also forced to leave his work. They went to Flitwick House to demand more money and to Priestley Farm, where the foreman warned that they might be transported. A force of 400 constables arrived, led by Lord Grantham, who ordered them to disperse. The men told him that they did not want to do mischief or riot, but could not live on their wages. They dispersed, but five were arrested for threatening behaviour. One was sentenced to six months' hard labour and the others to 14 days' imprisonment.⁸

Other places

There were smaller disturbances elsewhere. At Westoning in late-1830, 20 labourers and farmers harassed the local clergyman, demanding higher pay and reductions in rent and tithes. He persuaded them to disperse peacefully. In Husborne Crawley in August 1832, 23 men appeared before the magistrate for riotous behaviour. There were also isolated attacks on poor relief officers. In December 1830, William Whittamore, the workhouse master and constable of Wilshamstead (Wilstead), was assaulted by James Addington, who demanded food and threatened to stab him. When Addington was ejected, a 'noisy' crowd of 20 people gathered and attempted to break down the door of the workhouse. Addington was subsequently hanged for arson.⁹

Arson

During the 'Swing years' of 1830–32 there were at least 26 incidents of arson. Where fires were detected early usually little damage was done. Other fires caused substantial losses.

In 1830, the attack on Hoare's farm at Hulcote on 10 November destroyed five ricks valued at £200–300. Eleven stacks, all the outbuildings and the rick yard were destroyed at Benson's farm at Wootton Pillinge on 27 November. A large barn and an adjoining hovel were burnt at Wootton Keeley on 8 December; most of the crops had already been threshed by machine and sold, which may have triggered the attack.¹⁰ The mere threat of incendiarism intimidated some Vestries into granting poor relief. In 1832 it was said of Blunham with Moggerhanger that '[incendiarism] has been threatened in Vestry where relief has been refused; and the relief has, in consequence, been given'.¹¹

Arson attacks were not distributed randomly (see Figure 2). There were no reported cases from the north or north-west of the county. There were single attacks in Eaton Socon, Milton Ernest and Stevington. The east of Bedfordshire was also largely unscathed, except for fires at Chicksands and Dunton. There does, however, appear to have been two clear clusters: the first, a group of neighbouring parishes south-west and south of Bedford, comprising Kempston, Wootton, Elstow, Houghton Conquest and Wilshampstead (Wilstead). Clergy at Kempston reported that: 'In this neighbourhood there have been more than twenty fires, and some insubordination . . . I am of opinion that they [the fires] all originated in private pique taken against the farmer, for refusing some demand for relief'.¹² The second cluster was in the south-east, encompassing Chalgrave, Houghton Regis, Dunstable (four attacks), Totternhoe, Caddington, Hulcote and Luton parish (Lewsey).

Research by Jones (2009) on the disturbances in Berkshire concluded that the incidence of unrest in localities owed much to local social and parochial relations.¹³ This echoes some contemporary views – the Bedford Estate steward observed in December 1831 that he thought the fires were set by the people who actually work on the farms, or a parishioner who had a dislike to the person.¹⁴ The clustering is also consistent with Cirket's (1988) conclusion that large, 'open' parishes (i.e., those without a majority landowner who could intervene to influence the behaviour of farmers and vestries, and often lacking resident gentry and clergy) were more prone to disturbances. These included Kempston (arson), Wilshampstead (Wilstead) (three arson attacks), Wootton (two cases of arson) and Stotfold (large-scale riot).¹⁵

Successful convictions for arson were rare. It was usually committed in darkness and alone. Of the five committals for arson in Bedfordshire during 1830–32, two of those charged were discharged. A further two were discharged on charges of arson, but then transported subsequently for burglary (William Atkins of Houghton Conquest and James Lankin alias

Lancaster of Chalgrave). Only one, James Addington of Wilshampstead (Wilstead), aged 18, was executed for arson. Addington already had a criminal record, serving three months in 1827 for breach of the Game Laws. In December 1830 he assaulted and threatened to stab the parish workhouse master and constable (see above, page 7). He was found guilty of arson against Thomas Dines, a Wilshampstead (Wilstead) farmer and Assistant Overseer, on 11 November 1831. Addington was hanged in March 1832 outside Bedford Gaol. John Turner, of Milton Ernest, observed with some sympathy:

An incendiary only 18 years old is to be hanged at Bedford next Saturday. Alas! Things are bad here he had been an old offender and has confessed the justness of his sentence – some of the Young Men of his parish had 4/- per Week – he only received 3/6d, so he burned the Overseer out of revenge (no wonder).¹⁶

For individual farmers, the most basic defence against arson was night watches of their premises. In November 1830, Adam, from the Bedford Estate Office, opined:

Nothing but close watching will avail by day & night & immediate turning out on any noise. Dogs the smaller the better as easily alarmed should be kept everywhere & I think those who can should have horsemen always ready.

The next day he recommended keeping geese in stack yards and that toll-gate keepers and publicans should watch out for and report strangers. In November 1831 Bennett sent a printed circular to all Bedford Estate tenants asking them to employ a night watchman, at their own expense. Watchmen weren't infallible – in December 1831 William Manning's farm at Elstow was fired when his watchman broke off from his round to tend to livestock. Some losses could be recovered through insurance, but this was expensive and insurance companies soon began to impose very restrictive conditions. Where a mutual protection society existed, as in north Bedfordshire, this could publicise attacks and offer rewards for convictions, but not actually prevent arson attacks. Many farmers decided that the safest step was to buy off unrest by raising wages temporarily: 'All over the county farmers hurriedly raised their wages to meet the demands . . . and as rapidly lowered them again once the danger was over.'¹⁷

'Swing Letters'

Threatening letters were not a common expression of unrest in Bedfordshire. There are only two recorded. Prior to the fire at Benson's farm at Wootton Pilling on 27 October 1830, several people reported receiving threatening letters signed 'Swing'. It was reported at the 1831 Lent Assizes that Mr May, a

grocer at Ampthill, would have his property at Ampthill and Millbrook destroyed unless Parish Officers reinstated relief.¹⁸

Reflections

The ‘Swing’ disturbances in Bedfordshire represent a fascinating episode in the county’s history which warrants further research, particularly at parish level. Specifically, to test Jones’s and Cirket’s hypotheses that the clustering of arson attacks and incidence of riots reflected parish conditions and social relationships and were linked to ‘open’ parishes.

I would encourage other societies to research this aspect of rural social history, not just for 1830–32, but the undercurrents of unrest throughout the net two decades, sparking the upsurge in arson attacks in the early 1840s. I have provided the Editor with a PDF of my full article from *Bedford Local History Magazine* which details rural arson attacks, riots and protests at parish-level which he will be happy to supply to any who apply. I would be very interested in hearing what you find.

References

1. & 2. This article is drawn from B Ricketts, “Captain Swing” in Bedfordshire: Rural Unrest & Protest, 1830–1849’, *Bedford Local History Magazine*, No 104, April 2020, pp 3–55.
3. A F Cirket, *The 1830 Riots in Bedfordshire – Background and Events* (Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (BHRS), vol 57, 1988), pp. 75–112; J Godber, *History of Bedfordshire*, 1969, pp 417–418 and B Ricketts, *op cit*, pp. 4–6.
4. E J Hobsbawm and G Rude, *Captain Swing*, 1969, pp xxv and 71–87.
5. B Ricketts, *op cit*, p 7.
6. *Ibid*, pp 22–23.
7. *Ibid*, pp 13–15 and B Hyde, *Stotfold, The Swing Riots, The Stotfold Riot*, virtual-library.culturalservices.net.
8. B Ricketts, *op cit*, p 13.
9. *Ibid*, pp 16–17.
10. *Ibid*, Table 5, provides details of all the arson attacks recorded in Bedfordshire by place,
11. N Agar, *The Bedfordshire Farm Worker in the Nineteenth Century*, (BHRS, vol 60, 1981), p 72.
12. N. Agar, *op cit*, pp 73–74.
13. P Jones. ‘Finding Captain Swing: Protest, Parish Relations, and the State of the Public Mind in 1830’, *International Review of Social History*, vol 54, Issue 3, December 2009, pp 429–458.
14. Bedfordshire Archives R3/3710.
15. A F Cirket, *op cit*, pp 102–103
16. B Ricketts, *op cit*, pp 20 and 28.
17. *Ibid*, pp 23–24
18. *Ibid*, p 23.

Bob Ricketts, CBE

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The Luton Peace Day Riots

These days, sadly, riots and civil disturbances all over the world are far more common than in the past, so, it is sobering to find that a serious riot occurred in Luton lasting over three days from 19–21 July 1919. Servicemen were angry that the lavish spending for London's peace parade, held on the same day, following the end of the First World War could have been used to assist soldiers to integrate into civilian life on their return from the war.

So, on Peace Day, 19 July 1919, rioting ex-servicemen, unhappy with unemployment and other grievances, burnt down Luton town hall. The riot started after members of the council arrived to read out the King's proclamation of peace and many in the crowd expressed their disapproval. One issue was refusing to allow veterans to hold a drumhead service in Wardown Park. Tension migrated into violence and a number of protesters broke through the police cordon and made forcible entry into the town hall. There were a number of violent clashes, and then the town hall was stormed by the crowd and eventually set on fire.

*Luton Town Hall in 1897, from
George Street*



*Below: A card showing the contrasts in
24 hours [Beds Archives, Z1306/75]*

Left: Town Hall at 2pm on 19 July 1919.

Right: Town Hall at 2pm on 20 July 1919.



Order was eventually restored by midnight on 19 July, but the fire brigade could not put the town hall fire out and, by the next morning, it was in ruins. There were 39 arrests and many of those arrested received heavy sentences: John Henry Good was sentenced to six weeks' hard labour.

The *Luton News*, 24 July 1919, reported the riot under the headline 'Luton's Degradation':

There is probably now no city in the civilized world which is unacquainted with the terrible scenes of rioting and pillage which disfigured the name and record of Luton and turned the town's Peace Celebrations into a bitter mockery on Saturday night [19th July]. In the result the Town Hall and municipal offices are a mass of ruins, and the scorched and blackened scene presented to the public gaze in the early hours of Sunday morning will remain indelibly imprinted on all Lutonians. The premises of innocent shopkeepers were smashed and looted; the police special constabulary and the fire brigade subjected to an attack ferocious in the extreme; and damage which under no circumstances can be less than £200,000 has been caused.

The burning Town Hall [Beds Archives, Z1306/75]



Dissatisfaction known to exist in the town on many matters connected with the celebration culminated in such scenes as to necessitate the employment of military aid early on Sunday morning, and of very powerful police reinforcements subsequently, the men being drawn from the Metropolis, and neighbouring counties. The grim and disastrous story is related in detail below.

The first sign that there was likelihood of trouble was when the procession reached the Town Hall. A detachment representing the Comrades of the Great War was heading the column and a halt was called in front of the Town Hall.

The Mayor, wearing his robes and chain of office, came to the edge of the pavement and proceeded to read the King's Peace Proclamation and briefly to

address the discharged men. His appearance was the signal for a hostile demonstration on the part of the crowd, cheering turned into jeering. The attitude of the crowd a little later assumed a distinctly ugly character, and as a precautionary measure, [Police Sgt] Matsell and three constables took up a position on the steps.

There were loud cries for the Mayor, and a section of the spectators advanced and demanded that his Worship and the Town Clerk should come to the front and give explanations of the Corporation's decision in regard to Wardown. The request was not acceded to, and a move was made in the direction of the doors.

For quite a time [Police Sgt] Matsell and his police colleagues, though hustled considerably held their ground. Finally – overpowered by sheer weight of numbers – the police were rushed and the doors forced open. The object of the crowd which streamed into the building seemed to be the Assembly Room, in which Monday night's banquet [see below] was to be held. They swarmed upstairs, and found a table or two set out for tea, presumably for the civic party.

Immediately they commenced to wreck the furniture, and a suggestion was made that the whole of the tables and chairs should be thrown through the windows into the street. Chairs were pitched on to the pavement below, some windows being broken in the process, whilst a missile of some kind was hurled through one of the windows in the Town Clerk's office.

At this point the police exhorted the men to remember that innocent women and children were in the crowd below, who stood a serious risk of injury if the furniture were thrown out. Intruders then got on to the balcony and proceeded to tear down all the bunting and decorations, as well as the framework of the electrical illumination scheme erected the previous day.

An urgent message had been sent to Wardown for police reinforcements, and the arrival of the Chief Constable and other mounted men, and Inspector F Janes and a party in a motor-car, was the first intimation to many people in New Bedford-road and Manchester-street that anything untoward was occurring. The 20 specials who had formed part of the procession were also marched back to the Town Hall by Deputy Chief Constable Robinson. The police eventually cleared the Town Hall, and after the wreckage of chairs and bunting etc, had been carried inside, the doors were again barred.

Several members of the crowd, including a crippled ex-soldier, then mounted the Town Hall steps and impassioned speeches were made, grievances regarding pensions and other matters affecting discharged and disabled men being ventilated.

Excitement gradually simmered down, and apparently not knowing if the Mayor had left the Town Hall, a large crowd marched to his private residence in London-road. Report has it that the Chief Constable showed the greatest tact in a trying situation; that he succeeded in getting the ear of the men and asked them to nominate a leader. This they did, but on inquiry found that his Worship had not arrived home, and accordingly they took the advice of the police and dispersed.

During the late afternoon and early evening, a revival of trouble being feared, efforts were made by the local authorities to enlist police aid from London, but without avail. Between 10 and 11 pm a large and determined mob arrived to swell the

already congested Town Hall approaches, armed with bricks, hammers and other weapons. Though there was a good deal of noise, no real attempt at damage appears to have been made until the lighting of the giant Dover flares at each end of the town – People's Park, Hart Hill, London-road, and the back of the Downs – lit the whole district as though it were day.

Immediately, as though by pre-arranged signal, a fusillade of bricks and other missiles was rained upon the Town Hall, and the windows were smashed with great rapidity. Rushes were made for the building, but the entrance was barred by the police. Several efforts were made to fire the Town Hall, but as and when they occurred were dealt with by the police inside the building. The doors and windows of the Food Office, on the Manchester-street corner, were completely wrecked, but Inspector Janes and his comrades repeatedly ejected from the room men who had gained entry and were endeavouring to fire the place. In the end, baton charges had to be made to drive the crowd back some distance. Shortly after midnight, by the aid of the petrol [referred to below], the fire was actually started and rapidly assumed most serious proportions.

The Fire Brigade arrived on the scene via Guildford-street, but were immediately surrounded by the hostile elements and were prevented from attacking the flames owing to the fact that their hose pipes were severed in all directions and the two men accompanying Chief Officer Andrew were immediately knocked out by the crowd.

The shop of Mr W S Clark, at the corner of Wellington-street [Walter Sydney Clark, pharmaceutical chemist, 81 George Street], had by this time been smashed in and parts of its contents looted; but mainly the ringleaders contented themselves with taking the owner's stock of glass bottles, in order to strengthen their supply of 'ammunition'.



74 to 60 George Street about 1928 [Z1306/75]

In addition the Herts Motors garage [70 George Street] was burst open and tins of petrol were seized to feed the fire. Weakened by their long and continuous effort to maintain the property intact, and by the loss of many of their number who had been put out of action by close contact and also the rain of missiles, the police and firemen

were practically powerless, and the fire got really started in the Town Clerk's department, and in the Food Office.

Men could be seen hurling into the room all sorts of inflammable material – pieces of broken window frames, doors etc – which they could obtain; and, the outbreak once having been actually started, was fed by fireworks and petrol until it had obtained a complete hold on that corner.

The Chief Officer had by this time lost several of his men, owing to the attentions of the crowd, and he deceived the wild elements by withdrawing his motor from the scene. A rush was made to wreck the machine by damaging the radiator, and the Chief received a heavy blow, but his helmet saved him from injury. He returned to the vicinity of the Town Hall by a devious route. He got a length of hose fixed from a hydrant in Dunstable-place, but when, with the aid of special constables and civilians (among whom, we understand, were members of the Comrades of the Great War), the nozzle was run down to near the blazing building, a rush was made to collar the hose.

The attention of the crowd being concentrated on this matter, the Brigade were enabled to get a second line of hose going, the connection being made in a few seconds. It was then the rescuers commenced to get the upper hand, for with very powerful crossed jets of water, at high pressure, the firemen swept the entrance to Upper George-street in machine-gun fashion, kept back the men who tried to rush the path (several being knocked clean off their feet), and attacked the flames in earnest.

It was apparent that the main structure was doomed, and principal attention was devoted to adjoining property. In their efforts in this direction they met with considerable success, for at one time it seemed highly probably that the whole of the block of buildings back to Gordon-street might be involved. This danger was happily averted, and the flames were prevented from spreading beyond the principal set of buildings.

The Food Office was completely gutted and the situation there such that on Monday morning it was necessary to demolish the outer walls at the corner in the interests of public safety. At one time on Saturday night, before the fire had gained a firm hold, there was a big shower of coupons and other literature thrown out of the window.

From this point onwards the crowd was somewhat less bellicose in its attitude towards the fire-fighters and police, but the grim carnival was carried to extreme limits.

Messrs Farmer & Co's piano warehouse [2 Wellington Street and 85 George Street] was broken into and the instruments dragged into the street. To the tune of 'Keep the Home Fires Burning' the wilder elements of the huge gathering danced and sang, some even mounting a grand piano for the purpose.

All this time the Brigade maintained its attack on the blaze, the hydrants and hose being guarded by special constables, though the force was sadly depleted, owing to the number of men who had been injured and had been removed for treatment to

the police station and to the Bute Hospital. Mrs Griffin and others rendered yeoman service in this direction and the motor ambulance was kept regularly employed

Troops called in

About 3 am a body of the RFA [Royal Field Artillery] from Biscot Camp, marching eight abreast, swung down Upper George-street singing gaily as they came. At the sight of khaki the crowd seemed to fade away, and with a cordon of troops drawn round the Town Hall, Chief Officer Andrew was able to get down to the task of obtaining control of the outbreak.

The arrival of the RFA was too late to prevent the damage and looting of the premises of Mr G Payne [confectioner, 5 Manchester Street] and Messrs. Brown J M Brown & Company, boot and shoe dealers, 9 Manchester Street], in Manchester-street.

Finally a section of the crowd visited the shop of Mr Caspers, hairdresser, in Bute-street [Carl Caspers, 4 Bute Street], and having smashed the windows, looted the umbrellas which formed a portion of his stock; whilst a brick was thrown through a window at the shop of Mr H Stern [Hermann Stern, straw hat material merchant, 5 Bute Street, both were, of course, German names], on the opposite side of the road.

It was five o'clock before the special constables were able to be released, and the regular police force still fit for duty remained at their posts until they could be replaced by officers drawn from outside areas.

Early on Sunday morning, a very large body of troops were marched in from Bedford and took charge of the centre of the town.

Causes

Luton suffered more deaths in the Great War than any other place in Bedfordshire, because it was a town of over 50,000 people – it was then the largest town in the county, as it is now. There was a very high rate of casualties with the Diocese of Saint Albans Roll of Honour¹ giving 1,288 names of casualties and the Borough of Luton Roll of Honour 1,284. Of these, none was above the rank of captain and 373 men were with the Bedfordshire Regiment. So, one person in every 50 in the town – the percentage for military age men, of course, being far greater.

It was felt that the Mayor and members of the Luton Corporation Food Control Committee had profiteered by raising food prices during the war and that this could have been a cause of the riot. But, for a short period, a campaign by German U-Boats against British shipping was as serious in the First World War as it was in the Second. There was grave concern in early 1917 that we might be starved into making peace as our food ships crossing the Atlantic were being torpedoed at a very high rate. The Third Battle of Ypres (also known as the Battle of Passchendaele), was fought in 1917 with one of its aims the capture of ports on the Belgian coast such as Zeebrugge which were being used as U-Boat bases and a separate raid was mounted on

Zeebrugge (see HIB 5.12, Summer, and 6.1, Autumn, 2012). But introduction of the convoy system, initially against the wishes of the Admiralty, eventually defeated the U-Boats.

But the people of Luton blamed the Food Control Committee and distrusted the council, regardless of the real reasons for food shortages and high prices. When the council set up a Peace Committee to celebrate victory they did not involve any of the ex-servicemen's bodies in the town. They then announced that it would be a limited celebration because of the funds available and a halfpenny rate was raised to help pay for it. Then there was a Mayor's Banquet at which no women were allowed and at which only guests personally invited by the mayor were allowed in free, everyone else had to pay 15s. Very few ex-servicemen could afford this and felt excluded – so much for returning to a 'home fit for heroes'.

On 7 July 1919 the Discharged Sailors & Soldiers Association put in a request to hold a drumhead service in Wardown Park. This was another flashpoint because the request was rejected by the Tolls and Municipal Buildings Committee and that decision was ratified by the Watch Committee because the DSSA represented only a fraction of ex-servicemen and that a service just for their members in the town's largest park would be exclusive, but they did offer alternative venues. The DSSA members felt very embittered because the request was never put before the full council.²

What was left of the town hall was demolished in August 1919 and in 1922 the statue 'Peace', designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and bearing the names of more than 280,000 dead servicemen from the Great War was unveiled.

Acknowledgement

This article is largely based on the account of the riot on the Bedfordshire Archives website (see below) with the kind permission of Pamela Birch, Archivist. In an article on the riots in the Summer 2019 Bedfordshire Archives *Newsletter*, Helen Bates, archivist, reported that she had found that, in the same period, there had been similar disturbances in Coventry, Swindon and Manchester about soldiers' pensions and the high unemployment rate. She wrote: 'What I thought of as an isolated incident suddenly became part of a wider tapestry which showed the deeper sense of anger, not only in Luton, but in urban areas throughout the country in response to the rapid changes in society brought on by the First World War'.

Notes

1. Beds Archives WW1/RH2.

2. In 2019 to commemorate the centenary of the 1919 Peace Riots, the Cultural Histories Community Interest Company, working with a number of partner organisations, individuals and local community groups in Luton developed a range of projects to promote awareness and interest in the 1919 Peace Days riots via a programme of learning and the performing arts. The projects included collecting personal and family recollections of the Peace Riots, plus art and music projects to promote local awareness of the event.

Sources and references

A book devoted to the riots by Dave Craddock was published in 1999 under the name *Where They Burnt the Town Hall Down*.

<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Luton/LutonIntroduction/TheLutonPeaceRiot-SaturdayNight.aspx>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luton_Peace_Day_Riots#p-search

Compiled by **Ted Martin**

The River Ivel

People walk alongside it, folk paddle in it, men and boys fish in it, and some even sail down it on homemade rafts in July. But what do we know about the River Ivel? It begins its life as a spring on the north side of Baldock close to the railway and the A1M. As the Ivel works its way northwards to Langford it is joined by other rivers which flow out of the Chiltern escarpment. The Hiz brings water from Oughton and the Purwell and the Flit join the Ivel together with water from the Cat Ditch which winds through Bygrave, Hinxworth, Stotfold and Astwick. Eventually the Ivel joins the Great Ouse at Tempsford. After this the Ouse reaches the North Sea via Ely, The Bedford Level, The Denver Sluice, King's Lynn and The Wash.

As the River Ivel passes Henlow Grange its course is very windy and in the past it was quite marshy, too. Here it forms the parish boundary between Henlow and Langford. When the river reaches the Henlow Road, there is a road bridge over the river near the garden centre. Water End was the name given to the part of Langford between this bridge and Chapel Hill due to the regular flooding that took place. The last serious flood was in 1947. In the Middle Ages before the first Henlow Road bridge was built there was a ford at this point so travellers could pass from Henlow to Toplers Hill via Cambridge and Edworth Roads. This was a minor Roman road and parts of it may have been paved for the benefit of Roman travellers.

As soon as the river passes under the Henlow Road bridge the boundary follows a ditch known today as Dam's Ditch. This leaves the river which then runs a quite straight and pretty wide course from the Henlow Road to Langford Mill at the bottom of Mill Lane and then on to Holme Mill. It is probable that Dam's Ditch was called Adam's Ditch in medieval times. Perhaps this ditch was the original course of the River Ivel. What we see now

behind Riverside Gardens and northwards to the Mill is a much improved waterway enhanced as part of a failed plan in 1847 to construct a canal from Biggleswade to Hitchin. The straightness, width and high west bank of the river indicate the intervention of man. The new channel also improved the flow and increased the head of water for Langford Mill to operate more efficiently.

In 1823 a meeting was held in Hitchin where it was recommended that a canal route from Langford to Hitchin should be constructed. It was also decided that the company should extend the Shefford line west to meet the Grand Junction Canal. This would create a profitable link from the main inland waterways system to Bedford, Ely, Cambridge and King's Lynn on the River Great Ouse network.

The current footbridge over the river at the bottom of Chapel Hill, Langford, is a modern construction and before this the crossing at this point was a ford suitable only for cattle and sheep to access the common.

Water power was employed at Langford Mill later to grind corn and earlier to power machinery to convert old rags into paper. Water levels were managed by weirs and sluices to provide enough head of water to drive the machinery. The river then continues onto Holme Mills where the process is repeated once again to provide energy at Jordan's Mill.

Plans for a canal for the River Ivel were first announced in 1756. Locks on the River Ivel were built in 1758 at Tempsford, Blunham, South Mills and Sandy. Although tolls were initially lower than expected and the operators were in debt, trade increased rapidly and the creditors were all paid off by 1780. In the early 19th century the canal was extended to Shefford, with locks at Biggleswade, Holme, Stanford, Clifton and Shefford, and it was opened in 1823, but, as mentioned below, was abandoned in 1876 because of competition from the railway in terms of speed and lower charges.

The canal that was built from Shefford to Langford is known as the Ivel Navigation or New Cut. It passes through Stanford lock and joins the River Ivel behind Mill Meadow. The extension to the River Ivel Navigation was built by labourers or navvies from Bristol, who were paid 3.5d (not p) per cubic yard of earth removed.

The navigation proved profitable, and also had several unexpected side-effects; it helped to control flooding, and great numbers of eels were captured in traps at the canal staunches. These eels graced many local tables and became extremely popular as a regional dish.

Then came the railways – in 1850 the Great Northern, and in 1857 the Midland Railway were built through the region – and the navigation

gradually fell into disuse. By 1870 trade on the canal ceased with the last barge navigating in 1876.

Information sourced from *The People at the Long Ford* by Michael Rutt and <http://www.canalroutes.net/Ivel-Riverhtml>

John Shipman

Bedfordshire Dialect

Perhaps the finest expert on the Bedfordshire dialect was Dr David Shaw one-time English Lecturer at Bedford College. He could bring the language to life and to listen to him speaking in 'Bedfordshire' was to be transported back to the age of Bunyan, not at all like the contrived accents.

Dr Shaw argued, perhaps not surprisingly, that as one of the original frontier towns from the period of the Danelaw, the local Bedfordshire accent appeared to have its roots firmly in the joining of the Anglian and Saxon languages through intermarriage. He pointed out that from then the language of the area evolved and that now the south of the county is very similar to a London accent and that of the north could easily be mistaken for Northamptonshire or South Leicestershire.

The Bedfordshire dialect does still exist but it is now becoming very hard to find, although for example you will still hear locals, refer to even a young person as 'that old boy', often causing considerable confusion in conversations with newcomers to the area.

Some examples of other phrases that have long since disappeared:

Clodhoppers – Boots.

Ferrcalling – Messing about with something or fooling around.

Clack – Mouth – stop clacking or chattering.

Jallop – Medicine.

Buppy – Butter.

Dry as Charff – A very dry throat, very thirsty.

Up the wooden stairs to Bedfordshire – Going upstairs to bed. (Are local children still told this I wonder?).

Show the dog a bone – Let me see what is going on.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the dialect and phrases specific to our area could read *Bedfordshire: Webster's Quotations, Facts and Phrases* by Phillip Parker. An interesting read.

Trevor Stewart

Society Bookshelf

Books published by our history societies: contact the Editor if you wish your Society's books to be included

- Bedford History Timeline*, by Alan Crawley and Bob Ricketts Published by Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society. 2019, Paperback, 94pp, 119 illustrations. Price £8, from the Eagle Bookshop, 16–20 St Peter's Street, Bedford MK40 2NN or £10 incl postage from Bob Ricketts, 68 Mendip Crescent, Bedford, MK41 9EP.
- Beats, Boots and Thieves – A History of Policing in North Bedfordshire*, By Des Hoar and Richard Handscomb. Sharnbrook Local History Group. 2013. Paperback, 146 pp, £10 from 24 Loring Road, Sharnbrook, Bedford MK44 1JZ.
- Colmworth and Neighbouring Villages: Then and Now*, by Colmworth and Neighbours History Society. 2018. Paperback, 46pp, 100+ illustrations, £5 + £2 postage from Dave Jarrett, 3 Collingwood Road, Eaton Socon, PE19 8JQ
- Henry John Sylvester Stannard with notes on his daughter Theresa Sylvester Stannard*, by Richard Morgan. Published by Bedfordshire Local History Association, 2018. 48pp incl index. Available via the BLHA website <http://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk>, £5 + p&p.
- Langford Then and Now 2006*. Published by Langford & District History Society, 2006. Paperback, 40 pp, 80+ photos, £4, from Rowena Wolfe by phone or email: 01767 312556 or rowena.wolfe@btinternet.com.
- Langford through the Lens Volume 1*. Published by Langford & District History Society, reprinted with amendments 2014. Paperback, 74 pp, 70 photos, £5, from Rowena Wolfe by phone or email: 01767 312556 or rowena.wolfe@btinternet.com.
- Langford through the Lens, Volume 2*. Published by Langford & District History Society. 1992. Paperback, 80 pp, 80+ photos, £3, from Rowena Wolfe by phone or email: 01767 312556 or rowena.wolfe@btinternet.com.
- Willington in the First World War* by Robert Bollington. Published by Gostwick Press. 2018. 96pp, £6, from Willington Local History Group (cheque to be payable to them) c/o Rob Bollington, 2 Beauchamp Place, Willington MK44 3QA.

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- Articles: Bedford's Architects and Architecture, 1919 to 1939*, by Bob Ricketts.
The Founding of Holy Trinity Church, Bromham Road, by Bob Ricketts.
The Bedford Bee, by Nick Wilde.