

15TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF BLHA

This **ANNIVERSARY MEETING** has been arranged to celebrate **15 years** since the formation of your County's Local History Association, and will provide another opportunity to meet like-minded old friends (and to make new ones) from around the County to exchange ideas over a glass of wine. The meeting will take place on **Saturday 8th March 2008** at **Clapham Village Hall** from 9.30 am to 4.00 pm.

Our membership has grown so that it now comprises 31 societies (with an overall membership exceeding 2000 when last surveyed in 2006), other organisations and corporate bodies with an interest in Local History, and 50 or so individual members. All share an interest in Local History of this locality, and many participate in research and recording.

Whilst, naturally, we will take a congratulatory look at the achievements of the past 15 years, the focus of the day will be examining current trends in Local History and considering the way forward. We are fortunate in obtaining **Dr. Kate Tiller**, Reader Emerita in English Local History, Fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford University, as our keynote speaker and to join our discussions.

The morning programme, after registration, coffee and Introduction, will be :-

Dr. Kate Tiller	Local History Brought Up To Date
Kevin Ward, County Archivist	Archives & Cultural Services in the County
Martin Lawrence, Vice President	The BLHA – The First Fifteen Years

The afternoon programme, after a finger buffet lunch with a glass of wine/fruit juice and coffee, will be :-

Barry Dackombe, Chairman BLHA **The Association Today**
The Future of our Association and Its Role in the 21st Century. An opportunity to put your views and ideas forward in small informal discussion groups. Each group will be led by a chairperson who will report the outcome of your discussion to the overall coordinator before tea.

Tea, followed by Summary with input from the Speakers.

We invite all BLHA members and others who are interested in the study of Local History to join with us on this important occasion; we are sure it will be a very interesting programme and an enjoyable way of meeting other local historians and getting your views across to shape the future of **your** Association. This is a meeting not to be missed. At this anniversary meeting we are only charging for food and drink (£7.50); all other costs will be borne by the Association. **Booking forms available now from BLHA Secretary Stella Gibbs, Tel. 01480 351931.** Early booking is advised.

2008 LOCAL HISTORY CONFERENCE & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **2008 BLHA Local History Conference and Annual General Meeting** will be hosted by the **Caddington Local History Group** and will be held on **Saturday May 17th 2008** in the **Collings-Wells Memorial Hall, Caddington**. Parking will be stewarded and at the nearby school. The Church will be open for visits, and the village green is nearby. A hot lunch is planned, and the usual refreshments will be available. Full details of the programme and entrance fee will be available shortly. The Annual General Meeting of the Association will take place immediately before the Conference and, as usual, there will be no charge to members who wish to attend the AGM but not the Conference. Please note that the seating is limited to 80 persons, so to make sure of your place, book as early as possible after the issue of invitations. A profile of the **Caddington Local History Group** is on page 4.

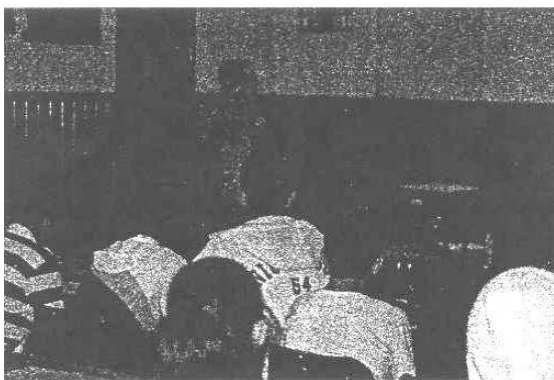
Digging up Sharnbrook's Past

Des Hoar, June Barnes

The group of enthusiasts attending the village's local history sessions had only been formed a few months earlier. We were endeavouring to identify what was already known and what documentary evidence existed. We started by getting several people who had done research to share their findings, and by making contact with various local organisations whose help we would need. The timing of one of these sessions led to what is, to date, our most interesting project.

We were invited to become Bedfordshire's first site in the Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA) initiative run by Access Cambridge Archaeology at the University of Cambridge (UC). The project brings together school pupils, village residents and local history groups in an archaeological and historical investigation into the development of villages and hamlets across the country. As well as discovering new information about the countryside, the project aims to give Year 10/11 students, who might not think University is for them, the opportunity to experience academic work in a real-life setting.

The project is run by Carena Lewis from the UC Dept of Archaeology, who is well known as being on the Channel 4 *Time Team*. Like the *Time Team's* 'Big Dig' in 2003, this scheme involved digging test pits in gardens within villages and hamlets which are still occupied. The project has investigated 17 sites across East Anglia since 2005.



Our first task was to identify where the test pits would be dug. We wrote a letter to residents explaining the project, and asked for volunteers. The reaction was overwhelming. We narrowed it down from 25 to 12, and Carena came to examine the potential sites to get our shortlist of six.

We waited for the big day in late June, and hoped for fine weather. Most of the 20 students came from Luton. The journey through Bedford's

morning traffic had not been particularly enjoyable, so spirits were not high and some were apprehensive about what lay ahead. Carena gave a full and engaging introduction to the aims of HEFA and went through a timetable of the two-day investigation at Sharnbrook and a third day at UC. It became clear that some of the students had not really been in the countryside before, and only a handful had ever done any digging. A few of the girls realised that they had not come dressed for peering into a muddy hole!

The talk covered the procedures of scientific investigation, and impressed upon them how the techniques they would use for discovery, retrieval and recording would be of the same standard as used by professionals. They would also be using the correct jargon and observing the necessary safety procedures. Their eyes lit up when Carena mentioned incentives; there would be recognition of the teams that

- had the most finds
- had the oldest find
- dug the deepest pit (student William knew he would win that one!)
- organised the neatest site
- kept the best records etc.

Teams were assigned, and each was issued with site equipment, a handbook detailing the process and a test pit record book. Members of the local history group took the teams to each garden where the test pit site had been marked.

The weather looked threatening, hence their first decision was whether to erect a gazebo style shelter – most decided not to. After marking the one-metre square pit and accurately locating its position relative to two fixed points, they examined the surface layer (context 1) for undulations, texture, colour, etc. They then had to remove the turf. It should have been easy, but some teams found they were using new sets of muscles!

Each context (a layer of 10cm depth) was examined, dug and sieved in a systematic manner.



All finds, i.e. anything that did not appear natural, were put into a specific tray for that context.

At the end of the day we assembled in the church, and the UC team started to identify the pottery. Not surprisingly, there was a fair bit of Creamware and Victorian pot in the contexts nearer the surface.



There were smiles on the coach as they left for home, and they had not had any rain.

The next day they arrived early, and everyone had come dressed ready for action. You could sense their anticipation as they all wanted to get deeper and hopefully find some really old and interesting items. Students from Sandy joined the teams.

Test Pit 1 was progressing ever deeper as William loosened some more rocks with a nudge by the mattock. It looked as though this pit was going through layers of rubble, and the finds were not reflecting the energy being put in. The other pits were progressing more slowly, but the number of finds was beginning to grow. All the teams were rigorous in their record-keeping, as they systematically described each context.

Time flew by, and it was necessary to do a final section drawing to record any change in the appearance of the layers in their pit. They then back-filled with any rocks and the spoil heap and then replaced the turf. We think they left the gardens with some sadness. One of them has decided that the garden will make a wonderful setting for her wedding ceremony!

We all met back at the church for de-briefing and another look at the finds. The preliminary identification suggested that the older items of pottery were present in several of the test pits. The students left Sharnbrook with a real sense of achievement. Back at school they would have to write

- report using the test pit records
- diary-style account of the dig
- summary of Sharnbrook's history

They would then have a day at Cambridge to get detailed feedback on the findings.

The final Pottery Report confirmed that test pit 1 at the south-east end of the High Street had nothing earlier than Creamware, which suggests the land was never used by people before this time.

Test pits 3 and 5 were similar, in that they produced a wide range of pottery from the early medieval period onwards. It shows that people have been living on the sites more or less continuously for 900 years, although the absence of glazed pottery from the 13th and 14th centuries suggests the sites were abandoned at some point in that time.

All the pottery from test pit 4 was post-medieval, suggesting that no-one was using the site before the 16th century.

The oldest find was a fairly large piece of Iron Age pottery from test pit 2 on the High Street. It shows that people were almost certainly living here over 2000 years ago. There was also a small amount of late Saxon and medieval pottery, showing another period of occupation between the 10th and 15th centuries. After that, this site appears not to have been used to any great extent until Victorian times.

The full details of the pottery finds for Sharnbrook and the other East Anglian sites can be found at www.arch.cam.ac.uk/aca/fatpf/excavations.html.

The findings will certainly provide new ideas about where to choose further test pit sites. The plan is for Carenza and her team to repeat the process in the summer of 2008.

This whole project was photographed and a slide-show was shown at our first meeting in September. Everyone was pleased to hear that William did indeed win the prize for the deepest pit!

Record of Finds from Test Pit 3

- A) Early Medieval Shelly Ware. AD 1100-1400. Hard fabric with plentiful fossil shell mixed in with the clay. Manufactured at many sites in western Bedfordshire (5 pcs)
- B) Early Medieval Sandy Ware. AD 1100-1400. Hard fabric with plentiful quartz temper. Manufactured at a wide range of generally unknown sites all over eastern England (1 pc)
- C) Late Medieval Oxidized Ware. Hard red pottery with lots of sand mixed in with the clay. Made from about 1450-1500 in lots of different sites in the south-east midlands and western East Anglia. (2 pcs)
- D) Late Medieval Reduced Ware. 1350-1500. Very similar to C) above, but pots are a uniform dark greyish-blue colour, and slightly earlier in date (1 pc)
- E) Glazed Red Earthenwares. Just about everywhere in Britain began to make and use this type of pottery from about AD 1550 onwards, and it was still being made in the 19th century. The clay fabric is usually very smooth and a brick red colour. Almost all of them have shiny good-quality orange or green glaze on the inner surface, and sometimes on the outside as well. From about AD 1680, black glaze was also used (1 pc)
- F) Black-glazed Earthenwares. Late 17th century +. Basically a development of Red Earthenwares, with a similar range of forms, although with a black glaze which was coloured by the addition of iron filings. (2 pcs)
- G) Staffordshire Manganese Ware, late 17th-18th century. Made from a fine buff-coloured clay, with the pots usually covered with a mottled purple and brown glaze, which was coloured by the addition of powdered manganese. (1 pc)
- H) 'Victorian'. A wide range of different types of pottery, particularly the cups, plates and bowls with blue decoration which are still used today. First made around AD 1800. (121 pcs)

Caddington Local History Group

Terri Aubrey

The **Caddington Local History Group** (Caddhist) was originally formed in 1994. The aim of our group is to 'collect, record, investigate and preserve anything of interest regarding Caddington and its immediate areas (past and present) and, if possible, educate in this context'.

This extract from our constitution is the basis of our monthly meetings, which include informative and entertaining talks given by local experts and personalities. We have over 100 members, half of which usually attend the monthly meetings.

We are always eager to collect and archive local memorabilia associated with parish history, events, personalities, etc. To this end, we have recently purchased a voice recorder and a camcorder, and have begun a photo archive.

Several of our members have researched or are in the process of researching areas of local interest, eg. All Saints' Stained Glass Windows, the History of the Boys Brigade, the British Legion, W.I. and the Schools in Caddington. In all, about twelve projects are ongoing.

Caddhist also instigated the restoration of the church clock (represented in our logo). This work took two years.

The social aspect is considered important, and we arrange day and evening trips, a summer barbeque, and an annual charity evening. As a result of one of our meetings on the subject of the WW2 Czech connection in the area, a visit to Prague guided by the speaker was arranged.

We assist and support village events, and have carried out a number of village projects. We have also published a number of books and distribute a regular newsletter.

Our website (www.caddhist.moonfruit.com), which describes all aspects of the group's activities, has attracted over 29,000 visitors.

New Publications

Bridges of Time by **Shela Porter** published by The Book Castle, ISBN 978-1-903747-82-7. Price £9.99.

The unfolding of a traumatic span of seventy years, this gripping autobiography tells the story of a woman's struggle, mostly in Bedford, to achieve happiness as she battles against fate and finally finds contentment in her later years.

The third in a large family of eight children, Shela enjoys her early years at school and writes small stories each week for her teacher on pieces of toilet paper. Ambitions to become a teacher herself are thwarted, however, when she is taken out of Bedford Girls Modern School at fourteen to work in the family business. Long hours and demanding work leave little time for a teenage social life, but it is in the little café that Shela meets her future husband. Marriage at twenty and the birth of three children in the first three years lead to a lonely life on a council estate, as her marriage breaks down and her violent and immature husband leaves the family home.

Full time work is imperative to keep the family together, but Shela is devastated when her youngest child develops coeliac disease and asthma and is taken away to be educated in a residential hospital school in Hertfordshire. The older boy leaves home to live with his father, and Shela meets her second husband who promises to look after them all. A gradual realisation that he is an alcoholic who is already seriously ill, prompts her to enter teacher training as a mature student, and on qualification, work in Bedfordshire schools.

Now widowed and lonely as her children leave home, Shela begins a questionable relationship with a man whom she eventually marries after his strictly Catholic wife dies. Two years in India follow, and then several in Yorkshire, as her unhappiness with an unfaithful and controlling husband results in a nervous breakdown and a return to Bedford with a pressing need to re-establish her life yet again.

Eventually retired, she begins to write again, and two children's books are published, with three more completed. Shela realises that writing has helped to save her sanity, and begins to give talks on her life and on writing as therapy.

In her early sixties, with all thoughts of romance firmly dismissed from her mind, she meets the caring and gentle man who becomes her fourth husband and who nurses her back to health while encouraging her to write regularly again. The first result is a biography of her mother, 'Threads of Time', which was published to coincide with the start of the new millennium.

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE is published by the **BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

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Contributions are welcomed and should be sent to the above address, together with a stamped addressed envelope if the contribution is to be returned. Contributions may be in any readable form, including on IBM compatible disc. If the latter is employed, please consult the Editor before despatch to avoid compatibility problems.

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