

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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BLHA Summer Event 2013 and AGM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
MILLBROOK HISTORY SOCIETY

AT

MAULDEN VILLAGE HALL

Saturday, 15 June 2013

Registration: 9.30 am AGM: 10 am

Event: 10.45 am to 3.30 pm

The Summer Event will commence at 10.45 am and will finish at 3.30 pm. No charge will be made for those who only wish to attend the AGM. Lunch and refreshments are included in the Event fee.

Event programme:

- 10.45 *'The Varsity Line in Bedfordshire'*
Illustrated talk by David Thomas of Millbrook History Society detailing the history of the Bedfordshire section of the Oxford to Cambridge railway
- 11.30 Short break
- 11 45 Talk: to be arranged
- 12.30 Lunch
- 14.00 We vacate the hall and travel in our own cars to visit the original Millbrook Station yard and signal control cabin and David Thomas's collection of railway memorabilia
- 15.30 Close

Cost for the day including drinks and lunch: £17; dedicated parking, details on your ticket. Closing date for applications, 22 May 2012. Send applications to Mike Turner, 117 High Street, Clophill, Beds MK45 4BJ, Tel 01525 862285.

Notes and news

The **Heritage Lottery Fund** has launched a new £1m small grants programme 'All Our Stories'. The programme will provide grants of £3,000–£10,000 to support charities, community groups and heritage organisations running local history projects. You need to register your

organisation on the Heritage Lottery Fund website to access the online application materials. For more information visit the Heritage Lottery Fund website at:
www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/Allourstories.aspx

Langford History Society. At its AGM on 6 February Langford History Society decided to change its name to Langford and District History Society to try to bring in new members from villages near Langford.

The Rev Thomas Whitehurst Rector of Colmworth

Our habit of considering local history by county sometimes leads us to ignore or underrate people and families which straddle county boundaries. Yet for those in the 18th century living in the SE corner of Beds, Hitchin over the border into Herts is likely to be more important than any town in Beds. The fact that county boundaries often included 'foreign' enclaves should further discourage us from too parochial a view. It was only in 1868 that a tiny isolated piece of Shillington in the middle of Hitchin was transferred from Beds to Herts.¹

This is the story of the Rev Thomas Whitehurst, a man with substantial landholdings in both Herts and Beds. The name Whitehurst seems to be derived from a small hamlet east of the Staffordshire village of Dilhorne. Several people of this name were in Staffordshire and Derbyshire in the 17th and 18th centuries, of whom the best known is the remarkable John Whitehurst 1713–88, noted clockmaker and scientist, Fellow of the Royal Society and a member of Erasmus Darwin's Lunar Society.² It seems likely all or most persons with this name are related. The Whitehursts I am about to describe bore arms that were used by their namesakes in the North.³

A William Whitehurst born in about 1690⁴ married Annabella Payne at St Benet's, Paul's Wharf, in London on 9 May 1724. She was a spinster of St Andrew's Holborn – baptised there on 2 February 1702.⁵ He was a widower of St Giles-in-the-Fields, his previous wife being Elizabeth Lovejoy widow whom he married also at St Benet's, Paul's Wharf, on 8 December 1720.

William and Annabella had at least nine children born between 1726 and 1737, of whom those born before 1731 were baptised at St Giles-in-the-Fields and those afterward at St George's Bloomsbury. St

George's was a new parish carved out of St Giles' and the Church begun in 1711 was completed in 1731,⁶ so it is not to be assumed that the Whitehurst family moved house in 1730–31. Thomas was baptised at the latter church on 28 September 1733.

William Whitehurst made a will on 5 March 1736/7.⁷ He was a Haberdasher and Citizen of London. He mentions a brother, John Whitehurst, who was of Hitchin and a haberdasher of hats. We may wonder whether there were not business advantages in there being brothers of whom one was a haberdasher in London (William) and the other a haberdasher of hats in Hitchin (John). Perhaps William was able to obtain especially fashionable styles in London for John to sell in the prosperous little town of Hitchin. Certainly John at least seems to have prospered, for he conveyed some 10 acres of land at Hexton to trustees in 1755 for them to apply the rents as to half for a girls' school and as to the other half for Skynner's Almshouses in Hitchin.⁸

John made his will⁹ on 6 November 1757. In it he mentions no descendants, but speaks of his sister in law Annabella Whitehurst of London, widow, and three Whitehurst nephews, two officers in the Army and the Rev Thomas Whitehurst late of St Peter's College, Cambridge, now of Hitchin, Clerk. This implies that William had done sufficiently well in business to provide proper careers for his sons – unless perhaps some or all the money for this came from childless uncle John Whitehurst.

William and John in their wills also mentioned nephew John Everitt (who was of Hitchin and later also became a haberdasher of hats and seems to have taken over John's Hitchin business). Everitt's mother is William and John Whitehurst's sister, Elizabeth.

Thomas Whitehurst was admitted on 25 June 1752 to Peterhouse, Cambridge. He is described as being of London, 17 years old, educated at Ely – presumably the King's School there. In fact he was 18. He obtained his BA in 1756, MA in 1759. By 1757 he was ordained.

On 14 April 1757 the Rev Thomas Whitehurst married a notable Hitchin heiress, Miss Sarah Hitchin. Her father, Edward Hitchin, was a Tanner in the town.¹⁰ There was an elaborate marriage settlement and the trustees included the grandees of the town: Sarah's uncle, Richard Hitchin; Joseph Ewesdin who was also probably a relative of Sarah's; Joseph Margetts Pierson a grocer but also a benefactor of the poor of Hitchin and later a banker¹¹; and Thomas Whitehurst's cousin, John Everitt, who not only inherited John Whitehurst's haberdashery of hats business, but also started Hitchin's, and indeed Hertfordshire's, first bank in or shortly before 1784.¹² He also purchased the Manor of Westoning, Beds, in 1767 and his son became High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1800 and received a knighthood.

The Gentleman's Magazine said Miss Hitchin was worth £15,000. However, it is clear that Thomas Whitehurst also had substantial property of his own. A fine map of 1767 in Hertfordshire Archives shows his property in the Walsworth area of Hitchin enclosed by a private Enclosure Act that year.¹³ Three years later the same surveyor (now identified as T

Bateman) produced a map of the Rev Thomas Whitehurst's property in Ickleford, a village immediately north of Hitchin and adjoining Walsworth.¹⁴ Some of the Ickleford property abuts or even strays into Arlesey and Holwell parishes, at that time both in Bedfordshire. Whitehurst's total holding shown on these maps is about 900 acres at Ickleford and 200 at Walsworth (and at Ickleford the Rev Thomas Whitehurst owned the Manor House).

Further evidence of the Rev Thomas Whitehurst's wealth comes from a private Act of Parliament which was passed in 1769 to regularise certain aspects of the holdings in the marriage settlement:

'An Act for Vesting Part of the settled Estates of the Reverend *Thomas Whitehurst*, Clerk and *Sarah* his Wife, in the Counties of *Hertford* and *Bedford*, in the said *Thomas Whitehurst*, in Fee Simple; and for settling other Estates of the said *Thomas Whitehurst*, in the said County of *Hertford*, to the same Uses as the said Estates were settled' (9 Geo 3, c. lxxxiv).

The capital sums in the settlement exceed £7,000, and property is mentioned on either side of the Beds/Herts border – freeholds in Hitchin and some 55 freehold acres in Luton and a further 57 acres of copyhold land in Shillington. All of these are described in meticulous detail – for example:

' . . . all that capital Messuage or Tenement, with the Appurtenances, situate and being in the South End of *Luton* aforesaid, thentofore in the several occupations of *Sarah Ewer*, Widow, late of the said *Edward Ewer* and *Jeremiah Bunn*, and then in the Occupation of Mr *John Young*; . . . and also all that Close or Pasture Ground, with the Appurtenances to the said capital Messuage or Tenement, belonging and near adjoining, late also of the said *Jeremiah Bunn*, and then in the Occupation of — ¹⁵ containing by Estimation Two Acres, more or less, and fronts, West, in a certain common Field belonging to *Luton* aforesaid called *Bailey Field* . . .'

Some further copyholds in those places are vested in new trustees: Fitzwilliam Barrington 1755–1833 who in 1818 became the 10th and last baronet¹⁶; and Richard Tristram, a lawyer and Steward of the Manor of Hitchin.¹⁷ There is no mention of Ickleford in this Act, probably because he had not yet purchased it.

The two maps I have referred to show an apparently unofficial Whitehurst coat of arms. In 1776, still living at Ickleford, the Rev Thomas Whitehurst regularised this by applying formally to the College of Arms and obtaining a grant of arms.¹⁸

In 1786 the Rev Thomas Whitehurst became Rector of Colmworth in Bedfordshire and remained there till 1791. It was evidently not a rich living – worth only £179 per annum by 1841.¹⁹ We can only guess at the reasons for this, but perhaps it was in connection with his sale of Ickleford in 1788.²⁰ He had the work at Colmworth performed by curates (including from 1788 onwards his own son, the Rev Richard Hitchin Whitehurst, later Vicar of Westoning) and I can find only one marriage entry in the registers in the Rev Thomas's hand – a wedding on 20 January 1787 between Thomas Carter, servant, and Elizabeth Facey, both of that parish. Was Carter Whitehurst's servant and was that why the latter

conducted the service? If Ickleford was up for sale, was Whitehurst actually living in Colmworth, perhaps sharing the Rectory with his son?

Evidence that all was no longer well with Whitehurst's finances comes in some Chancery cases. The first, of which we have only a passing reference, concerns a Richard Shaw who sued Whitehurst in connection with two loans (£500 and £300, both with interest) and was awarded £1,000 and £600 respectively plus a further 3 guineas each in costs. Whitehurst evidently raised the money to pay this by encumbering other property that he owned.²¹

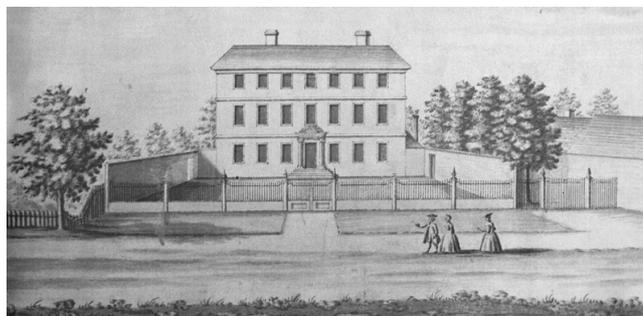
The second case tells us more about this encumbrance.²² In February 1789 Whitehurst owned the rectory and advowson of the parish of North Wingfield, Derbys, and put them up for sale by public auction. The value of North Wingfield at this period is not known but by 1841 it was worth a very handsome £772 per annum.²³ The auctioneer was no less a person than James Christie.²⁴ Before the sale, a Mr Bell objected to the accuracy of the printed particulars. Christie then added further material to the printed particulars and the sale proceeded. One Richard Collett²⁵ made the successful bid of £7,570 10s 0d and immediately paid over a deposit of £1,500. The encumbrances were of course the money owed to Shaw and two other creditors were named, James Menetone[?] and a Mr Goubb, who was owed £1,107 plus interest. North Wingfield was otherwise a good investment in that the incumbent, the Rev William Burrow, was over 80 so the chances of having a right of presentation in the near future were good. However, Whitehurst delayed going through with the sale to Collett – hence Collett's action requiring specific performance from Whitehurst (and after both Whitehurst's and Christie's deaths, their respective sons). As so often with Chancery cases, we do not know the outcome, but the case suggests financial embarrassment. Perhaps the Colmworth Rectory exercise was also a way of increasing income.

The Rev Thomas Whitehurst moved to Harmondsworth in Middlesex towards the end of his life. He made his will there on Christmas Day 1792.²⁶ He died in 1801 still at Harmondsworth leaving his property in trust. The executors and trustees were Joseph Margetts Pierson, who had been one of the trustees of his marriage settlement, and William Wilshere, another Hitchin lawyer and banker.²⁷ The fact that both men came from Hitchin suggests Whitehurst's remaining property was in or near that town. The interest from the trust fund was to be paid to Whitehurst's widow, Sarah, and after her death to his eldest son, the Rev Richard Hitchin Whitehurst, Vicar of Westoning, and his heirs. When it came to the point, both Pierson and Wilshere renounced the executorship and Administration with Will Annexed was granted to the Rev Richard.

Earlier in 1792, the Rev Thomas Whitehurst had handed over £1,000 to Sarah (to avoid creditors, one suspects). Sarah was not with him but living in Newman Street, London (Why?). By her will²⁸ she left the £1,000 equally divided between her other two children the Rev John Whitehurst, Vicar of Newton, Suffolk, and Sarah Hitchin Whitehurst who never

married but outlived both her brothers, dying in 1837.

The Heinz Archive of the National Portrait Gallery knows of no portrait of the Rev Thomas Whitehurst, but perhaps he is depicted in a vignette on the Ickleford map. It shows the west front of the Manor House and a man and two women walking past it.²⁹ Can we detect a shovel style to the hat and one of those clerical wigs like two bunches of grapes? If so, the man might be the Rev Thomas and one of the women his wife, Sarah. Unfortunately their daughter, Sarah Hitchin Whitehurst, was only 8 at the time, so cannot be the second woman.



The west front of Ickleford Manor House (Hertfordshire Archives).
Is the man the Rev Thomas?

Notes

1. 31 & 32 Vict, c. 122, s. 27.
2. For an account of John Whitehurst and his antecedents see Maxwell Craven, *John Whitehurst of Derby, Clockmaker & Scientist 1713–88* (Ashbourne, 1996), especially Chap 1.
3. Maxwell Craven says the Rev Thomas Whitehurst was 'of a collateral branch of the family' (*op. cit.* n. 2, pp. 19–20). He adds that the Rev Thomas was of Church Stretton, Salop. This is to misunderstand a somewhat delphic remark in Sir Bernard Burke, *The General Armory with Supplement* (London, 1884), p. 1104. Indeed I suspect Stretton is not the Salop one, but a hamlet in North Wingfield, Derbys.
4. Bishop of London's Marriage Allegation 1720, No 483 of 7 Nov 1720.
5. Is that 1702/3 or 1701/2?
6. Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 4: North* (London, 1998), p. 257. The St Giles microfilmed registers are very faint and with 60–70 baptisms a month, searching is laborious. It is a relief to turn to the better registers of St George's Bloomsbury. (There is also a Francis Whitehurst baptised at St Giles on 23 Sep 1726, the son of Francis and Margaret Whitehurst.)
7. TNA PROB11/698.
8. Robert Clutterbuck, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford*, III (London, 1827), p. 50.
9. TNA PROB11/890.
10. An Edward Hitchin was a leader of the Hitchin Congregationalists (Reginald L Hine, *The History of Hitchin*, II (London, 1929), pp. 100, 104, 109 and 114, with a mezzotint portrait of him reproduced opposite p. 114). Dates are sparse but this Edward Hitchin was active in 1688, from which I deduce he was probably of an earlier generation than the rich tanner. Moreover in 1715 one of the churchwardens of Hitchin was Edward Hitchin – surely not the arch-dissenter, but possibly the tanner.
11. His benefactions are in Clutterbuck, *op. cit.* n. 8, III, pp. 51–52. His banking is in Jack Parker, 'Nothing for Nothing for Nobody': *A History of Hertfordshire Banks and Banking* (Stevenage, 1986), p. 14.
12. Jack Parker, *loc. cit.* n.11.
13. Herts Archives 58882.
14. Herts Archives D/EHa P1.
15. There is a blank here.
16. Burke, *Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies* (2nd ed, 1841), p. 44.
17. Died 1785, Clutterbuck, *op. cit.* n. 8, III, p. 46; Hine, *op. cit.* n. 10, I, p. 63.
18. W Harry Rylands, *Grantees of Arms Named in Docquets and Patents 1687–1898*, Vol II (Harleian Society, LXVIII, 1907), p. 393.
19. *Clergy List 1841*.
20. John Edwin Cussans, *History of Hertfordshire*, Hitchin Hundred, p. 26, quoted in the *Victoria County History: Herts*. The advowson belonged to the Hillersden family (*Victoria County History*:

Herts, III, p. 189), but I know of no connection with the Hillersdens.

21. Whitehurst's witness statement of 22 April 1790 in *Collett v. Whitehurst*, TNA C 12/1089/16.

22. *Collett v. Whitehurst*, TNA C 12/1089/16, C 12/1264/4C 13/2324/67, C 13/2324/56.

23. *Clergy List 1841*.

24. This seems to be James Christie the auctioneer who died in 1803 (ODNB).

25. Richard Collett was one of the 'Attornies in Exchequer Office' of Pleas in Chancery Lane in London (*Law List 1812*, p. 53).

26. TNA PROB11/1361/97.

27. Jack Parker, *loc. cit.* n. 11. See also Arthur Jones, *Hertfordshire 1731–1800 as recorded in The Gentleman's Magazine* (Hatfield, 1993), p. 248, and *Burke's Landed Gentry*, Wilshere of The Frythe.

28. TNA PROB11/1383/281.

29. The house was destroyed by fire in 1919 (Hine, *op. cit.* n. 10, II, p. 406). The illustration of Ickleford Manor House is part of the 1771 map of Ickleford and reproduced by kind permission of Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (reference D/EHa P1).

Books

Beats, Boots and Thieves – A History of Policing in North Bedfordshire, By Des Hoar and Richard Handscomb. Sharnbrook Local History Group. ISBN 978–0–9574154–0–9. Paperback, 146 pp, price £10. Obtainable from 24 Loring Road, Sharnbrook, Bedford MK44 1JZ.

This book tells the story of the establishment of a professional police force in North Beds – an obvious move in towns and cities but less obvious in rural parishes. The story is told with reference to the people involved, both the offenders and the policemen.



From the front cover of *Beats, Boots and Thieves*

Contributing factors to researching policing were: the old Police Station/Court House is still very prominent in Sharnbrook High Street; police officers frequently occurring in local family histories; and Bedfordshire Constabulary's recent 150th anniversary.

Geographical scope could not be restricted solely to Sharnbrook because Sharnbrook is the focal point for many surrounding villages – a wide area north of Bedford was selected and all officers who served in it were included and also any residents/people born in Sharnbrook who served in police forces elsewhere.

Contact was made with the Police Museum and Archive Unit at the Bedfordshire Constabulary HQ and the County Record Office. Officers' stories highlighted both their comradeship and their complex relationship with the public. Crime data was collated and analysed for patterns, and advice and assistance sought from academia and there was help and encouragement from the villagers and inputs from the descendants of police officers.

The three main chapters in the book, from the main areas of research, are: (1) *Organisation*: covering the early years, the seeds of change, the move towards modern policing, establishing the new rural constabulary, including the role of the parish constable, and increasing costs, the new police station for the Bletsoe Division and the use of police houses. (2) *Events (Crimes)*: the handling of crime, the

levels of crime, crime in Sharnbrook, and the Carlton incident (the riot at Carlton Approved School in August 1959). (3) *People*: the policemen's chapter: the first people: identification in group photos, records by date, PCs and their collar numbers and in a specified village; the rank, career and lifestyle of officers; women officers and serving as a special constable. Then there are 19 pages of biographies of officers written in the first person, no doubt with some help from the authors!

Two pages of final thoughts on the demise of the Division and policing today and yesterday; a page of answers to queries raised earlier; 6 pages of timelines and 3 pages of Subject Index follow. The normal indexing convention of surname first is not used: H E Bates is under H! Some entries are in bold type, but there is no explanation for it.

The book is profusely illustrated, but has no list of illustrations. Why print on bulky book wove when a smoother paper would have improved the illustrations? Professional input on typography and indexing would also have helped presentation.

But there is much interesting detail and history to be relished and savoured here and *Beats, Boots and Thieves* is a very creditable and interesting piece of research: the minor presentational criticisms above should not detract from an absorbing and detailed read. Further information from: publishing@slhg.org.uk

The Ampthill Gas and Coke Company, 1848–1936 (40 pp) and *The Three Counties Hospital Gas Works, 1857–1952* (32 pp). Softbound, wire stitched, £4 each post free or both for £7 post free from Mr A Marks, 48 Mossbank Avenue, Luton, Beds LU2 9HH.

Local gas works are now in the past and probably unknown to the younger generation but they are part of our local and industrial history. Tony Marks' two booklets give a detailed history of each concern and descriptions of the technology. Both are well printed on art paper.

The Ampthill Gas and Coke Company booklet after an introduction has sections on the deed of settlement and land purchase, the building of the works, the company's activities up to 1914, public lighting, gas meters, the Great War, final years, take over and closure and a chronological listing of company employees mentioned in the minute books. Photographs of the retort house, the works in 1909 and the manager's house are included.

The Three Counties Hospital Gas Works booklet after an introduction covers planning and construction; retorts; mains; the gas men; coal; lighting; gas meters; the railway; gas holders; gas appliances; gas engines; gas engineers, fitters and consultants; the gas works; and the final years. There are tables of hospital gas consumption 1860 to 1890 and gas made at the works in 1906, 1907, and 1945–52. There are no illustrations and two (blank) notes pages.

TED MARTIN

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