

# HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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## Notes and news

### BLHA Annual Conference 2014 and AGM

HOSTED BY  
MAULDEN HISTORY SOCIETY

AT

MAULDEN VILLAGE HALL

Flitwick Road, Maulden

Saturday, 14 June 2014

Registration: 9.20 am AGM: 9.40–10.15 am

Summer Event: 10.20 am to 16.20 pm

No charge will be made for those who only wish to attend the AGM. Lunch and refreshments are included in the Event fee.

#### Conference programme: The First World War

- 10.20 *'7th Bedford's Somme Success & Failures in the Somme in WW1'*: Martin Deacon, Archivist at Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records
- 11.00 Coffee break
- 11.15 *'Wrest Park Hospital 1914–16'*: Debbie Radcliffe, volunteer researcher at Wrest Park
- 11.50 Visit to Maulden Church and Mausoleums
- 13.00 Lunch served in the village hall
- 14.20 *'WW1 Life in Maulden'*: Marian McDowell, a member of MHS who has researched many aspects of life in Maulden
- 15.00 *'Our Allies' Activity in Ampt Hill in WW1'*: Kevan Fadden, founder chair of Ampt Hill A & LHS, was chair of the British Pitt Rivers Archaeological Awards Committee for 16 years
- 15.40 Summary; 15.50–tea and biscuits

**Cost for the day including drinks and lunch: £19;** cheques payable to Maulden History Society  
Closing date for bookings, 26 April 2014. Send bookings to Mrs R Coyle, 44 Ampt Hill Road, Maulden, Beds MK45 2DH, Tel 01525 405732.

**Miss Caroline's Campaign.** In June 1912, Caroline Scobell Orlebar, daughter of the vicar of Willington, became concerned that the Tudor dovecote in the village might be demolished. As a result she set up a public subscription fund and campaigned to collect enough money to buy the building and a small piece of land, so that it

could be given to the nation and protected and preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.

She and Lyndon Bolton, then president of the Bedford Arts Club, contacted their friends and acquaintances, wrote letters to the Board of Works (later English Heritage), the National Trust and local and national newspapers. As a result more than 80 people contributed and the amount needed was raised in just over two months. The dovecote was purchased at the end of August 1912.

Miss Orlebar found that giving the dovecote away was more difficult than she had anticipated and, sadly, she became ill and died before the transfer was completed. In early 1914 her brother found that the Board of Works was unable to accept the building, so he arranged for it to be transferred to the National Trust.

The centenary of the handing over of the building to the Trust will be celebrated at the Willington Dovecote and Stables during the summer. It is hoped that there will also be a temporary display in the 'Great Bedfordians' gallery of the 'Higgins' in Bedford.

You might find that one of your ancestors contributed to the fund. Why not come along to find out?

**Frank Sweetland**, Bedford Photographer from 1906–1914, was Ed Fordham's great-great uncle. He has a number of photos and postcards by him and of him and his family and is researching and compiling his life story and a catalogue of his work, in particular his work in Beds villages. Any help and assistance will be appreciated. Local historians or postcard collectors of his work please contact him at: E-mail: [ed.fordham@gmail.com](mailto:ed.fordham@gmail.com); write to 7 Douglas Court, Quex Road, London, NW6 4PT; Tel 07974 950 512.

## Bedfordshire in 1670: evidence from hearth tax returns, Pt 1

The article which follows is based on data from Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (BHRS) publications, *Populations 1671 etc*, volume XV1 (1934) by Lydia M Marshall, and from other sources.

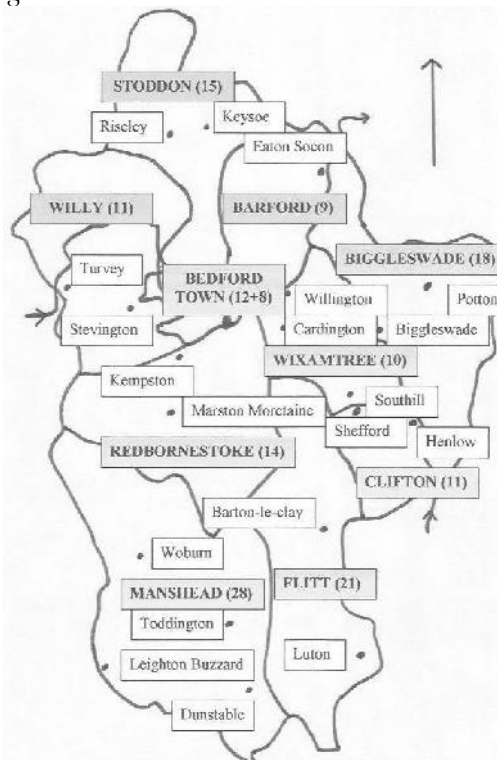
### Introduction

I began to look at Lydia M Marshall's work on the hearth tax, in an attempt to place Willington manor house in context and to see how it compared in size with other large houses in the county. She had used the hearth tax returns to estimate population growth and decline in Bedfordshire, but I found that the data could be used in other ways and so created spreadsheets.<sup>1</sup> I was fascinated by a Bedfordshire which was familiar, but also very different, from today.

These hearth tax returns give us a snap-shot of our county soon after the restoration of the monarchy

and long before the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and the industrial revolution in the nineteenth. It was first enacted in 1662, and was 'chargeable on every fire hearth and stove the sum of two shillings by the year'. Towns and villages were listed under their respective Hundred headings (nine of them) and under the Town of Bedford, which was divided into parishes and wards, and had a group of associated villages. The returns which are the subject of this article were 'for one year and a half, finishing at Michaelmas', in three instalments, ending in 1670 (Marshall p 159). A duplicate copy was delivered to the Exchequer on 18 May 1671.

The sketch map below shows Bedfordshire divided into Hundreds, with the number of entries in the hearth tax returns from each one. Some of the larger settlements in each Hundred are shown.



Two collectors were employed to view tax collections: William Staunton collected from Barford, Flitt, Redbornestoke, Stoddon, Willey Hundreds, and Bedford town and villages; Samuel Worster, collected from Biggleswade, Clifton, Manshead and Wixamtree Hundreds. They were assisted by a local constable in each town or village, but in Luton, Kempston and Marston Moretaine by two.

In about 10% of the entries from towns and villages the constable is not named and in another 20% of entries they were unable to sign their names. In the Biggleswade Hundred this figure rises to 25% and in Clifton and Stoddon Hundreds, and in Bedford and its villages, the figure rises to over 30%. In the Wixamtree Hundred two of the ten entries do not record the name of the constable and five of those named, that is 50% of the total for the Hundred, could not sign their name, suggesting the lowest levels of literacy in the County.

The entries include the names of people paying hearth tax, the names of people who are discharged from payment 'by certificate' because their incomes or possessions were too small, and the number of people

who were in receipt of poor relief which William Staunton called 'collection' and Samuel Worster usually called 'constant alms'. No-one, unless an inmate of an exempt almshouse, was exempt from the tax for any reason if his or her house had two or more chimneys. Almshouses with less than £100 yearly revenue were exempt as were certain kinds of semi-industrial hearths. The collector and local constable were usually named and population estimates are given.

It is important to remember that the figures for the population of towns and villages are estimates, based on the number of names listed being multiplied by 4.25. My researches into Willington suggest that the figures arrived at for this village are low. The use of the same multiplier for contrasting parts of the county seems unreliable. The returns suggest that there were overcrowded slums adjacent to St Paul's church in Bedford, but that other towns and villages had quite different varieties of housing.

### Population estimates

Lydia Marshall used the hearth tax data, with census returns of 1801 and 1921 to produce estimates of population growth and decline in Bedfordshire between 1671 and 1921. She explains the problems found by other researchers attempting to make population estimates and notes that despite great variations throughout the country, she had used an average multiplier of 4.25 times the number of people listed. This means that the smallest village in the return, Higham Gobion, had an estimated population of 17, as only 4 people are listed in the return. In Totternhoe it was more complicated, 43 people paid tax, 5 were discharged by certificate, 4 persons received poor relief, and the estimated population was 217.

### Settlements with forges

Just under two-thirds of the settlements listed in the returns had one or more forges, though they were not evenly distributed across the county: five of the 21 towns and villages in the Flitt Hundred had forges; three of the wards in Bedford town, and three of its eight associated villages had one; about half of the settlements in the Stoddon and Willey Hundreds had one; Barford, Biggleswade, Clifton, Manshead, Redbornestoke, and Wixamtree Hundreds each had two or three settlements without a forge.

Woburn, in the Manshead Hundred, had five, the largest number in the county; and Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Potton had four forges each. Elsewhere, Sutton, Biggleswade, and further south Lidlington, had three forges each. Multiple forges may be due either to proximity to the minerals in the Greensand Ridge, and/or to established coach routes.

### The Stoddon Hundred

Lydia Marshall says that 'Stoddon was consistently unpopulous'. Although settlements in this Hundred are small, in 1670 only four empty houses appear in its returns. There was a wide variation in the number of people too poor to pay the tax. Although the numbers of people certified as being too poor to pay

were high in Shelton and Nether Dean no-one was too poor to pay in Knotting or Melchbourne. On the other hand the average number of people in receipt of poor relief was just over 5% of the number paying the hearth tax; but again there were variations across the Hundred. Four parishes had no-one receiving it, but Tilbrook and Little Staughton had 7 and 8 people, respectively.

Over 30% of constables were unable to sign their names, adding to the evidence that this was a stable, though impoverished, agricultural community.

### **Houses in the County**

The spreadsheet 'Bedfordshire Ranking of Large Houses 1670'<sup>2</sup> contains details of 52 houses with between 14 and 82 hearths. The largest houses in the county were in Woburn (82 hearths), West Hyde (60 hearths), Ampthill (55 hearths) and Silsoe (52 hearths). The large house in Ampthill (55 hearths) belonged to the Earl of Aylesbury, but his house in nearby Clophill, with 15 hearths, was empty.

Large houses were unevenly distributed through the county. Manshead, Flitt and Redbornestoke had 10, 9 and 8 large houses, respectively; a little group of 3 neighbouring Hundreds, Wixamtree, Biggleswade and Barford had 4 or 5 each, but Willey had only 2 and Stoddon 1. The owners or tenants of these and all other houses are given, but the only house-name given is 'Someries in Stopsley'.

### **Empty houses**

Every house paying tax in the county and every house where the tenants are discharged by certificate is listed and details of all the entries are summarised in the spreadsheet 'Surnames in HTR and SL'<sup>3</sup> under their respective Hundred headings, with information about population, numbers of hearths taxed in inhabited or empty houses, people being excused or receiving benefits and other details. For many towns or villages details of houses being built or newly built are given, as are details of houses being demolished or destroyed by fire.

The hearth tax was usually paid by the tenant, but it seems that when a house was empty the owner sometimes paid. It was quite usual for one or two empty houses to be recorded in most parishes, but in some places the pattern is very different. In the Redbornestoke Hundred, which contained Ampthill and Flitwick and went as far north as Kempston, all parishes except one had empty houses, but in Millbrook 14% of housing stock was empty; Ridgmont, Lidlington, Elstow, Wilhamstead and Marston Moretaine each had about 10% empty; Ampthill, Flitwick, Wootton, Maulden and Houghton Conquest each had between 6% and 9% empty. These seem to be clear indications of decline in the centre of the county in the second half of the 17th century.

The town of Bedford was divided into parishes and some of these were divided into wards, but only four empty houses are recorded. In St Paul's parish the very large numbers of parishioners who were excused from paying tax 'by certificate' and the 30 who were exempt because they received poor relief, suggest large numbers of slum dwellings in the centre

of town. In the rest of the Willey Hundred eight parishes had no empty houses and some had only one or two, but in Biddenham 15% were empty, in Felmersham and Radwell 8% were.

The returns for Barford Hundred show that all parishes except Ravensden had at least one empty house but Wyboston had more than 12%. Numbers of empty houses in the Biggleswade, Clifton, Manshead and Wixamtree Hundreds were relatively small but rather more than half of the parishes in Flitt Hundred had empty houses. In particular Hawnes, where about 10% of the housing stock was empty and Clophill, where as well as the big house being empty, 8.5% of the houses were uninhabited.

There were some partly or fully endowed almshouses, and a schoolhouse and hospital in the county, but more details of these can be seen below under 'The care of the poor.'

### **The care of the poor**

People inhabiting houses of less than 20s in value, or not possessing lands or chattels worth this amount, were excused from the hearth tax, or discharged by certificate and their names were usually given. Means tests must have taken place, but there are no details. The largest percentage of houses where the tenant was discharged by certificate was Dunstable with 14%, closely followed by Shelton with 13%, and by 10 returns of between 10 and 12%. In the Manshead Hundred, which had the largest number of returns, high percentages of people discharged by certificate were found in 12 returns, including Woburn and Heath and Reach, where the percentages were between 5% and 8%. In contrast, several towns and villages had no householders discharged by certificate, although most of these had parishioners receiving poor relief.

Seven parishes had neither parishioners discharged by certificate nor parishioners receiving poor relief. In Billington this may have been because there were four almshouses in the parish; in Prebend, Wellestreete, Mill Lane and St Loy's wards in Bedford it may have been because these were select residential areas, or because poor people chose to live together in the East and West wards of St Paul's parish.

Exemption from paying the tax was automatically granted to those in receipt of poor relief. Their numbers were often given, but their names were not listed. Ten of the 34 parishes which had no-one discharged by certificate also had no parishioners in receipt of poor relief: they were Higham Gobion, Billington, Knotting, Farndish, Old Warden and five wards in the town of Bedford.

Almshouses, usually described as small and not fully endowed, are listed for some towns and villages. There were 11 in Henlow; 10 in Marston Moretaine; 8 in Leighton Buzzard; 6 in Arlesey; 4 in Great Barford, Billington, Houghton Regis, Westoning, Keysoe and Cople; 3 in Husborne Crawley and 1 or 2 in Colmworth, Goldington, Potton, Houghton Conquest, Felmersham with Radwell. One almshouse in Wootton had 6 hearths, and Toddington also had a school house and a hospital.

The returns contain no firm evidence about the numbers of aged and infirm who lived with friends or relatives or were maintained by their former employers, but there are two hints: in Eaton Socon where 'Widow Squire a pauper' is listed as paying tax, but it is not clear whether she was the pauper or whether a pauper lived under her roof; the return for Farnlish includes the entry 'John Newman a pauper' with the short list of those paying tax, though no hearth for him is recorded. (*Continued in HIB 6.8*).

## Notes

1. The raw data has been transferred into three spreadsheets: Surnames in HTR and SR; Bedfordshire ranking of large houses in 1670; Bedfordshire Hearth Tax 1670 with forges. To obtain details of these, e-mail: Dorothy.jamieson@ntlworld.com

2. See note 1.

3. *Ibid.*

DOROTHY JAMIESON

## Book reviews

*Bedford Town Centre Statues: A Self-Guided Walk with Street Map.* By Stuart Antrobus, 2013. ISBN 978-0-9536851-8-9. A5 booklet, 32pp, price £5, all proceeds to Hitchin British Schools Trust, obtainable from them by post (£5.60) at 41/42 Queen Street, Hitchin SG4 9TS:

(www.britishschoolmuseum.co.uk); in Bedford at the Tourist Information Centre, The Higgins Museum and the John Bunyan Museum.

This is a very well printed guide to the statues (in colour) in Bedford Town Centre. There is also a location map and chronological list. The author describes each statue, the material from which it is made, any inscription it bears and gives a brief biography of the artist who created it. Invaluable for an interesting walk around Bedford!

*The Hat Industry of Luton and its Buildings.* By Katie Carmichael, David McOmish and David Grech, 2013. ISBN 978-1-84802-119-8. Paperback, 210 x 210mm, 2013, 96pp. English Heritage: offer for BLHA members: a **15% discount** and **free p and p** (rrp £9.99). Tel 01235 465577 or e-mail:

direct.orders@marston.co.uk

quoting reference No: 7220140002. Offer expires 1 June 2014.

This book is intended as an introduction and guide to the historical significance of Luton's hat industry and charts the methods of production and the surviving buildings of the industry, proposing a strategy for future conservation of those buildings. It is very well written, well produced and well illustrated with some intriguing pictures (some in colour) and a map. This book is an excellent introduction to an industry that, in the 1930s, was producing 70 million hats a year but which declined and almost disappeared in the post-war years.

### *The books of Bernard O'Connor*

Bernard O'Connor is a one-man publishing industry: at www.lulu.com there are nine pages of books covering fossil diggings and Second World War history, many concerned with Bedfordshire. He has lived and worked in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire for over 20 years as a teacher in secondary schools and researching aspects of local geology, archaeology, history and natural history. He spent 10 years investigating the coprolite industry: thought then to be fossilised dinosaur droppings, an important source of phosphates. Parishes where coprolites were found comprise many of the titles on the website.

The three Bedford titles reviewed here are all paperbacks and do not represent distinguished book production though the printing is clear and reproduction reasonable. Sans-serif type for all three is not helpful and

the absence of a title page in one and a minimalist one in another is unusual. All titles present text quotations in italic: what is wrong with quotation marks?

*The Bedfordshire Fossil Diggings* (£12) in its 212 pages gives the background to coprolite digging for fertiliser in Beds in the 1860s and lists each parish where it is thought to have occurred. Other subjects covered are the involvement of the church and the use of the railways. No contents list or index diminishes its usefulness for the user, but there is a bibliography.

*The Bedford Spy School* (£7). This 32-page booklet identifies locations used by the government in Bedford and the personalities involved in training students to become fluent in Japanese in six weeks. Half the graduates moved to Bletchley Park and others went overseas. There are photos of the Bedford location and five pages of cartoons of the 'students'. The teacher, Oswald Tuck, at that time was 63 years old and a retired linguist from the Royal Navy.

*Bedford School's Secret Old Boys and their Special Operations in World War Two* (£10). In 160 pages O'Connor looks at the careers and achievements of five alumni of Bedford School and the father of one other old boy in the Second World War. Frank Nelson (1883-1966) was the first head of SOE; David Maitland Makgill Crichton (1914-1941), was lost on his way to Egypt for an SOE mission when a U-boat sunk the SS *Jonathan Holt* on 24 February 1941; Frederic 'Fritz' Peters (1889-1942), a naval officer who served in both wars, was in charge of administration at the Sabotage School at Brickendonbury Manor but rejoined the Navy when the School was taken over by SOE, playing an heroic role in breaking the boom at Oran Harbour; Cecil Vandeppeer Clarke (1897-1961), CO of Brickendonbury Manor, 1939-1942, was instrumental in developing the Mk I limpet mine to sink enemy ships; Harold James Andrews (1897-1951) worked with the Spanish Naval Air Force in the 1930s and then on SIS and SOE operations in Portugal, Spain and France from 1940-1944; and Charles Barton Bovill (1911-2001) was a Marconi radio expert during the Second World War. Their careers and contributions are examined in depth with illustrations and background material which contribute to an absorbing and interesting read.

*Bedfordshire Place Names.* By Anthony Poulton-Smith. Kindle eBook format, price £2.98.

This is the the latest title in a county place names series. Search for 'Bedfordshire Place Names' on the Amazon website. The author examines and explains the origins of the names of towns, villages, districts, hills, streams, woods, farms, fields, streets and even pubs. Some definitions give a glimpse of life in the earlier days of the settlement. The definitions are supported by anecdotal evidence, bringing to life the individuals and events which have influenced the places and the way these names have developed.

The book can be downloaded to any Kindle device and may also be read without a Kindle as Amazon provide free Kindle Reading Apps for PC, Mac, smartphones and tablets.

### Book received:

*Early Dunstable in Maps and Pictures.* By Barry Horne, David Hornby, Vanessa Hornby and Brian Dix, Chuch End Publishing, Beaumont, Church End, Edelsborough, Dunstable LU6 2EP, 2013. A4 booklet, 56pp, £12 + £1.40 p & p: to be reviewed in the next issue of HIB.

TED MARTIN

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