BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

VOLUME 7, NO 1 WINTER 2015

SPRING EVENT

A visit to

EATON SOCON

The village that used to be in Bedfordshire and is now in Cambridgeshire

23 May 2015

A guided walking tour of the village followed by a talk and refreshments from 2.30PM

Details to be announced and will be sent to Society Secretaries

ADVANCE NOTICE:

BLHA ANNUAL CONFERENCE & AGM

Saturday, 13 June 2015

Hosted by

Clapham History Society

Full details in the Spring issue of HIB

Contents

From the Editor 3
Notes and news 3
Willington celebrates 3
A relic of Bedford's industrial past 5
The Norman Arch at St Peter de Merton, Bedford: ROSEMARY EVANS 6
The Knitting Bishop: JANE CROOT 9
Book review: *The Rise of Methodism: A Study of Bedfordshire 1736–1851* TED MARTIN 11
Book notice: *Pride of Peacocks* 12

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Flitwick Manor

From the Editor

Welcome to the first issue of *History in Bedfordshire* as a digital only publication. We have decided to make this change because the majority of BLHA's members, both individual and in local Societies, are now on-line.

This decision gives us some great advantages. HIB will no longer be restricted to just four pages, required by the print format in the past, and this means that we will no longer have to split long articles between issues – they will be published in full in each issue, and that issue can be as long or as short as the circumstances and the available material dictate.

The format has also been redesigned to make it easier to read on computer screens and tablets. So it will no longer be an A4 double column newsletter but will be in this A5 (book) format. A larger type size has been used in a single column so that you will not have to scroll up and down the columns. In addition, each issue will have a table of contents and we can reproduce photographs and illustrations at a larger size than before and even use colour when needed. This first digital issue will start a new volume of HIB.

Another advantage of this change is that the Association will save a significant amount in printing costs each year which can be put to other more beneficial uses.

Arrangements have been made for members who do not have a computer.

I do hope you will enjoy reading HIB in its new format and perhaps some of you will be tempted to contribute an article on local history for it. I'm happy to work with you in polishing pieces for publication, so don't be shy, please contact me at the address shown on page 1. TED MARTIN

Notes and news

Willington celebrates

On 13 September 2014, the sun shone, Bedford Town Band played, Franklin's Hog Roast roasted and a cheerful team of National Trust staff and volunteers welcomed more than 100 visitors of all ages to a celebration event at the Dovecote and Stables at Willington.

The event was to celebrate the centenary of the Tudor Dovecote in Willington being given to the National Trust by the Orlebar family. In 1912 Caroline Orlebar (*above right, the only photo available*), daughter of the vicar of Willington, set up a public subscription to buy the dovecote to protect it from demolition, intending to give it to the nation. With Lyndon Bolton, then president of Bedford Arts Club, she collected the necessary £200 in less than three months. Unfortunately Caroline died before she could give the building to the Board of Works (now English Heritage) or the National Trust, but her wishes were carried out by her executors on Christmas Eve 1914. Visitors to the Celebration included members of Caroline's modern extended family, who were able to enjoy the relaxed and happy atmosphere created there.

The Dovecote was built in the time of John Gostwick, about 1543, and contains nesting boxes for about 1,500 pairs of birds. It replaced an earlier, medieval, dovecote and still continues to dominate the landscape at the west end of the village, as it did nearly 500 years ago. Although no doubt built as a status symbol, new blocks of stone and Tudor bricks were used for the nesting boxes, it was also meant to be commercial, too. Pigeons were a luxury food and very acceptable as presents. In about 1530 John Gostwick sent some to Thomas Cromwell, saying 'I send you by the bearer a calf and two dozen pigeons, the best novelties I can send you at this time'.

Two new talks 'The Story of Medieval Willington' and 'John Gostwick – Life and Legacy' have been developed. If you belong to a history (or other) group and would be interested to hear one of them, please contact Diane Bell, who is

co-ordinator of Bedford National Trust Association's Talks Service, on dcbell@hotmail.co.uk

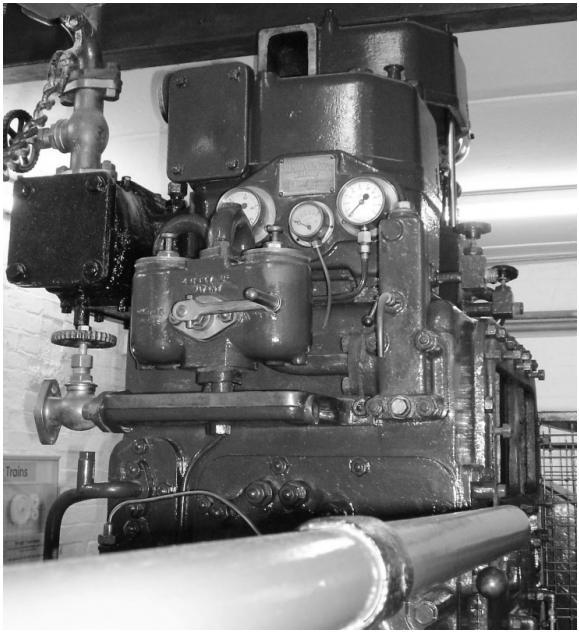
Information about open afternoons and other events in 2015 will be on the following websites early in the new year: www.bedfordnt.org.uk or www.localhistory.me.uk

More information about the property can be found on:

www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Or you can email willingtondovecote@nationaltrust.org.uk or phone Phil O'Donoghue (property manager) 01480 301494 or Judy Endersby (volunteer curator) 01234 838278.

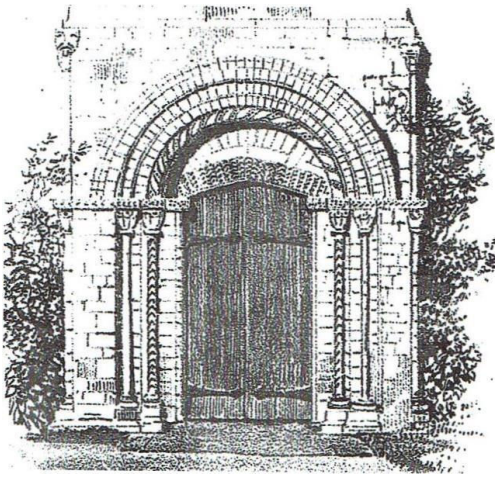
A relic of Bedford's industrial past



At the Waterworks Museum at Broomy Hill, Hereford, HR4 0LJ, a relic of Bedford's industrial past is prominently displayed. It is a two-cylinder diesel engine of modular construction which was designed mainly for use in static situations. It was built by W H Allen of Bedford in 1932 and one other engine of this type is said still to exist in Germany.

The engine was used at Alton Court pumping station, Ross-on-Wye, to drive a five-stage borehole pump. For the technically minded, its bore was 230mm (9 inches), and it ran at 460 rpm producing 60 hp. The engine was donated to the museum by Welsh Water in 1990.

The Norman Arch at St Peter de Merton, Bedford



Bradford Rudge's sketch

In a paper entitled 'Bedford after the Saxon Period' read at a meeting of the Bedfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society in 1868, James Wyatt, FGS, declared that from an early period after the introduction of Christianity into Britain Bedford had been signalised as a religious centre. 'In Saxon days it had an important church', continued Mr Wyatt, 'a vestige of which is yet to be seen in the tower of the present parish church of St Peter'. James Wyatt was a man of considerable standing locally in Queen Victoria's reign as, apart from being a decided churchman and churchwarden of St Peter's, he is remembered as an archaeologist, antiquarian, journalist and first editor of the *Bedfordshire Times* – which he founded in 1845.

Two other churches were raised in Bedford soon after the Conquest, namely, that dedicated to St Mary and one in the square opposite, dedicated to St Peter, which 'in consequence of being supplied by the Priory of Dunstaple, was named "St Peter de Dunstaple" [*sic*], to distinguish it from the old Saxon church on the north side of the town'. Sometime in the reign of John, possibly, in Wyatt's opinion, about 1199, the church of St Paul's was rebuilt on an old foundation, the conjecture being that the previous edifice was Saxon and had been destroyed by fire.

The first small church of St Cuthbert, arguably founded by Offa, King of Mercia as an atonement for 'numerous violations of which he had been guilty' (particularly of treacherously murdering the King of East Anglia, and seizing his possessions in 772), may have suffered the same fate at Danish hands during a raid on the town in 1010. Thatch and wood burst into flames all too easily; it needed non-flammable material to withstand heat from torches, whether thrown by enemy or held by worshipper. It was only St Peter's tower, already renewed in stone after some disaster, that withstood the conflagration then, some remaining cracked and calcined stones of the colour of brick bearing witness to a great fire thought to have been in that same year.

St John's Church is a later foundation, maybe of the 14th century so that, in the words of James Wyatt, 'at an early date there were as many churches in the town as we have now . . . But beside the churches, there were five religious houses in the town, and the wealthy monastery of Newenham in the adjoining parish of Goldington.'

Although little is known of the Church of St Peter de Dunstaple it apparently became very dilapidated and superfluous to requirements – somewhat predictably, sited as it was on the corner of what is now St Mary's Street and Cauldwell Street and sharing a rector with St Mary's. When finally, in 1545, it was found that one church was sufficient for the spiritual needs of the parish, the parishioners were commanded by the Bishop of Lincoln to take it down, the materials being used to repair the town bridge walls, St Mary's and the streets – and also to construct a bear-baiting arena! But these were not the only appropriations of the consecrated materials. Tradition has it that its Norman doorway was removed across the river to the other St Peter's Church, whose distinguishing title of *de Merton* had been in use since the 12th century, the name coming from Merton Priory in Surrey, founded c 1092.

The arch was first placed in the South wall of the small building as the entrance to the old nave, and there it must have stood until the South aisle was built. In 1890 *Kelly's Directory* declared: 'Many of its stones are ancient, but much of the doorway is of soft Bath stone and is fast decaying.' Little of the original stone now remains, bad workmanship during the second move causing masses of loose rubble to fall from the walls above. The segmental stone tympanum above the door shown in Bradford Rudge's sketch (page 5) must have been removed then.

Norman arch detail.

In his review of important Bedfordshire buildings in 1968, Nikolaus Pevsner, whilst revealing himself thrilled by the Anglo-Saxon evidence in the church, pronounces the doorway to be 'a fine piece with two orders of shafts, carrying decorated scallop capitals, with saltire crosses in the abacus, and roll mouldings, one of them with a spiral beaded band', and this conclusion is unchanged in the recently published 2014 edition. It has four mouldings – double billet, double zigzag, plain and twisted cable – and also the ornament of a wedge (Parry).

Column detail

This magnificent doorway with its semicircular Romanesque arch of the early medieval period acted as the main entrance to the church for many centuries. However, it was exposed to the elements until 1902 when the South porch was erected as protection at a cost of about £250. A year later the little statue of St Peter was added to it in a niche outside as a memorial to Mrs Amelia Prior, wife of Doctor Prior, in memory of her manifold deeds of love and mercy; it is in Ketton stone.

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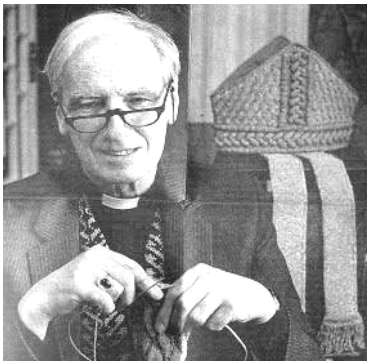
ROSEMARY EVANS

The Knitting Bishop

Richard Rutt, 1925–2011



Richard was born Cecil Richard Rutt on 27 August 1925 in a council house in Langford. Little did his parents know then that 60 years later he would be Bishop of Leicester and sit in the House of Lords!

Richard was the eldest of three sons of Cecil and Mary Rutt, who came to Biggleswade when Richard was about four. The family home was in Drove Road and here the three boys grew up and went to the local council school, 'Hicks Pits Academy' in Rose Lane. When at the age of 11 Richard failed the county scholarship exam for a grammar school place his father, a relieving officer and a churchwarden at St Andrew's, found the wherewithal to send him to Huntingdon Grammar School and later also paid for Richard's brothers to go. This involved considerable sacrifices on the part of the parents, especially as all three sons went on to university.

Richard's grandfather in Langford had first taught Richard to knit and he once knitted himself a pair of mittens to while away the time spent on the school train. His passion for knitting would last all his life.

He became so extraordinarily skilled in it that in his later years as a bishop he sometimes wore a mitre and cope that he had designed and

knitted himself, and in 1987 published a definitive history of knitting. But we are winding too far forward. Let's go back.

A choirboy and altar server at St Andrew's church, Biggleswade, and a brilliant scholar, Richard entered Kelham Theological College on leaving school but, in common with all young men of his generation, war interrupted his plans for the future when he was called up in 1942. He joined the Royal Navy, where his talents as a linguist were quickly recognised and he was sent to the Government language centre in Bedford to learn Japanese. From there he transferred to Bletchley Park, where he worked in Hut 7 decoding Japanese naval signals. An interrupted signal from a Japanese warship that he decoded and reported revealed the ship's position and as a result it was sunk, with the loss of a thousand Japanese lives. This weighed heavily on Richard's conscience thereafter. Such is war.

After the war he returned to his studies at the theological college in preparation for Holy Orders and read languages at Pembroke College, Cambridge, finally emerging with a Master's degree. In 1952, at the age of 27, he was ordained into the Church of England and became Curate of St George's in the Cambridge parish of Chesterton.

However, his chance introduction to south-east Asian languages in the war had sparked an interest that would change the course of his life. In 1954 he volunteered to go to Korea as a missionary priest and would remain there for 20 years, with only rare visits home. Working at first in deprived rural areas after the Korean War, he endured many hardships, but learned the language and immersed himself in the history, literature and all aspects of the traditions and culture of the country, which he grew to love. He also learned Classical Chinese and published numerous scholarly works whilst pursuing his vocation. In 1965 he became Archdeacon of West Seoul and in 1968 was appointed Bishop of Taejon, the second city of Korea. He married his wife Joan the following year. Resigning his office in 1973 to make way for the Koreans to take charge of the Anglican Church in their country, he had hoped to continue as a simple parish priest but it did not prove possible and in 1974 he and Joan returned to England. Meanwhile Richard's father in Biggleswade had died.

On his return Richard was appointed suffragan bishop of the diocese of Truro, with the title Bishop of St Germans, and threw himself into learning and the promotion of the old Cornish language. From 1979 to

1990 he was Bishop of Leicester, and in 1986 set up the city's council of faiths, which was instrumental in fostering a spirit of understanding and mutual respect between the various ethnic faiths. After retiring to Falmouth Richard found himself increasingly at odds with the changes afoot in the Anglican Church, so he and Joan became Catholics in 1994 and Richard was ordained a Catholic priest the following year. After Joan's death Richard became a Monsignor in the Catholic Church in 2009. He died on 27 July 2011. JANE CROOT*

* With thanks for information supplied by Michael and Philip Rutt, cousins of Richard Rutt. This article was first published in the Biggleswade History Society's *Newsletter* and is reproduced here by kind permission of the editor.

Book Review

The Rise of Methodism: A Study of Bedfordshire 1736–1851, by Jonathan Rodell. Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (Vol 92) and The Boydell Press, Hardback. xxiii and 292 pp, incl index. 2014. ISBN: 978–0–85155–079–4. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF; Tel 01394 610600:e-mail: trading@boydell.co.uk or:
www.boydellandbrewer.com.
£25 + postage £3 in the UK.

History tells us that Methodism was the 19th century's largest popular movement and students of the era are aware of the role played by Methodists in the rise of the ordinary man to political consciousness in a rapidly changing century.

This book tells the story of the rise of Methodism in Bedfordshire and uncovers a picture of a rapidly changing scene where different generations used the movement's structures to express their grievances and aspirations.

The research has been extensive using archival and published sources. The author quite frankly reveals that this book has its origins in a doctoral thesis and contains some traces of its previous existence but reassures the reader that it has been thoroughly 'revised, restructured and expanded'.

In order to show the growth of Methodism he has arranged most of the material chronologically, each of chapters 1–3 beginning with a narrative and then continuing with an analysis of a series of themes, such as the social constituency of Methodism, its internal life, how it impacted on local politics and how the wider community reacted to it. Chapter 4 considers how the story of Methodism in Bedfordshire, as presented in the previous three chapters, aligns with the existing history of Methodism.

Two Appendices follow: Appendix A presents a critical evaluation of the main sources for Methodist history and Appendix B has tables showing (1) the subdivision of the Bedfordshire Wesleyan circuit 1763–1851, (2) a comparison of membership changes between the English and Bedfordshire Wesleyan circuits and (3) membership of the Bedford, St Ives and Higham Ferrers Wesleyan circuits and their offshoots, 1794–1851.

There are two maps and 16 tables. The dust cover shows a painting of George Whitefield preaching and the frontispiece is a map of Bedfordshire from Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary of England* (1844). This last should have been reproduced larger by reducing the margins on this page. As it is, most of the detail is unreadable without a glass! However, there are 32 plates (some in colour) on art paper after page 136 showing Methodist worthies of the period, various chapels, and other items. There is also a Glossary, a Bibliography and a comprehensive 22-page index.

Dr Rodell has a readable style and the work has a logical and helpful headings system. There are footnotes on nearly every page, and mercifully no endnotes. As one would expect, from this series, the volume is well printed and bound with a full colour dust jacket and the paper used is good quality matt coated and art.

TED MARTIN

Book Notice

Pride of Peacocks: A Memoir of a Bedford Firm of Auctioneers, Estate Agents and Surveyors, by Keith Lazenby. Bedfordshire Historical Record Society (Vol 93) and The Boydell Press, Hardback. xiv and 454 pp, incl index. 2014. ISBN 978–0–85155–080–0. Boydell & Brewer Ltd, PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF; Tel 01394 610600: e-mail: trading@boydell.co.uk or: www.boydellandbrewer.com. £25 + postage.

This book, written by a retired former partner of the well-known local company of auctioneers, estate agents and surveyors, provides a history of Peacocks from 1902 to 1988 and of other well-known firms in the area. There is an introduction by Professor Richard Moore-Collyer on the history of auctioneering in England from the 17th century and an extensive appendix listing all known property auctions carried out by the firm. It will be reviewed in the next issue of HIB.