

BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

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The Association's 25th Year

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Bedfordshire Local History Association

One-Day Workshop:

GIS Applications in Local History

20 April 2019

from 09:30 to 4:30 at Sharnbrook Village Hall, MK44 1JP

Participants will need to provide their own laptop

oOo

Aim: A hands-on introduction to using QGIS software to create and handle maps to analyse and display historical data.

Who should attend: Members of historical societies who conduct research and wish to display their research data in map format so they can analyse the data further and include maps in their reports. This workshop is limited in numbers to 10 places only.

Requirements:

- No prior knowledge of GIS is necessary, but the participant should have a good level of experience of Windows and Office software.
- The participant needs to bring an up-to-date laptop and have Administrator rights on that machine. The machine must have Excel or Open Office and Acrobat Reader.
- The machine must have a free USB slot and a WIFI adaptor.
- Instructions will be given to download and pre-install QGIS software.

Course content: A mixture of demos and exercises – datasets will be provided:

Why use GIS? QGIS software, desktop interface and plugins; Sources of base maps and boundary data; Using HER datasets and filters; Adding an old map and LIDAR; Adding your own research data (text and images); Analysing datasets; Creating maps and interactive web maps; GIS data resources; Feedback and future work

Registration

Name:	
Email:	
Tel:	
Local History Group:	
Do you have a suitable laptop?	
Do you have admin rights?	
Do you have Office software and Acrobat reader?	

Venue: Sharnbrook Village Hall, Lodge Road, Sharnbrook MK44 1JP from 09.30–4.30.

Parking is available, coffee and tea provided, please bring own lunch.

Cost: £25: Please make cheque payable to 'Bedfordshire Local History Association' and send to Des Hoar, 24 Loring Road, Sharnbrook, Bedford MK44 1JZ

Further enquiries to deshoar@globalnet.co.uk or 01234 782717

2019 AGM & Conference

The 2019 AGM and Conference is to be held at the Learning Centre, Poplars Garden Centre, Toddington on 22 June 2019, hosted by the Bedfordshire Gardens Trust, with registration from 9am. The AGM will start at 9.30, with the Conference to start at 10am and finish no later than 4.30pm. This year's theme is 'Caring for the Designed Landscape in Bedfordshire'. The main speakers will be Professor Tom Williamson (University of East Anglia), Stephen Coleman and John Little, with contributions planned from the Gardens Trust's members: Corinne Price (Garden Manager, Swiss Garden), Felicity Brimblecombe and Caroline Bowdler. Topics for the talks will include 'The Orchard as part of a Designed Landscape' which will include updates on the Orchards East project and Flitwick Manor; 'Gertrude Jekyll in Bedfordshire'; 'Why historians should take note of garden history'; 'Working together to maintain the designed landscape'; 'Toddington and the AGAS map'. Full and final details will appear in our Spring issue (due March 2019) together with a booking form.

Appeal for Help

I am a journalist with the Associated Press, many years ago I covered Bedfordshire for Anglia TV but I also contribute travel writing for the Associated Press. I need to submit a travel book proposal about the UK and I am searching for material.

I am looking to find extraordinary places or things in Bedfordshire: places with a fabulous or strange atmosphere, a remarkable view, a little-known but important place in history, or an artefact or natural object (a 'heritage tree', for instance). The locations/objects can be urban or rural. The subjects could be old or very recent. They could be to do with ancient history or modern popular culture, with all stops in between. The keys are that there is a story to tell, and it is little-known or, at least, largely forgotten. If anything springs to mind, I'd be so grateful if you could let me know at jgjharmar@yahoo.co.uk

Scandal in Sutton

The Story of the Reverend Doctor Edward Drax Free: Rector of Sutton 1808–1830

Insults, insults in 1810! – he called him a Methodist!

The following indictment for assault on a tradesman calling at the Rectory to present his bill came before Bedford Quarter Sessions on 7 January 1811. The language the assailant used was all the more extraordinary because he was a clergyman:

Complaint of William Bigg, of the parish of Potton, shopkeeper, against the Rev Edward Drax Free for assaulting him when he presented his bill and using ‘approbrious language, calling him villain, rascal, scoundrel, cheat and Methodist’.

It should be explained that in the early years of the Methodist movement many in the established Church of England were concerned about its growing popularity and disapproving of the enthusiastic, evangelical style of many of its preachers.

The Reverend Edward Drax Free, Doctor in Divinity and Fellow of St John’s College, Oxford, had been appointed Rector of Sutton in 1808 at the age of 44 and would continue in the post until 1830. There had been complaints about him in his previous post in Oxford where he caused such embarrassment to the church and his college that they had considered expelling him but were able to shunt him off to the backwater of Sutton when the living became vacant there. A very unpleasant man, he never married and, soon after his arrival, his outrageous behaviour began to earn him an unsavoury reputation. On this occasion, despite several ploys to avoid prosecution, he was found guilty and fined £5.

The full story of the assault and Dr Free’s attempts to get away with it is told by Brian Outhwaite in his book *Scandal in the Church – Dr Edward Drax Free 1764–1843*:

William Bigg, a Potton shopkeeper, went to the Rectory at Sutton on the early evening of Friday 7 December 1810 in order to present Dr Free with a small, but no doubt overdue, bill. He was shown by Maria Crook [the housekeeper] into the parlour where the Rector and the Reverend Edward Mossop, Vicar of Langford, were sat each side of the fire drinking wine. Bigg presented his bill, which the Rector then denied was owing. Calling Bigg, ‘Villain, rascal, scoundrel, cheat, Methodist’, he seized the shopkeeper by an arm and his coat collar and forced him from the room. Not content with this he grabbed hold of Dr Mossop’s stick and threatened to cudgel Bigg unless he immediately left the house. Pushing him down the long passageway to the wash-house, he flung him out of the door. Bigg lost little time in complaining to Samuel Whitbread, the Biggleswade magistrate, who wrote to Dr Free ‘advising him to compromise the matter’. Free felt sufficiently

alarmed by his own behaviour to approach a local solicitor, William Chapman of Biggleswade, who interceded with Whitbread on Free's behalf. 'Dr Free', he wrote to the magistrate, 'being so well satisfied of the propriety of his conduct towards Bigg, and having such respectable evidence in confirmation of it, begs me to say he does not conceive that he has any matter whatsoever to accommodate with Bigg'. Free also wrote directly to Whitbread, pleading that his health prohibited early and long rides, and expressing the hope that Mossop's evidence would see him clear.

Events duly took their course. Whitbread's notebook records that on Boxing Day Bigg and the Constable of Sutton came to see him, the latter reporting that, when he had tried to serve a warrant on Free at eight o'clock that morning he had been told by a servant that the Rector had departed for London the previous evening by the mail coach. The Constable was ordered to conduct a search to confirm the truth of the allegation and, if true, to execute his warrant on the clergyman's return. On 10 January 1811 Free, Bigg, Mossop, Maria Crook and a former servant of the Rector appeared before another Justice of the Peace, James Webster, who bound the protagonists to appear at the next Bedford Quarter Sessions. Webster was clearly swayed by Bigg's story, and not at all persuaded by the support for the Rector from Mossop – 'a great friend and table companion of the Doctor's'. He also resisted Dr Free's threat that he would consult London counsel, and his plea that the case should go to the Assizes.

The above story pales into insignificance beside the string of outrages committed by the scandalous Rector who failed to perform his duties, sold lead off the church roof and allowed pigs to desecrate the graveyard. He quarrelled with all and sundry, both when sober and drunk. He kept pornographic literature and seduced a series of house-keepers, producing five illegitimate children, besides causing at least one of the women to miscarry. He probably would have kept his benefice had he not been inept enough also to offend the local gentry, the Burgoynes, over a burial in their family vault. Montagu Burgoyne laid a complaint on behalf of the village that eventually, after six years of legal battling, led to Free's deprivation in the Court of Arches.

Had he lived in our times the tabloid press would have had a field day. So, imagining the headlines that might have appeared I have, purely for fun, used tabloid-style headlines in this article. I cannot hope in the space available to give an account of all the twists and turns of the long legal battle that eventually resulted in Dr Free being publicly disgraced and ousted from Sutton, but shall just summarise his misdeeds, which were many and varied. To those who want to know the full fascinating story I strongly recommend R B Outhwaite's book.

Rip-off rector!

Doctor Free's father had also been an Oxford-educated clergyman and a schoolmaster who complained incessantly that he was underpaid. Perhaps this shaped Edward's characteristic of extracting for himself the maximum financial benefit from every situation, whether legally or morally justifiable or not. He avoided paying for goods and services – we learned above that he refused to pay a shopkeeper's bill and also assaulted him – and a Biggleswade ironmonger claimed he had indulged in shoplifting! Lacking respect for others, frequently rude and violent, he would swindle, cheat and defraud.

The living at Sutton would not support an extravagant lifestyle but the income allowed for a comfortable life and, after all, Dr Free was a middle-aged bachelor with no family to support. Soon after his arrival in 1808 he set about improving his income by defrauding his college and treating the Rectory property and glebe lands as if they were his own, stripping valuable assets for his personal gain. He applied to his college for funding for improvements to the Rectory, which he said his deceased predecessor had neglected, forgetting to mention that he also claimed money for the same purpose from his predecessor's estate. The college promised £200 but payments stopped after the first £50 because Free denied access to the house to the college's surveyor when he called. It was also noted that only minor repairs to fences had been carried out and that the majority of the mature trees on the property and in the churchyard had been felled and sold for timber.

What was more shocking was that Dr Free took the same attitude with the church and churchyard and his clerical duties. In 1820 he had the lead removed from the chancel roof and replaced with slates costing half what he made on the sale of the lead which, according to the builder who did the work, had been in good condition requiring only minor repairs.

The rector took advantage of all and sundry, even demanding from poor cottagers tithe on a few vegetables grown in their gardens. He kept the church locked, denied the churchwardens access to the parish registers and account books, keeping them in the Rectory, and sometimes refused to perform baptisms or burials until inflated fees were paid. Few headstones were erected in the churchyard during his time because he charged whatever fee he could get away with. He clashed with the local farmers over tithes, boundaries and rents, trebling the rent previously charged for glebe land. He even antagonised the lord of the manor, his neighbour, Sir Montagu Burgoyne, who in 1814 reported him to the

magistrate, Samuel Whitbread, for habitually poaching on his property, inviting his cronies to shoot game. The complaints multiplied.



Churchyard a pigsty! villagers up in arms!

After several years in Sutton Dr Free had so alienated the villagers that church attendance fell dramatically and many went instead to Potton. There were complaints that he never visited the sick, but one parishioner commented that few people would have allowed him into their homes anyway! On occasions he failed to hold services at all, sometimes for weeks, and of his sermons another parishioner said: ‘What Doctor Free says in the pulpit is more about his enemies and those who have offended him than anything else.’

Left: Sutton Church and churchyard with the Rectory in the distance (R B Outhwaite).

Most of our knowledge of his misdeeds comes from witness evidence given in the late 1820s for his trial in the ecclesiastical Court of Arches. One of the things that caused much distress was the desecration of the churchyard by Dr Free’s livestock. Dung was cleared from the paths before church services.

Typical of many witness statements were those of William and John Hale: ‘He had commonly one or two horses and several pigs there and at times when the weather was wet the church yard was like a ploughed field.’ When their father was buried ‘horses, cows and pigs were all there.’ ‘It was shameful to look at; not a grave was in decent order; the swine had rooted them up.’ And after only a few years they could no longer find their father’s grave.

‘Doctor Freelove’ – Rectory a common brothel

Most shocking were Free’s sexual relations with a series of young housekeepers, resulting in five illegitimate children – as the judge was to remark before sentencing him in 1829, ‘thus shamefully converting his Rectory into a common brothel’. Dr Free employed local people to help

with the running of the Rectory, but the only person allowed to live with him under his roof was his female housekeeper, and he got through several, nearly all considerably younger than himself. Marriage was probably not an option; he was by all accounts such an unpleasant, ill-tempered man that no woman in her right mind would accept him, so he paid live-in housekeepers, expecting them also to perform 'other duties' – and most of them did! Free disliked being disturbed after dark and locked the house in the evening. What went on then was the talk of the village.

There were six different housekeepers in all. The sixth to arrive, the smart, well-dressed 28 year-old Eliza Pierson, came in 1823 after Free responded to her newspaper advertisement seeking a situation, and escaped back to London after only nine days, having been repelled by the 58 year-old's sexual advances. She told how she had been given a bedroom next to the rector's and directly linked to it by a door that he insisted on keeping open, which made her uneasy. But when he began ringing the bell for her to come to his room she at first thought he must be unwell but on going to him realised what his intentions were, and retreated. He was displeased when she moved her bed to another part of the house. The young widow Ann Taylor was the only other one who appears not to have succumbed to his advances. She was with him for five years and returned for another five until the end of his trial. The other four housekeepers were clearly not averse to performing 'other duties' and had six pregnancies between them, one of which ended as a miscarriage. Only two children, a boy and a girl, are known to have survived past infancy.

Who will rid us of this troublesome priest? – Monty on the case!

Free's big mistake was offending the Burgoynes. Incensed by their accusation of poaching, he tried to take revenge in an extraordinary way in 1817. Having recourse to an archaic statute of 1581 he prosecuted Sir Montagu at the Bedford Assizes for non-attendance at his parish church over a 19-month period, attempting to extract from him the stipulated fine of £20 a month, a total of £380! This was so unusual that it was reported in *The Times*. It backfired when Burgoyne's counsel pointed out that during those 19 months there were no services to attend for long periods and that Free received a formal warning for this neglect! Of course, Sir Montagu was acquitted but he was in poor health and died later that year.

The Burgoyne baronets were military men and tended to be away from Sutton for extended periods. Another member of their family, the late Sir Montagu's uncle, also called Montagu Burgoyne and whose estate was then in Essex, was often involved in overseeing the business of the Sutton

estate. This Montagu Burgoyne lost a daughter in 1818 and arranged to have her body brought to Sutton for burial in the ancestral church, where he wished to have a new vault built for her. Dr Free charged him an exorbitant fee of 100 guineas for permission for the vault and in so doing 'cooked his goose'. Enough was enough! Montagu Burgoyne resolved afterwards to take on the rector and get him out of Sutton, and he was a man with the connections, organisational skills, intelligence, energy and perseverance to do it. It was to take much planning and preparation, followed by a frustrating six-year battle through the courts but he would see it through to the end. He began meticulously collecting evidence of Free's misconduct, working closely with the disgruntled parishioners and churchwardens of Sutton, even becoming a churchwarden himself. The autumn of 1823 marked the beginning of the process of retribution, with Dr Free the subject of a series of formal complaints, organised by Montagu Burgoyne in the form of presentments by the churchwardens and others to the Archdeacon of Bedford.

Randy rector defrocked

The stack of evidence against Free could not be denied and in June 1829 in the Court of Arches he was sentenced to deprivation of the living of Sutton and ordered to pay the costs of the case, which had begun there in 1824. Summing up before pronouncing sentence the judge said that the case might have concluded in 1825, had Free not tried at every turn to obstruct and impede the proceedings. Free appealed, but the sentence was upheld in February 1830 and he was ejected from Sutton Rectory at last. Destitute, he walked to London because nobody would take him or pay his fare. He lived in a succession of lodgings and relied on charity but there was little sympathy for a disgraced clergyman. In 1843 he was the victim of an accident caused by a bolting horse and was taken to the Royal Free Hospital, where he died of his injuries.

The six housekeepers

The housekeepers, nearly all considerably younger than Dr Free, were employed by him as domestic servants and lived alone with him in the Rectory. In those days most young girls and unmarried women from the less affluent orders of society worked in service because they had limited options for earning a living. To ease pressure on their families many sought work with accommodation provided, often far from home. If other servants lived in the same household there was some companionship and social interaction, but a female servant living alone with a male employer

upon whom she was entirely dependent could become lonely, isolated and vulnerable.



There is no known portrait of Dr Free. The detail (left) from 'A Tour of the Lakes' by Thomas Rowlandson (British Museum) is on the front cover of R B Outhwaite's book.

Employers commonly took advantage of vulnerable young women, whom they would regard as socially unsuitable for marriage. Pregnancies were covered up and the woman usually left her employment well before her confinement. If she was lucky, her employer would make arrangements for her confinement and the child's support and education, but if not she would have to turn to her relatives or the overseers of the poor in the parish to which she belonged, and they would seek out the father and oblige him to pay up. This happened all the time and in the best of households, but was not to be tolerated in the household of a clergyman, who was expected to be a model of morality. However, it was a recurring theme in Sutton rectory and this last part of our story deals with the scandalous rector's relationships with each of his housekeepers in turn.

1. *Maria Crook.* Dr Free came to Sutton in 1808 at the age of 43 and seems to have managed without a resident housekeeper until the winter of 1810, when 25-year-old Maria Crook moved in. Maria, from Potton, had earlier been employed in the London residence of the Pym family of Hasells Hall. She had returned in 1807 to Potton but her period of residence in London meant that Potton was no longer her legal parish of settlement so, when she found herself needing parish relief she was sent

back to London. Securing the job at Sutton enabled her to return to her familiar surroundings in Bedfordshire.

Within three weeks of her arrival she was regularly sharing the rector's bed but only remained with him for a couple of months. After a quarrel in which he physically assaulted her she broke some of his windows and left, afterwards going to work in the house of the Mayor of Bedford. Soon, however, she realised she was pregnant and would have to leave this job also. Fearing she would again be sent back to London if she sought parish relief, she wrote to Free, offering to conceal the paternity of the child if he would pay for her confinement and the child's support. He refused and, sure enough, she lost her job and was sent back to London. Here she gave a statement before a magistrate, naming Free as the father.

A daughter, Ann Crook, was born in September 1811 in the parish workhouse of St George's, Hanover Square. Free did make a payment for the confinement but his involvement ended there, for the child lived only a few weeks. Maria struggled to make a living in various ways for some years afterwards, eventually in her late 30s marrying a Newport Pagnell pedlar. In 1828 it was as Maria Roberts, aged 43, that she testified against Dr Free during his trial.

2. *Catharine Siggins*. Dr Free was 48 towards the end of 1812 when he brought young Catharine from her lodgings near Fleet Street to be his housekeeper. She was only about 18, the daughter of a farm labourer of Wade's Mill in Hertfordshire. Catharine resisted his advances at first but succumbed after several months and was noticeably pregnant by the early summer of 1813.

At this point Free sent her back to London with money for her confinement and delivery. Shortly before the birth she returned to her father's house in Wade's Mill and a daughter was born there on 21 November. When the money ran out she went to the local parish for relief, naming Free as the father, whereupon the rector was summoned to appear before a magistrate in Hertford and agreed to make regular payments for the child's support. Catharine departed from the family home after about a year, leaving the child in the care of her family. Little is known about her life after that, except that at some point she married a gardener of Hoxton in Middlesex. Dr Free honoured the agreement to support his daughter and was still sending regular payments in 1828 when she was 15.

3. *Margaret Johnston*. Free wasted no time after Catharine's departure to London, for in June 1813 he hired the 32-year-old Margaret Johnston, having seen her advertisement for a situation and visited her in her lodgings in London. It was around the time of the birth of his daughter

that this new housekeeper also became pregnant, and she too was hurriedly sent away at the end of April 1814. Where she was sent is not known but she gave birth to a stillborn daughter in Stepney in mid-August of that year and returned to Free's service in September. Clearly the relationship continued as before because she was once again pregnant in 1816, this time going to Ramsgate where she was delivered of a son on 15 November. This child was still living when Margaret testified at Free's trial 12 years later, in 1828.

By December 1816 she was back in the Rectory as Free's housekeeper and left again in November 1817, pregnant for the third time. Another boy was born in Ramsgate in March 1818 but subsequently died. After that Margaret never returned to Sutton but continued to work in service in London. It appears that her sister Mary, who lived in London, looked after the son who survived, and Free is known to have visited them there. When Montagu Burgoyne was collecting evidence to use against Dr Free he tracked down Mary and visited her. He saw the boy who, he noted, bore a marked resemblance to his father but he found Mary very reluctant to provide information, however, she did admit that Free paid for the boy's support and education.

4. *Ann Taylor (née Cross)*. Ann became the fourth housekeeper in February 1818. Her age is unknown but what is known is that she was the widow of a local plumber and glazier and was the only one of Dr Free's housekeepers to have successfully resisted his indecent advances. She was with him for nearly five years, leaving his service at the end of 1822 but returned in the spring of 1824. By 1825 Montagu Burgoyne was assiduously collecting evidence about Free's misconduct but Ann was loyal to her employer and did not testify against him. In fact she remained with him throughout the period of his trial, until 1829.

5. *Maria Mackenzie*. In December 1822 Maria was 28, living in Somers Town in London and seeking work when she answered the 58-year-old Dr Free's advertisement for a housekeeper. After just two weeks she was in the rector's bed every night and became pregnant. She miscarried in April 1823 and maintained that it was caused during a quarrel when he knocked her down on flagstones in the house. The relationship was already stormy, Maria having threatened to quit before, and Free arguing that she was pregnant when he hired her and had been living in London as a prostitute. When he gave her notice she packed her belongings and demanded her back pay, but he refused and kept her boxes, accusing her of stealing linen from the house, so she left and lodged temporarily with the village constable. Hearing soon afterwards that a new housekeeper was at the

Rectory, she went there and was horrified to see her own younger sister at a window. She fetched the constable and they brought the girl away. She then consulted Biggleswade solicitor, William Chapman, to recover the wages owed and brought a prosecution for assault against Free. The rector was advised to settle out of court but disputed Chapman's bill for costs of more than £17, so the prosecution went ahead to King's Bench, which ruled that the case should not proceed but Free should pay the costs and Maria's wages. Maria returned to London and continued in domestic service.

According to her later testimony during Free's trial in the Court of Arches the wages were never paid. She also gave revealing evidence about his indecent behaviour, telling how she had answered the parlour bell in daytime to find him naked below the waist and on other occasions he had shown her books of pornographic prints. Free's handyman, James Steers, corroborated this evidence when he recalled having chanced upon the books one day in the Rectory and on idly looking inside was shocked by the indecent images. Answering these accusations Free referred to his 'anatomical books'.

6. *Mary (called herself Eliza) Pierson*. And finally, as we saw above, Eliza, a smartly dressed 28-year-old, arrived at the Rectory in June 1823 after Dr Free replied to her newspaper advertisement for a situation – and, repelled by the rector's sexual advances, made a swift getaway back to London after only nine days in the job! *Mary (Eliza) was smarter and wiser!*

Jane Dale*

*This article first appeared in the *Newsletter* of the Biggleswade History Society and we are grateful to Jane Dale the author who is also the Editor of the *Newsletter* for permission to reprint it here.

Reference

R B Outhwaite, *Scandal in the Church – Dr Edward Drax Free 1764–1843* (The Hambledon Press, 1997).

About Bedford

An apple a day!

How many local people are aware of the important place that Bedford once had in the horticultural industry and the production of apples and soft fruits in particular.

A Thomas Laxton was born in Rutland in 1836. He trained as a Solicitor but was particularly interested in breeding plants and the scientific methods of such breeding. He selected suitable plants from close observations rather than depending simply on well tried and tested stock.

His aim was to improve the quality of plants and he believed that seeds from all such commercially grown items should be saved within a seed bank.

In 1872 he began producing varieties of strawberry plants and moved to Bedford in 1879 where he lived at 1 Harpur Place (where the car park of the Central Club now stands). When he retired in 1890 he was living at 78 Tavistock Street.

His son William Hudson Laxton, formed a partnership with his brother Edward and it was Edward who became the driving force in the new nursery and seed business. In 1890 the shop was based at 4-6 Bromham Road and subsequently moved to 63a High Street (where the Tesco store is now).

Laxton Brothers concentrated their attentions particularly on cross breeding the best varieties of apples by grafting stock from one type of tree onto another and this work resulted in over 21 new varieties of apple, for example Laxton's Superb and Duchess of Bedford, together with new peas, pears and other small fruits.

In 1900 the company set up the 140 acre nursery in Goldington Road, where the University now stands, and which became the focus of their propagation work.

Edward Laxton the son of Edward Senior, inherited his father's horticultural talents and in 1923 he became a partner in the business but was tragically killed when a stray German bomb dropped on Bedford in 1942.

In 1956 a decision was made to sell off the nursery land and the shop and the company subsequently went into voluntary liquidation. However Bedford is remembered by the large variety of Laxton apples and apple trees that can still be purchased.

The Bridewell

Anyone living in the town will be aware of the story of the County Gaol (top of Silver Street) and its John Bunyan connection. They will also know of the replacement Prison in St Loyes, still in use today.

They probably will not know though that there was a much earlier Prison at the top of Cauldwell Street where the Bedford Free School now stands. This had the ancient name of The Bridewell or House of Correction and was particularly to lock up vagrants and the workshy. The House of Correction was intended to provide work for the unemployed and while keeping them off the streets, to instill industrious habits.

At the 1585 General Sessions in Bedford it was announced that it was the intention to build a new House of Correction and this therefore probably dates the building for us. The first recorded inmate appears to have been an Andrew Norris, charged with assault in 1652 and sent to be detained at the Bridewell for two weeks. Deeds of 1689 mention such a property but little is known about it other than what John Howard describes on his visit in 1783.

In 1724 a John Okely was appointed Keeper of The Bridewell, unusually for life, and given the responsibility of 'putting the building in good and sufficient repair', and replacing thatch and in 1758 the architect Thomas Moore carried out many repairs and alterations to the premises, including the rebuilding in brick of the previously wooden walls.

John Howard the great prison reformer visited the property in 1783 and he describes it as consisting of three rooms on the ground floor and a courtyard. He says that it housed few prisoners, usually only between two and four, and that no water was available.

In 1801 the prisoners were transferred to the new County Gaol and Samuel Whitbread purchased both the land and the redundant buildings.

Bedford's other great church

The history of the great town centre churches of St Peter's and St Paul's is well known.

However there was also a third important building perhaps now overlooked because it has been deconsecrated and services are no longer held there.

St Mary's Church on the corner of Cardington Road was probably founded around AD 915 when King Edward the Elder constructed a broad ditch and rampart around what became the southern part of the town. The earliest historical reference to St Mary's is in the 13th century but even this is actually a copy of an earlier 11th century manuscript.

John Speed's map of Bedford dated 1610 indicates what the town looked like in medieval times and the church is shown as is the adjacent St Mary's Square where markets and fairs were held and a market cross probably also stood. At one time the church would have been a major landmark clearly visible from the other side of the bridge and the countryside around. It is said that the tower provided a prominent vantage point during the great siege of Bedford Castle in 1224.

The oldest surviving parts of the building are the tower and the south transept dating to the 10th and 11th centuries. The battlements of the tower are 15th century in date and just below these are some very important late Saxon windows, below them also a wonderful typically Norman style window. Sadly these important features are so often ignored during the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

Within the church can still be seen a medieval wall painting, more important Saxon windows and the font from the former church of St Peter de Dunstable that once stood opposite. There are some very interesting memorials – to a highwayman, a Professor of Medicine, a sailor on the infamous HMS *Bounty* and one of the King Charles II's own Chaplains.

The stained glass windows though mainly Victorian, are important in that they are very ornate and would therefore have been most expensive. They were donated by wealthy industrialists and local politicians who had moved into the Parish from the other side of the river, suggesting that the area during the 1800s in particular, was a desirable place to live.

In 1975 the church was declared redundant and for the next 15 years it lay almost derelict but in 1991 the Bedfordshire County Council Archaeology Department saved the building from further destruction by setting up the Archaeology Centre there.

Open Days are held once or twice a year and a visit to see the rare features inside this Church is well worth while.

Public executions in Bedford

Prior to 1869 executions for what were then considered serious crimes, were generally carried out in public. In Bedford they were something of a spectacle and there are reports of the drunkenness and debauchery that often accompanied them. The victim was generally cheered and the hangman profoundly booed.

These executions used to take place at Gallows Corner, the first corner as you leave the town having crossed the Bromham Road Railway Bridge. Perhaps the most famous of these was that of Gamaliel Ratsay a

highwayman who made his final speech last for three hours in order to prolong the moment.

When the new gaol opened in 1801 executions were transferred to that building and generally took place on the roof of the original gatehouse which still stands facing Bromham Road.

There are reports of 15 public executions at Bedford between 1801 and 1869 all of them were attended by vast crowds, often thousands (there is a report of 14,000 for one particular execution), and the usual hawkers or vendors selling what refreshments they thought would be popular that day.

It was also the practice for a local printer to publish a broadsheet, rather like a programme today, supposedly reporting the last conversations of the accused and giving an account of their final moments. Though, it is thought that many of these were simply invented to satisfy the demand. Bedfordshire Archives have a fine collection of these and they provide a most interesting social commentary on the times. The last public execution at Bedford was of a William Worsley on 31 March 1869.

Another of great interest was that of Sarah Dazely, convicted of poisoning her husband and a child, detained at Bedford and publicly hanged on 5 August 1843. The broadsheet for her execution was published by Merry of Bedford and gives a full account of when the carpenters arrived to start construction of the scaffold and of what Sarah did during her final hours, including attendance at Chapel and continuing to protest her innocence.

Hangings at Bedford continued but after 1869 were thankfully behind closed doors.

Bedford's Own White House

One of most impressive buildings in Bedford must be the palatial white house located opposite the statue of John Howard on the market square. This will be remembered by many older Bedfordians as the major branch of Lloyds Bank in the town in the days when you said "Sir" to the Bank Manager and trembled if you were called in to see him.

The building was though constructed in 1849 as a family home for Charles Palgrave a local chemist and the Mayor of Bedford in 1849 and 1850. Charles as Mayor, also played a major part in ensuring that the proposed new Midland Railway ran through his town. The architect of the house was his nephew Robert Palgrave, a pupil of the more famous George Gilbert Scott.

This Robert was also responsible for the imposing gateway entrance to James and Frederick Howard's factory in Kempston Road, later Britannia Iron Works and for the fabulous spire of St. Paul's Church erected in 1867 and now perhaps one of the best known landmarks in the town.

The Chemist's shop run by his Uncle Charles was on the ground floor with the family living accommodation on the upper floors.

One can but imagine the privilege of being invited to tea with the Mayor and of being seen to enter from the High Street through the imposing front door to his home.

Trevor Stewart

Book Review

Secret Bedford, by Paul Adams. Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2018. 96pp, £14.99, paperback, 100 illustrations.

In this well-produced book local author Paul Adams 'takes the reader on a unique and entertaining journey into the past' as the publisher's blurb has it. It is written in a light and engaging style and is replete with 100 illustrations. The author covers a lot of ground with each chapter concentrating on just one subject as: Ancient and Historical Bedford; Wartime Bedford; Musical Bedford; Spooky Bedford; Murderous Bedford; Religious Bedford; Cinematic Bedford; and Walking Secret Bedford.

The title *Secret Bedford* is a bit of a misnomer as even as an incomer I knew many of the stories, and the usual suspects appear: John Bunyan, Joanna Southcott, Glenn Miller, etc, but the chapter on Musical Bedford had some interesting, if sometimes tenuous, connections. But it was good to see a photo of the Bedford Trades Brass Band in this section – indigenous and local amateur music-making which is usually ignored. Murderous Bedford detailed stories, some of which I had not come across before.

Spooky Bedford has some ghost and ghost-hunting stories and Cinematic Bedford tells of the town's use for location shooting. The best being *Personal Affair* (1953) and then Adams strays out of town to tell how the Old Warden railway tunnel appeared in *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* (1965).

I particularly enjoyed the 'Did you know?' boxes throughout the text, even finding out the origin of 'Up the wooden hill to Bedfordshire', said to so many children at bedtime over the years.

To summarise: this is a very well-illustrated introduction to Bedford's legends and stories. It is very well produced but the thick paper and tight binding make it a struggle to keep it open which makes the text sometimes disappear into the back margin when reading. Although well designed the text type size is, in my opinion, a little too small – probably designed by someone with 20/20 vision! A Bibliography is provided but an index would have made the book much more useful.

At £15 for 96 pages (16p per page) it could be considered a bit expensive but it is an entertaining read for those who have just arrived or those who want to know more about the town. Many whose hobby is local history may find that they know many of the tales, but even they could be surprised!

Ted Martin

Publication Received

Bedford Local History Magazine, No 102, October 2018. 44pp + cover. Price £3.50, obtainable from the Eagle Bookshop, 103 Castle Road, Bedford MK40 3QP. **Special Putnoe History Edition:** 'A Thousand Years of Putnoe' by Bob Ricketts. **Book Reviews** by Bob Ricketts: Richard Morgan, *Henry John Sylvester Stannard with Notes on his Daughter Theresa Sylvester Stannard*; Gordon Vowles,, *The Life and Times of Sir John Gostwick: Tudor Entrepreneur and Bureaucrat*.