BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

HISTORY IN BEDFORDSHIRE

VOLUME 10, NO 3, Winter 2023/24

The Association's 31st Year

www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk

BLHA Spring Event: ~ *page 2*
BLHA 2024 AGM and Conference: ~ *page 2*
Jewish Evacuees to Bedfordshire 1939–1945: ~ *page 4*
Michael Rutt, 1935–2023: ~ *page 6*

Articles:
Evangelist Extraordinary: The Rev Timothy Matthews: TREVOR N STEWART ~ *page 8*
Disasters from Bedfordshire's Skies: The Disappearance of Glenn Miller: JOHN THURSTON ~ *page 12*
The Great Northern Railway, Part 1: TED MARTIN ~ *page 19*

Society Bookshelf ~ *page 32*
Publication Received – *page 33*

History in Bedfordshire is published by the
BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk
For HIB: Editor: Ted Martin, 39 Chamomile Gardens, Cardamom Street, Biggleswade, Beds SG18 8YZ
Telephone: 01767 306103. E-mail: ed.martin39@btinternet.com
For BLHA: Secretary: Clive Makin, 32 Grange Road, Barton Le Clay, Bedford MK45 4RE: Telephone: 01582 655785
Contributions are very welcome **and needed**: please telephone or e-mail the Editor before sending any material.
All rights reserved. Copyright © 2023 BLHA (Bedfordshire Local History Association) and contributors. ISSN 0968–9761

BLHA Spring Event

Stotfold Mill

Wednesday 24th April 2024

We are currently finalising the details for this event which is being put together specifically for the BLHA. The event will include:

Presentation on the history of the Mill
Tour of the Mill, which will be working and producing flour
Presentation from the Mill's archive group
Opportunity for Tea Room refreshments
Access to the Nature Reserve

Full event and booking details will follow.

BLHA 2024 AGM & Conference

This will be hosted by the Leighton Buzzard & District, Archaeological & Historical Society on Saturday, 22 June 2024

Planning for the 2024 Bedfordshire Local History Conference on 22 June at Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, is well ahead with speakers booked, sumptuous catering arrangements, a spacious hall, plenty of room for stalls and displays, ample parking and easy access by public transport.

A wide range of subjects and periods will be covered from the medieval period through to the Second World War. Perhaps the subject covering the longest period is the history of Leighton Buzzard Mill which was thriving as a double mill in 1066, so had a long history before that in a town owned by Saxon kings. It survived right into the modern day, ending its life as a Mother's Pride bakery, before being taken over and demolished in the 1970s.

There is a talk about Q Central, the secret Second World War communication centre in the town of which little is known but one of its outposts, Bletchley Park, is now a major tourist attraction. Leighton Buzzard was also the headquarters of Radar, again one of the best-kept secrets of the war.

Other subjects include Alice Chaucer, granddaughter of the poet Geoffrey, who owned Leighton Buzzard for 60 years during the turbulent years of the Wars of the Roses and was one of the

town's great benefactors, building the Market Cross among other things. She was widowed three times and became one of the richest and most powerful women in England.

The keynote speaker is Paul Tate, head of the Leighton Society's archaeological team, who has been leading the team looking for the Holy Well in Linslade, suppressed in 1299 because it was attracting too many pilgrims away from Lincoln. After seven years the well has been finally uncovered.

As usual, the day will start with coffee, the annual general meeting of the Bedfordshire Local History Association at 9.30 am and the first speaker will start at 10 am.

Important parts of the conference will be the usual coffee break and long lunch break which will allow people to browse the exhibitions and stalls of local societies. Four stalls and three exhibitions have been booked so far, but there is plenty of space for more if any society is interested. There is no charge for stalls or exhibition space.

The organising committee have fixed entry fees as £25 per head, including lunch. For those not wanting lunch, the cost is £20, but includes free tea and coffee.

Anyone wishing to book tickets or organise a stall before the formal booking forms are released can email lbdahs@yahoo.com, an address set up especially for the conference.

The Society will monitor the address and contact you as soon as possible.

As stated at the beginning there is ample parking at Linslade Middle School in Mentmore Road, LU72PA, where the conference is being held. It is a 12-minute walk from Leighton Buzzard railway station but is also on a bus route from the station and town centre. There is seating for 120 in the hall. Lunch will be available in the adjoining dining room.

Paul Brown
LBDAHS

—

UCL HOLOCAUST CENTRE BEACON SCHOOL PROGRAMME

Jewish Evacuees to Bedfordshire 1939–45

Every year the Holocaust Centre at University College London (UCL) selects 20 schools nationally to participate in their Holocaust Beacon School Programme (https://holocausteducation.org.uk/local-support-through-beacon-schools/). For 2023–24, Wixams Academy has been designated a UCL Beacon School – the only new beacon school in the county.

The programme develops teachers' understanding of how to teach the Holocaust and creates a new scheme of learning with which to teach to their students. The outcomes of the programme are shared with other schools in the local area to disseminate quality teaching resources.

To design our scheme, we have decided to use a little-known Bedfordshire connection to the Holocaust to frame our retelling of the Holocaust for Bedfordshire students.

In September 1939 around 450 Jewish children were evacuated from London and arrived in Shefford. The children and their teachers were billeted in Shefford, Clifton, Chicksands, Campton and Meppershall. Over the course of the war the evacuees and their teachers established a successful Jewish school in Shefford. Although there were some initial teething issues – particularly about the kosher diet – the villagers of Bedfordshire welcomed and nurtured the Jews to the extent that Shefford and the surrounding villages are remembered with great fondness in the world-wide Jewish community.

However, the story is even more impressive when placed in its wider international context: the evacuees were actually double-evacuees: they had been rescued on a Kindertransport after the November Pogrom (sometimes referred to as *Kristallnacht*) in 1938 by a British Rabbi called Solomon Schonfeld. Rabbi Schonfeld, at great danger to himself, travelled to Germany after the pogrom and organised his own Kindertransport – the 500 Jewish children he rescued initially settled in London. When Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939 millions of children were evacuated from British towns and cities, and the Schonfeld Jews were moved from London to Bedfordshire.

The most impressive aspect of this story is simply that, at the same time as the villagers of Bedfordshire were welcoming and nurturing their Jewish residents, thousands of other settlements across mainland Europe were involved in the 'Holocaust by bullets' where local populations rounded up their local Jews and either placed them in ghettos or

murdered them. The image most people associate with the Holocaust is Auschwitz – its gates and gas chambers. Although it is true that the 'Final Solution' was indeed carried out here in its most murderous form, the majority of the Holocaust's victims were actually murdered by their neighbours in their own villages.

So, what the villagers of Bedfordshire did throughout the Second World War was remarkable and unusual in the context of what was happening to Jews in Europe at the same time.

Our Beacon School project will focus on why the Schonfeld Jews had to leave Germany (historical antisemitism and the November Pogrom); how the Schonfeld Jews arrived in Britain (the Kindertransport); what happened when they arrived (the experience of living in Bedfordshire); what happened to those left behind in Germany and Poland (the Holocaust by bullets and the death camps); and to look at the aftermath for those who were evacuated here (the creation of the State of Israel and remembrance).

We aim to develop a series of 9–10 lessons to tell this story and we want children in Bedfordshire schools to know about the heroic efforts people in their county made to welcome and nurture the Jewish people during the Holocaust.

However, we need help – particularly from the history societies of Shefford, Clifton, Chicksands, Campton and Meppershall.

Do you know of any sources within your archives or private collections that would help us to find out more about the experience of the Jewish evacuees? Do you know of any living eyewitnesses who lived and witnessed the Jewish school or its students? Has anyone in the village links to the Jewish community, and especially links to any of the evacuees?

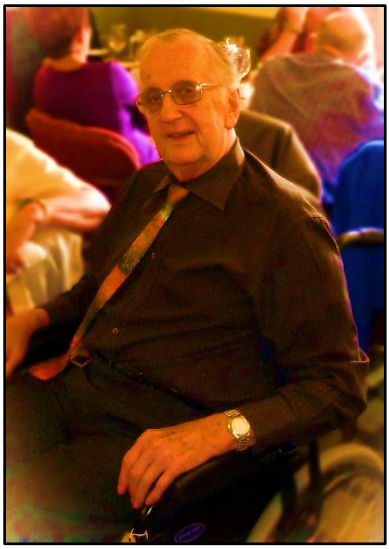
If you have any information, we'd love to hear from you. We will, of course, keep you updated with our project.

Ryan Craze (rcraze@wixamsacademy.co.uk)
Head of History, Wixams Academy
on behalf of the Wixams History Department

Michael Rutt

28 April 1935–18 December 2023

(Maurice) Michael Rutt **was** named Maurice after his father (but usually referred to as Michael or Mike) formerly of Tithe Farm, Langford, where Michael spent the first 20 years of his life. He had a great deal of affection for the village, its people and its history.



By profession he was a teacher and sometime head of the Social Studies Department of Templars School. Baldock. A former pupil remembered him as a very good teacher and a 'lovely man'. Later in life he became a tour guide.

Michael was a great friend of Langford History Society and his legacy and great contribution to Langford was to research and write the only comprehensive history of the village. The first edition was published in 1976, as *The People at the Long Ford*, by Bedfordshire County Library, when Michael was just into his forties. This production was just typewriter script, printed and bound in paper covers.

He put much research and skill into the writing of this book, taking the story from the Saxons through to approximately 1918. He had no internet nor Wikipedia yet, in addition to many printed sources, he researched in the muniments room of Westminster Abbey, Bedfordshire Archives and Friends House in London. All of these must have entailed many journeys and hours studying in libraries. The quality of his writing is evident and all of it retained a sympathy for the common people of the time, and this probably suggested the title for the first edition.

It was at one of the History Society meetings that I met him for the first and only time. We had a conversation and then, quite suddenly, he gave me his hard-bound copy of the first edition, saying, 'Do what like with this'.

The opportunity came with lockdown when I was able to scan and edit the text to bring it up to date. I had some telephone and email conversations with Michael about the project, but he said he was not well enough to be involved but would leave it to me, apart from wanting to change the title to *At the Long Ford*. The Society was able to publish it as a handsome paperback in 2021 and it has reprinted twice since.

In 1961 Michael married Valerie Rawlins from Chalton, near Moggerhanger, and had two children, Jonathan and Lindsey. Valerie died in May 2022. Jonathan recalls that, as a young boy, Michael took him to see Tithe Farm, to meet with the current owners and be shown around the house and the surrounding land, where Michael had spent many happy years growing up; a particular image that Jonathan has is captured in a photograph, taken around 1945, with a bicycle outside one of the farm outbuildings.

Despite his failing health, Michael retained a sharp and active mind, with the ability to recall events throughout his life with enviable and vivid detail, often correcting Jonathan should he dare to attempt to do the same whilst in earshot, or if he missed or quoted anything incorrectly – no doubt a legacy of his time as a teacher and tour guide.

Jonathan says: 'My sister Lindsay and I will always have lasting memories of a much loved and special Dad, from whom I am proud to have developed a shared interest in history, especially military history, where we had a common interest and passion. Dad was a great jotter, capturing his thoughts in notes and poems within several large notebooks – which I will cherish. A very tangible memory of both Dad and Langford is present in my house today, in the form of a Grandfather clock which dates back to c1825, spending a large proportion of its 198 year life in Langford, with the Piper, Isherwood and Rutt families, before eventually

being handed down to me as its ninth custodian in 2021. In memory of a much-loved husband, Dad, Grandfather & friend.'

The grandfather clock was the subject of an article by Michael in the *Bedfordshire History Magazine*, Autumn 1970, which can be found on the History Society website.

It is most unusual for a small village to have such a comprehensive review of its history as in *At the Long Ford*, and I'm sure all villagers will be grateful for years to come to Michael for his work. Former pupils of Templars School will have fond memories of a kind and caring teacher and many tourists will remember a skilled and perceptive guide.

Ted Martin

—

Evangelist Extraordinary! The Rev Timothy Matthews

How many of the young people of Bedford who regularly gather in Esquires nightclub in Greyfriars actually realise that they are in a church that is the legacy of one man and was funded and constructed by his congregation.

Timothy Matthews was born in Long Sutton, Lincolnshire, on 26 June 1795, the son of a Church of England clergyman. He himself became curate at Bolnhurst Church between 1818 and 1825 and Colmworth between 1818 and 1830.

The Rev Matthews in the pulpit at Christ Church

From 1825 to 1830 he was also Assistant Chaplain to the House of Industry (the Workhouse) in Bedford and was appointed full-time Chaplain in 1830.[1] Consequent upon this Matthews opened up his services in the Workhouse chapel to all citizens of the town who soon began attending in considerable numbers. This was much to the concern of the Board of Trustees of the establishment who then took action to restrict such admission to inmates only, causing their Chaplain to resign instantly.

He was a very controversial figure, a rebel, and a law unto himself who, although ordained as an Anglican clergyman, was more often at odds with his church and his bishops and regularly preached at non-

conformist places of worship, rather than in an established church. Despite this he was still recognised 'as the finest preacher of his time' and was often called upon to take services in London.

After one particularly unpleasant meeting with his bishop, (probably over the public attendance at services in the Workhouse), Matthews, having resigned, became a street preacher. So charismatic was he that his following grew daily and, the use of Anglican churches being barred to him, he soon had to consider seeking a permanent building in which to worship. The congregation set about raising the funds necessary to enable them to purchase land fronting onto Bromham Road and then in 1837 to construct a new chapel to be called Christ Church (not to be confused with the later Christ Church on Goldington Road), where Matthews was to become the pastor with living accommodation in the basement of the building.

His fame continued to spread and he was regularly seen (and heard) parading through the town loudly blowing a bugle to summon the ever-increasing congregation to services. He was a great evangelist but still a rebel and he took to baptising new members of the church in the river Great Ouse by the town bridge. There is one record that, on a particular Sunday in 1841, he is reputed to have personally baptised over 2,000 converts in one day.

In June 1821 at Colmworth Timothy Matthews married Ann Fielding, a member of the Fielding family who had come from Halifax to Staploe to farm land owned by relatives. Ann's younger sister Mary was a dissenter and one of six who emigrated to Canada from the village in 1832. Through her later marriage to Hyrum Smith she became a founder of the new Mormon faith and is still greatly revered in Salt Lake City.

Rev Timothy and his wife had six children two of whom (Joseph and Timothy Richard, also a hymn writer) followed their father and grandfather into the priesthood and one (Benjamin) became a doctor.

Once the new Mormon religion had become established and missionaries were being sent back to Great Britain, it was Timothy Matthews (Snr) who welcomed them and to the consternation of the local establishment, allowed them to use his church.

The archives held by the Mormon Church record:

Elders John Goodson and Willard Richards arrived in Bedford on the 2nd of August 1837, and having letters of introduction to the Rev Timothy R Matthews, from Brother Joseph Fielding (Mrs Matthews' brother) they immediately waited on Mr Matthews, who expressed great joy at their arrival, and manifested his sincerity by walking arm in arm with the elders through the streets of Bedford,

calling on the members of his church, and inviting them to attend the lecture of the elders, at his chapel vestry that evening. Mr Matthews had previously been apprised of the Saints in America, through the medium of the Rev James Fielding of Preston and the letters from America before referred to.

In the evening the church assembled in the vestry, and Elders Goodson and Richards continued to lecture and testify of the work of God on that and the three following evenings in the same place, with the entire approbation of Mr Matthews, who, at the close of the lectures, publicly bore testimony to the truths advanced, and called upon his people to know why they do not come forward for baptism, while they in return, wished to know why he did not set them the example.

Herbert C Kemball one of the early leaders of the faith later wrote 'that forty of his (Matthews') members later went forward and were baptized'.

Rev Matthews was also responsible for the founding of the Zion Baptist Church in Oldways Road, Ravensden *(left, as it appeared in 1995),* It was formed as a direct result of his missionary activity in the village every Sunday afternoon, when, after a busy morning preaching in Bedford, he would march through the village with his famous bugle calling folk to worship.

The first church (1831) met in two rooms in the cottage on Bedford Road of gardener Thomas Symonds (or Symons) *(right)* and his wife Hannah. (Thomas and Hannah both born in Ravensden had actually themselves been married at Ravensden Church on 27 November 1831 by Rev Matthews.) The congregation grew quickly and a vacant barn was rented for use as a chapel.

Unfortunately, the Registration of Places of Worship by the Archdeaconry does not give an exact location for this barn in either the 1831 or 1834 registrations, but it is thought that it was probably at the end, and to

the rear of the cottages on the north side of Bedford Road then known as 'The Boarded Row' or 'Campbelltown'. It is also suggested that before moving to the new chapel the congregation further rented a larger barn adjacent to the *Case is Altered* public house and Harper Cottages.

Soon after her marriage, and no doubt because of her friendship with Matthews, Hannah Symonds began raising funds for a purpose-built chapel but sadly Timothy Matthews died in Bedford in 1845 before sufficient money had been collected to enable construction to begin

He was interred in the garden of his Bromham Road church. However, as this was unconsecrated ground, both he (and his tomb, *left*) were later moved to the churchyard at Colmworth, where his wife was also buried.

He is not recorded in the *Dictionary of National Biography* but was the subject of a book published in 1934 nearly 100 years after his death, namely, *The Life of T R Matthews*, by Thomas Wright.

He has also been referred to in the *History of Bedfordshire*, by Joyce Godber who states that to Thomas Wright, Matthews was 'this truly great and noble-minded man, whom he would include in succession with Wycliffe, Latimer, Whitfield and Wesley!'

Note

1. The Workhouse was in Kimbolton Road and later became what was known as North Wing Hospital. It was badly damaged by fire a couple of years ago, but the Rev Matthews Chapel still stands, albeit in a rather sad and neglected condition while arguments rage as to whether the whole building should be reconstructed as it was, or if total demolition will be permitted.

Trevor N Stewart

—

Disasters from Bedfordshire's Skies: The disappearance of Glenn Miller

Glenn Miller was born on 1 March 1904, in Clarinda, Iowa, USA. While just a youth he became interested in music to the extent that he dropped out of university to concentrate solely on becoming a full-time professional musician. In 1925 at the age of 21 he joined his first big band where he played alongside the great Benny Goodman. He married his childhood sweetheart, Helen Burger, in New York in 1928 and during the next few years he played with a number of bands including the legendary Dorsey Brothers.

Glenn formed his own band in 1936 but had to wait until 1939 for the 'big break', which came with several lucrative performances and the legendary recording of 'In The Mood' and 'Tuxedo Junction'. *Time* magazine reported in 1939 that 'Of the twelve to 24 discs in each of today's 300,000 US jukeboxes, from two to six are usually Glenn Miller's'. This was evidenced by the recording of 'Tuxedo Junction' which sold 115,000 copies in the first week of issue. This was followed by Glenn Miller's band topping the polls in 1940 and 1941 and starring in the film *Sun Valley Serenade*.

Miller was a true patriot and, despite the fact that he was already over the call-up age, he decided to join the armed forces and duly enlisted on 15 February 1942 at the age of 38. He became a captain and was assigned to the Army Air Corps. The Army Air Force Band was then formed with its role being to publicise the activities of the USAAF and to encourage young Americans to enlist. The band was also involved in the War Bond drive.

Just before D-Day the decision was made to send the band to England to help boost the morale of American servicemen stationed in the East Anglian region. (*Left: The bust of Glenn Miller outside Bedford Corn Exchange.)*

Early in July 1944 Glenn Miller and his orchestra arrived in Bedford, which had hosted recreation activities for hundreds of soldiers and military personnel from the many surrounding base camps.

Bedford became the nation's entertainment centre after the BBC evacuated there in 1942, and many stars of radio, stage and screen could be seen in 1944 (their base was the Co-Partners Hall in Queen's Park). Other famous stars would follow, including David Niven, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and many others.

The band took on a punishing schedule of live concerts to servicemen by flying and driving all over the country (one source stating they gave 800 performances) and then returning to Bedford for broadcasts and building up a stock of recorded programmes. The first concert the band gave in Great Britain was to hundreds of Allied servicemen and women in Bedford Corn Exchange on Sunday, 9 July 1944, the Corn Exchange at this time being a Forces Canteen run by the Bedford Borough Entertainment Committee for the many servicemen and women stationed around Bedford.

Despite this exhausting schedule of concerts and recording dates, Glenn and his band staged four concerts open to the public as opposed to servicemen, two in London, one in Grantham and one in Bedford. The advertisement in the *Bedfordshire Times* of 4 August 1944 for the Bedford concert stated:

Captain Glenn Miller and the American Band of the Supreme Allied Command have kindly consented to give one public concert in the Corn Exchange, Bedford, on Friday, 11 August, 8.30 to 10 pm, doors open 7.45pm.

In aid of the Borough Entertainment Committee for the Forces.

Tickets at Frasers: 10/6, 7/6, 5/- and 3/-.

Total receipts to the Mayor's Committee without any deductions.

Shortly afterwards Miller was promoted to Major and following D-Day it was decided to relocate Glenn and his band to the European theatre of operations. Their first performance was scheduled for Christmas Eve in newly liberated Paris.

The flight

It was planned originally that Don Haynes, the band's manager, would travel along with Miller, ahead of the band, to ensure necessary preparations had been made for their concert performance.

However, by chance, Miller bumped into Lieutenant-Colonel Norman Baessell at the officers' mess at Milton East near Northampton on 14 December and struck up a conversation with him. Baessell mentioned that he would be flying to Paris the next day from the RAF airfield at Twinwood Farm and, on hearing about Miller's plans, offered him a seat

on the plane. Miller duly accepted and spent the rest of the evening eating dinner and playing poker with Haynes and Baessell.

Unfortunately, the morning of 15 December found Bedford heavily fogged-in. Haynes called up Baessell to find out if the flight was still on. Baessell replied that by the time they took off after lunch the fog would almost certainly be gone.

On a bitterly cold day Baessell contacted pilot, John Morgan, who confirmed that he would be arriving soon. Apparently, Miller jokingly said to Haynes that Morgan would fail to locate the field as it was 24°F and 'even the birds were grounded'. Despite this Morgan's plane arrived minutes later through the dense fog and landed on the airstrip.

Baessell, Haynes and Miller left the control tower and drove to the Noordwyn Norseman C-64 on the tarmac where Morgan, waiting for them, apologised for his tardiness. Miller, who was said to have had a fear of planes was said to have muttered: 'Where the hell are the parachutes?' The ironic reply from Baessell was said to have been, 'What's the matter with you Miller, do you want to live forever?' Charles Lindbergh had made it across the whole Atlantic on one engine; their C-64 would only be going as far as Paris. Miller made no further comment.

Don Haynes watched as the Norseman took off at 13.55 hours on 15 December 1944, not realising he would be the last person to see them alive.

The disappearance theories

The official report was that the Norseman aircraft had crashed into the channel due to either iced-over wings or engine failure. However, there has been increasing speculation as to what really happened.

(Left: US Army Air Force UC-64 Noordwyn Norseman.)

In 1985 a British diver, Clive Ward, found what appeared to be the remains of the ill-fated Norseman off the coast of France. Aside from the ordinary corrosive effects of the sea, Ward found no damage to the plane and, intriguingly, no signs of the plane's registration number or human remains. This inevitably led to more unanswered questions regarding Miller's fate and fuelled even more speculation.

Amongst the many theories on the disappearance are the following, some plausible, some totally bizarre.

Theory 1: the plane crashed due to bad weather

The official report issued by the US military on 24 December was that Miller's plane had nose-dived into the English Channel, either because its wings had iced over or due to engine failure. This claim was supported by Fred W Atkinson Jr who, in 1944, had been at Le Bourget Airport, Paris.

According to Atkinson, two of the C-64 Norsemans were scheduled to return to Paris on the day Miller departed from Twinwood; however, the flights were cancelled on account of bad weather. In spite of the risk involved, an unnamed brigadier-general ordered that two pilots fly Miller to Paris to re-group with his band, who had arrived earlier. When Atkinson's unit left for Paris several days later, they were notified of a crashed aircraft on the coast of France that might belong to the unit, and whose occupants were dead. A plane was dispatched, and its crew identified the bodies as those of Miller and the two pilots, based on identification papers and dogtags as well as visual identification. The second crew in Twinwood further verified that Miller and the two pilots had been seen to depart in the crashed aircraft several days earlier.

Papers detailing the salvage of the crashed aircraft were processed, as were the report of the deaths of the pilots on the squadron morning report, which was updated on a daily basis to keep track of the status of all personnel. Because of the loss of the pilots and the army's number one morale man, there were rumours that officers in the 320th squadron had sworn to bring manslaughter charges against the brigadier-general who had issued the order; however, as Miller had not yet been officially pronounced dead, they could do little but wait in frustration until the announcement was made.

Unfortunately for Atkinson's unit, there was never a conclusion to all this, despite the surplus of witnesses to confirm the events.

Theory 2: the plane was downed by 'friendly fire'

The late Fred Shaw was the navigator of a Lancaster (serial number NF973) based in Methwold. On the day Miller's plane disappeared, 138 Lancaster bombers – one of them Shaw's – were returning from an aborted bombing raid on Siegen in Germany because their fighter escorts had failed to get off the ground. Because the squadron could not possibly land with their staggering bomb load, their combined total of 100,000 incendiary bombs had to be jettisoned. The bomb jettison zone was known as the South Jettison Area (a 10-mile circle, 50 miles south of Beachy Head over the English Channel) and was officially dangerous ground to be avoided by all aircraft and ships.

When the bombs were jettisoned from a safety height of 4,000 feet, Shaw, who had never seen a bombing before, was driven by curiosity to look out the window. As the bombs exploded several feet above the surface of the sea, he saw a plane 2,500 feet below, flying south. Years later he would say:

It was obvious to me that the aeroplane below was in trouble, so I watched intently. Then, just before it went out of sight under the leading edge of the wing, I saw it flick over to port in what looked like an incipient spin. And eventually I saw it disappear into the English Channel.

The bomb aimer had reported the same sighting a moment before; now a rear gunner called over the intercom that 'there's a kite just gone in down under'.

Because they were technically not in enemy territory and the mission had been reported, the men were not debriefed, and the downed plane remained unreported.

Shaw never connected the downed plane with Miller's disappearance until 1956 when, after seeing the movie *The Glenn Miller Story,* he decided on impulse to check his old log book. He then realised that the Norseman he'd seen plunging into the sea could very well have been Miller's.

*Postscript 1***:** Shaw's documents were eventually sold by Mrs Shaw, who, according to her daughter, Cheryl Fillmore of Southampton, believed that the material should not rot in a drawer but be made available to those who were interested in the matter. They sold for a grand sum of £22,000 at Sotheby's on 13 April 1999. *(Left: Captain (later Major) Glenn Miller.)*

Postscript 2: In a book published in 2006, Clarence B Wolfe, a gunner with Battery D, 134th AAA Battalion, in Folkestone, also claimed that his battery shot down Miller's plane

Theory 3: Miller died of medical conditions in a hospital

Two different claims have been made that Miller traversed the channel and returned, but later died in an American hospital. One claim was by the New Jersey Department of Health, which stated that Miller had died

in Ohio in 1945 as a result of injuries. An anonymous letter surfaced from a doctor stating that Miller had been flown in with gunshot wounds in 1945 and had later died under his care.

Miller's younger brother Herb, however, came up with another story. In 1983, Herb claimed that 'Glenn Miller did not die in a plane crash over the Channel but from lung cancer in a hospital'. Miller had apparently been shuttled off to a military hospital upon arrival, where cancer took his life the very next day (Lieutenant-Colonel Baessell also made the trip safely, but later died while engaged in battle with the Germans).

To support his story, Herb Miller had pointed out a passage in a letter written by his chain-smoking brother in the summer of 1944: 'I am totally emaciated, although I am eating enough. I have trouble breathing. I think I am very ill.' Miller's depression, irritability and exhaustion during the few months prior to his untimely demise, Herb Miller asserted, further proved that Miller had an underlying medical condition. To further corroborate this story, Don Haynes, Miller's band manager, had claimed that the bandleader had lost a lot of weight and that his tailor-made uniforms 'didn't fit him well at all. They merely hung on him.' Miller must have been aware of his impending doom, for late one night he told George Voustas, the director of his military programs: 'You know, George, I have an awful feeling you guys are going to go home without me.'

Furthermore, according to the weather report for 15 December the daytime temperature had been 5°C (41°F, and not the previously claimed 24°F) – too warm for aeroplane wings to have iced over and crashed into the English Channel.

Herb Miller was unable to furnish information about his brother's final resting place, claiming that Miller had probably been buried in a mass grave at some British military cemetery. True to his brother's heart, however, Herb had allegedly fabricated the crash story because his brother had wanted to 'die as a hero and not in a lousy bed'.

Theory 4: Miller had survived but later died in a bordello

Perhaps one of the most ludicrous claims is that Glenn Miller (and his two fellow officers) had reached Paris but later died in somewhat compromising circumstances.

In 1997 German journalist, Udo Ulfkotte, was trawling through American and German intelligence wartime records. According to the German tabloid magazine *Bild*, Ulfkotte had found evidence of a steamy cover-up indicating that Miller had actually arrived safely in Paris on 14

December but had unfortunately met his end while in the dubious company of a French prostitute.

Disputing this absurd claim, retired Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Baker reported to the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* that there was no way Miller could possibly have reached Paris by 15 December except on his flight, because the two of them had been drinking together in England the night before.

Ulfkotte later claimed that he'd been misquoted and asserted that he had never found evidence of Miller dying in a brothel, the story having apparently come from an off-the-record conversation with German intelligence specialists.

Postscript: Apparently supporting this theory, a book by Lieutenant-Colonel Huton Downs, a former member of Eisenhower's personal staff, argues that the US government covered up Miller's death. Downs suggested that Miller, who spoke German, had been enlisted by Eisenhower to covertly attempt to convince some German officers to end the war early. The book goes on to suggest that Miller was captured and killed in a Paris brothel, and his death covered up to save the government embarrassment.

Other crackpot theories

Other slightly ridiculous theories include:

(a) Miller had been a spy and had subsequently been killed (see postscript above).

(b) Miller had been abducted by aliens who'd apparently been interested in studying/dissecting him.

(c) He had been the victim of black marketeers.

(d) US agents marked Miller for death because he was threatening to expose a cabal of gay US officers.

(e) A German assassination squad had been sent to shoot down Miller's plane.

f) He had been accidentally shot by an MP in Paris.

Conclusion

And so a fairly anonymous flight during wartime from a small airfield four miles north of Bedford has become a major aviation mystery. We must all draw our own conclusions as to how possibly the greatest band leader of the 20th century met his fate. **John Thurston**

The Great Northern Railway, Part 1

This railway traversed the south-eastern corner of Bedfordshire from 1850 onwards on its trunk route to Scotland and among its benefits to the country it supplied a fast and efficient route to London for the agricultural produce of this part of the county.

Transport before the railway

During the Regency period, roads improved, partly because of Turnpike Trusts and the superintendence of surveyors and this had a great effect on passenger transport and the efficiency of the wagon trade.

The Great North Road was the principal route in this area and its starting point was Smithfield in London. Distances on the road were computed from the now demolished Hicks Hall, at the south end of St John Street, just to the north of Smithfield Market. The route ran from Smithfield up St John Street to the Angel at Islington. With the building of the General Post Office at St Martin's-le-Grand in 1829, coaches began using the alternative route, the modern A1, beginning at the GPO building and following Aldersgate Street and Goswell Road before joining the old route at the Angel. The Angel was an important staging post. The next important stages were Barnet, Hatfield, Baldock, Biggleswade and Alconbury, where the Great North Road was joined by the Old North Road which followed a different route from London. All these towns had traditional coaching inns.

There were several coaching routes through the area, among them the 'Bedford Times and Umpire' coaches which ran through Hitchin; 'The Eagle', Birmingham to Cambridge coach and 'The Wonder' running from Oxford to Cambridge apart from the North to South coaches.

After the railway

An 1839 Directory shows a full coach and wagon service through Baldock, but the 1846 Directory shows this very much reduced with no coach service to Scotland and, apart from the Leeds mail and the Lincoln mail, no long-haul coaches further north than Boston or Oundle or wagons further north than St Neots. The Biggleswade coach struggled on for a while. The main wagon service in the area, Jackson's Leeds Wagon, had gone, possibly because goods were taking shorter routes to meet the railways and thus have a faster and more secure journey to their destinations.

The effects of the change can be seen in average toll revenues from the Great North Road. The Stevenage to Biggleswade Turnpike Trust recorded an average of £2,064 a year from 1827 to 1830. From 1831 to 1832 this had dropped by only £111 pounds to £1,953. But 1835 to 1839 showed a bigger decrease of £189 to £1,764, but this loss more than doubled in the period from 1842 to 1844 when it was £437 and the revenue was £1,327 per year.

Early railway development

In the 1830s and 1840s railways were spreading across the country. The Stockton & Darlington was the first in 1825. Then came the Liverpool & Manchester in 1830.

These railways were isolated lines built by local companies to link specific places. The London and Birmingham in 1838 followed the Liverpool and Manchester, but it was soon realised that lines could be linked together to form a network and that companies could work with one another. Inevitably, the stronger companies absorbed the weaker. In time, these amalgamated companies became very large and, at one stage, the London and North Western was the largest joint stock company in the world.

Railway companies had a very privileged position because, until 1860, they were the only companies that could raise money from more than five people. This ban was imposed on manufacturers as a result of the South Sea Bubble in the 18th century. This meant that railways were seen as good investments. Government stocks were paying at best 4 per cent when the Liverpool & Manchester was paying just under 10 per cent.

A railway to the north

The biggest prize was a railway to link London with the north and, eventually, Scotland. The first part of this, a London to York scheme, was proposed as early as 1827.

A very early, if impractical, contender was Sir Peter Hesketh-Fleetwood. In 1830 he developed the western shore of the estuary of the River Wyre in Lancashire by building a new town, which he modestly called Fleetwood. Passengers from London could travel by train to Fleetwood and then by boat from Fleetwood to Barrow, to resume their train journey to the north. This diversion was necessary because Shap Fell was then felt to be impassable by trains, although it was later to be on the West Coast main line.

The first route to the north and Scotland, the West Coast route, was built by a number of small companies in the period 1837–50. It originally

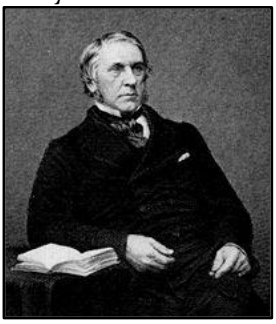
ran from London via Birmingham where the London and Birmingham joined the Grand Junction Railway to take the trains on to Manchester; there the North Union took them to Preston and then the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway took them to a junction with the Caledonian Railway at Carlisle and that Railway carried them on to Scotland.

But in the East of England general economic depression and inertia discouraged railway investment.

In 1836, the Eastern Counties Railway was authorised to construct a line from London to Norwich and Yarmouth via Ipswich, and the Northern & Eastern Railway from London to Cambridge. By 1843, and after spending a lot of money, the Eastern Counties had only reached Colchester. The Northern & Eastern had only managed to get to Bishop's Stortford: but they **were** said to run the fastest trains in Britain in 1843 – 36 mph!

The title of the Northern and Eastern gives an inkling of what was in the minds of its original promoters.

These failures and the economic depression stopped further development. By the beginning of 1845 the Eastern Region's share of the national total of 2,235 route miles opened amounted to about 100 miles. In the 1840s, it was possible to travel from Yorkshire to London by rail, but the journey was a long way round—via Derby and Rugby to Euston using the York & North Midland, the North Midland, the Birmingham and Derby and the London and Birmingham railways.



The London & York Railway then proposed a route from London heading directly north through Peterborough, Grantham and Doncaster with a loop line from Peterborough to Boston, Lincoln and Doncaster and branches to Sheffield and Wakefield. Joseph Locke (1805–1860) (*left*), a well-known surveyor and civil engineer performed the first survey.

Locke built straight railway lines that avoided expensive tunnelling, but to do so, he was forced to adopt gradients that were too steep for engines to work economically. But he was the first railway engineer to realise that engines would eventually be able to cope with steep gradients and by the 1840s improved engines meant that he was able to build lines with gradients as steep as 1 in 50.

In 1843, when depression was giving way to recovery, the Norwich & Brandon Railway invited both the Eastern Counties and the Northern & Eastern Railways to build on to meet it at Brandon in Suffolk.

From 1 January 1844 the Eastern Counties leased the Northern & Eastern and secured control of both routes from the eastern counties into London.

In the 'Railway 'Mania' period there were very many schemes. In the mid-1840s powers were obtained for building over 9,000 route miles and the raising of £500 million pounds by British and Irish railway companies. But in East Anglia the failure of the Eastern Counties Railway to provide a comprehensive regional network had opened the way for many other schemes, and the unoccupied spaces of the eastern counties seemed irresistibly attractive for investment by gullible investors. (*Above: cartoon satirising 'Railway Mania.*)

Shares were eagerly taken up and investment from regional towns was just enough to make the schemes look attractive to outside investors. The local landowners preferred benefits and no risk and so did not take part. Most of the projects failed even to reach Parliament but, by 1850, the region possessed a fairly substantial network of completed lines.

The London and York Railway

A main concern was for a second route to Yorkshire and the north to improve on that available from 1840 via Rugby and Derby. The 1844 trunk route plan was revived, by the London & York Railway (later to become the Great Northern Railway), and was supported by Edmund Dennison, MP for the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Two parliamentary sessions were needed before the Great Northern Railway won its franchise and the opposition put up by the Eastern Counties Railway and its allies was beaten.

The proposal met very stiff opposition from York & North Midland, the North Midland, the Birmingham and Derby and the London and Birmingham which were led by the big fixer and eventual fraudster George Hudson (1800–1871), the so-called Railway King. His mantra was: 'All trains must come to York'.

Hudson *(left)* became chairman of the Eastern Counties Railway as a base to fight the London & York proposal tooth and nail. Every kind of delaying tactic was used. Joseph Locke was put under pressure and resigned. Edmund Denison acted very quickly and employed William Cubitt, another famous civil engineer, in a matter of days, on 23 September 1844.

The London & York Bill along with 245 other Bills went to Parliament in 1845, but Hudson's delaying tactics meant that although the Bill was passed it ran out of time in the House of Lords. Hudson, to defeat the London & York proposal and to protect his Midland Railway interests, entered an Eastern Counties Railway northern extension bill into Parliament in 1846 when the London & York bill, deferred from 1845, was re-presented in the new session. Hudson's Bill was unsuccessful.

The Great Northern railway is formed

On 5 May 1846 another northern railway promoter, the Direct Northern, amalgamated with the London & York and the Bill received the Royal Assent on 26 June 1846 after the biggest parliamentary battle over a railway bill ever known. Once the bill was passed, the amalgamated companies were renamed The Great Northern Railway.

The line was also the longest approved by Parliament: 188 miles between London and York as well as the loop into Lincolnshire, 86 miles. The first meeting of the new railway followed almost immediately.

Left: Edmund Beckett Denison, 1st Baron Grimthorpe (1816–1905).

Edmund Denison became chairman in 1847 and the 'Denison Dynasty' appeared on the management of the Great Northern Railway. It is an example of 19th century cronyism and came about immediately after the incorporation of the company. The Denisons had a split personality because they kept changing their names from Beckett to Denison and back again.

Edmund Denison, MP, born on 29 January 1787, but now called Sir Edmund Beckett-Denison, became the first chairman in 1847 and held that post until 1864. His son, also Edmund Beckett-Denison, something of a polymath, was born in 1816 at Carlton Hall, Nottinghamshire, went to Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, became a barrister and was made a

QC in 1854. His legal skills were useful when he represented the GNR in examinations by House of Commons Committees. Edmund Jr's brothers, Christopher and William, became directors of the GNR. So, we have father as chairman, one son as the legal representative of the company and two other sons as directors.

As mentioned the first Edmund Denison appointed Sir William Cubitt (1785–1861) (*left*) as engineer to build the GNR. Cubitt was 61 and a self-made man, born in Dilham in North Norfolk.

He was consultant engineer to the South Eastern Railway from London to Dover before obtaining the Great Northern appointment. He was chairman of the Building Committee for the Great Exhibition, and consultant engineer for the building of the Crystal Palace, and for this he received his knighthood. William Cubitt died in 1861.

Hudson's downfall

Although beaten in Parliament, Hudson continued to fight to try to cripple the GNR. But in February 1849 he was expelled from the Eastern Counties Railway and a Committee of Inquiry uncovered that for three years he had paid dividends of £200,000 out of capital. Other malpractices quickly came to light on his other lines and he had to resign all his chairmanships and go abroad. The rest of his life was spent fighting claims for misappropriated funds. He died in 1871.

The route

The plan was for a 188-mile main line from London via Hitchin, Peterborough, and Grantham to York; a loop line from Peterborough to Bawtry south of Doncaster via Boston and Lincoln; and branches to Sheffield and Wakefield. This became the core of the railway.

It was decided to build the loop line (Peterborough to Lincoln) first because of proposed changes to Locke's original route of the main line. Construction of the northern end of the loop line was also deferred for similar reasons, running powers from Lincoln to Retford and from north of Doncaster to both York and Leeds being a better idea in slow economic times.

Although opposition from Hudson was expected, his downfall was imminent and the opposition didn't materialise. With Hudson out of the

way, relationships with the York and North Midland Railway and the other lines north of York were strengthened. This upset the Midland Railway (the Midland Counties, Birmingham and Derby and North Midland Railways had amalgamated to form the Midland Railway).

At about this time, the Euston Square Confederacy (see below) was formed which continued Hudson's obstructions and dirty tricks.

Building and opening the line

The first section of the GNR line to be opened was leased: Louth to Grimsby (1848); and by 1849 services were being offered between Peterborough and Doncaster via Lincoln.

London to Peterborough started building in 1848, by Thomas Brassey, including tunnels under the northern heights out of London and the Welwyn Viaduct, designed by William Cubitt; Joseph Cubitt, William's son, was resident engineer.

Navvies were in Langford between 1848 and 1850, but before building could begin, land had to be purchased and this was done by negotiation between valuers appointed by the vendor and purchaser and sometimes juries had to adjudicate on prices. Land at Biggleswade was purchased at £300 an acre, while solicitors for Mr Norman of Langford asked for £225 an acre. Local landowners quickly realised that they could get higher prices as land just south of Langford sold for £171 and £250 an acre in 1856.

By 1850, the main line was opened to Peterborough from a temporary station at Maiden Lane, London, and also Doncaster to York via Askern. The first regular passenger trains to York ran on 8 August 1850: the quickest journey taking 6 hours 45 minutes. Edinburgh could be reached in 13½ hours at an average speed of 31 mph.

The effect of this on the toll revenues of the Great North Road was catastrophic. A Turnpike Trust minute of 1851 says:

> With reference to the reduced amount of toll arising from the gradual diminution of traffic since the opening of the GNR salaries are to be reduced by half and labourers' rates cut to 9 shillings a week.

The rush to embrace rail travel meant that the traffic carried by the new GNR was far better than was expected and five trains ran in each direction during weekdays and two on Sundays.

The station in Maiden Lane, now known as York Way, was in use from 7 August 1850, when the first parliamentary train ran, until 13 October 1852, while the line was being tunnelled under the Regents Canal to gain access

to King's Cross. This temporary station had to cope with all the excursion traffic for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

On the new mainline the initial climb out of London was stiff (for the period) with gradients of 1 in 105/110 for some miles. There were very few gradients exceeding 1 in 200 elsewhere on the line.

King's Cross

The London terminus at King's Cross was completed in late 1852. It was designed by Lewis Cubitt (1799–1883) who was not directly related to Sir William Cubitt, the engineer of the GNR. The station was built on the site of smallpox and fever hospitals and when it was opened on 14 October 1852 was the largest station in Britain.

King's Cross exterior 1852

Inevitably, the shareholders thought it had cost too much but Denison told them that 'it was the cheapest building for what it contains, and will contain, that can be pointed out in London'.

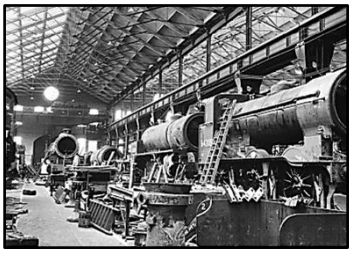
The architecture of King's Cross has always been admired for its simplicity, but it is a difficult station to operate because it is on a cramped site with tunnels almost at the ends of the platforms. It was built as a main line station, with two simple train sheds and an architectural facade fronting the main road but, when suburban services began to increase, problems arose. It has had a major refurbishment recently.

In 1863 connections were established to the Metropolitan Railway and local GNR trains were diverted from King's Cross down the hole leading to the widened lines and then to Farringdon Street. When, in 1866, the Metropolitan connected with the London, Chatham & Dover Railway, via the famous bridge at the foot of Ludgate Hill, heavy coal trains left the GNR at King's Cross bound for South London and passenger trains went from King's Cross to Herne Hill and from GNR suburban stations to Ludgate Hill.

The result of this and the progressive opening of branches meant that a suburban station later known as York Road was added to King's Cross between 1875 and 1895.

The 'Plant'

The railway's main locomotive works was established in 1853 at Doncaster. Doncaster was an old coaching town and the GNR reached it from the south in 1849. The GNR works, known locally as the 'Plant', added 3,000 people to the local population. It grew so much that by the end of the century it covered 200 acres, employed 4,500 men and had 60 miles of sidings.



The erecting shop at Doncaster in BR days (but still working on GNR engines).

It closed for a week every September so that these sidings could be used for the 70 special trains coming to the St Leger race meeting the origin of which dated back to the 17th century.

Doncaster itself was an important junction for a line to Sheffield, opened in 1849 and a direct one to Hull in 1869 and there was heavy coal traffic through the town from the South Yorkshire coalfield.

The Cambridge branch

But how did the Cambridge branch via Baldock come about? East Anglia was coming out of depression in the 1840s. In 1846 the House of Lords approved a plan to link Oxford to Cambridge by a railway having 73 miles of single track via Hitchin and Dunstable but it only approved the 13 miles of the Royston & Hitchin Railway, with an authorised capital of £800,000, which was later reduced, in 1846.

The GNR saw that this little railway could give it access to Cambridge and an Act of 1847 allowed them to lease it when it was completed, but the GNR was not allowed at the same time to extend to its own Cambridge station by a spur to the Eastern Counties Railway. This was again refused in 1848, although they were now allowed to continue to Shepreth to join with the projected Eastern Counties' Cambridge to Bedford line which had been approved in 1847, as one of Hudson's attempts to strangle future Great Northern traffic, but it had not yet been started.

The Hitchin to Royston section, laid to double track as required by the Lords, opened on 21 October 1850 and was extended to Shepreth on 1 August 1851. The works costing no more than £3,500 per mile.

The Royston & Hitchin Railway had reserve powers to build from Shepreth to Shelford if the Eastern Counties unreasonably delayed land

purchase. Eastern Counties delayed as long as it could. Finally, in 1851, the Royston & Hitchin put forward proposals to build the line. This bill was defeated, but, the Eastern Counties, scared of taking further risks, put the construction of the Shepreth to Shelford line in hand, completing it on 1 April 1852. On 1 April 1853, an end-on junction having been laid and the GNR, glad to relieve itself of an unprofitable obligation of nearly £15,000 a year, the Eastern Counties assumed a 14-year lease of the Royston & Hitchin, for the branch revenue and 60 per cent of that deriving from it south of Hitchin. Three daily services, subsequently four, with two on Sundays, were provided between Cambridge and Hitchin.

Later in the lease period, the GNR tried to gain entry into Cambridge. The presence of the Bedford & Cambridge line helped. This was locally promoted in 1860, and between Sandy (where connection with the GNR main line was intended) and Potton took over the route of the private railway owned by Captain Sir William Peel (opened to freight on 23 June 1857 and to passengers in April 1858). The Bedford and Cambridge line began passenger services to Cambridge on 7 July 1862 (freight on 1 August) being operated by the London and North Western Railway before absorption into that railway in 1865. This and the good relations then existing between the GNR and London and North Western allowed the former to exert pressure on the Great Eastern Railway (as the Eastern Counties had now become) during 1864.

One of the schemes advanced envisaged running powers from Shepreth to Cambridge, doubling of the track between Shepreth and the main line, and use of the Great Eastern Railway station, and this was chosen by an 1864 Act conceding to the GNR full running powers to Cambridge station, where all facilities and a separate platform would be provided; double track capable of carrying express services was promised between Shepreth and Shelford by 31 March 1866, the last day of the lease, on the expiration of which the Royston & Hitchin would be returned to the GNR. Financial difficulties prevented this until 1867, which upset the GNR. It also resented the condition of the track to Hitchin despite improvement requirements laid down in December 1865. Things had not improved on 3 July 1866, when sleepers 'in the last stage of rottenness' and too few led to a derailment near Royston in which two locomotive men were killed and nine passengers injured. The GNR, finally absorbed the Royston & Hitchin on 1 July 1897.

Letchworth, Baldock and Royston saw considerable residential and industrial growth as a result of the line.

The Cambridge to Bedford line closed on 1 January 1968. Passenger services now survive only between Bedford St Johns and Bletchley. A scheme to reopen the route is current.

Reputation and acquisitions

By 1853, when the direct main line GNR route via Peterborough–Grantham–Retford was open, the GNR started acquiring other railways, or running powers, the GNR gained access to Bradford, Halifax, Leicester, and Nottingham.

The company gained a good reputation. Speed, comfort and reliability were paramount, even though the line was initially anything but direct. Most importantly, the GNR started taking coal to London; the first railway company to do so. The price of coal in London rapidly fell from 30 shillings per ton to 17 shillings per ton as a result.

Nottingham and the Euston Square Confederacy

When the GNR allied itself and later took over the Ambergate, Nottingham, Boston and Eastern Junction Railway, they could start a London to Nottingham service. But the first train into the Midland Station at Nottingham fell foul of the Euston Square Confederacy, an agreement between the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) and other railways to try to keep as much of the northbound traffic as possible, both in the east and the west, on the LNWR, which, as successor to the London & Birmingham, etc, ran the West Coast route to Scotland.

When the GNR train arrived, the engine was surrounded by Midland engines and was pulled and pushed into a disused shed; and, once in it, the track was ripped up. It was months before lawyers could get the engine released.

Then in 1856, the confederacy tried a fares war and the GNR had to reduce its fares. Bur this resulted in more people using the GNR because they realised that the service was much better than the competition and the GNR's takings doubled.

In the end, Mark Huish of the LNWR tried a private negotiation with the GNR. The GNR publicised the negotiations and that broke the confederacy.

Alliances with other railways

By 1857 a working arrangement was made with the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway (later to become the Great Central Railway), by which the GNR was able to run London–Sheffield–Manchester express

services which proved very successful: despite the longer distance than on the LNWR, they were often faster. But the LNWR played some dirty tricks at Manchester London Road station to attempt to obstruct the service.

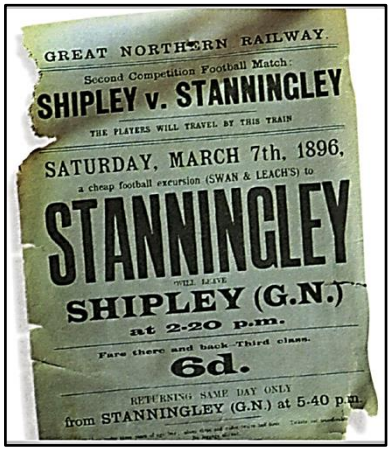
From this time on, the Midland gradually became an ally of the Great Northern and used the GNR's line into London King's Cross from Hitchin for 10 years from 1857, until St Pancras opened in 1868. The Midland line from Bedford to Hitchin closed in 1964.

By the late 1850s the GNR had access to all the important West Yorkshire towns. Jealous of the revenue received from coal traffic from this area to London and the south-east, the Great Eastern Railway (the successor to the Eastern Counties Railway) and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway promoted a Bill for a trunk line through Lincolnshire from Doncaster. This was thrown out by Parliament in 1865 and was equally unsuccessful in 1871.

But after some years the Great Eastern Railway was controlled by establishing, in 1879, the Great Northern & Great Eastern Joint lines, from Huntingdon through March into Lincolnshire and to Doncaster. Part of the deal was that much of the original loop line was taken into joint ownership but so were some Great Eastern lines in Cambridgeshire. So, the complete joint line stretched from St Ives (Cambs) through to Black Carr Junction, Doncaster.

Excursions

Excursion traffic started on 1 April 1851 with trips to the Great Exhibition. Remarkably, on this occasion GNR employees received free travel and five days leave! From 1852 excursion destinations included Edinburgh, with advertised connections for Iona – these were later repeated by Thomas Cook.


GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY.

Second Competition Football Match:

SHIPLEY v. STANNINGLEY

THE PLAYERS WILL TRAVEL BY THIS TRAIN

SATURDAY, MARCH 7th, 1896,

a cheap football excursion (SWAN & LEACH'S) to

STANNINGLEY

WILL LEAVE

SHIPLEY (G.N.)

at 2-20 p.m.

Fare there and back Third class.

6d.

RETURNING SAME DAY ONLY

from STANNINGLEY (G.N.) at 5.40 p.m.

Some excursions were run by private individuals, but the Great Northern was the most active organiser, especially to London.

The 1862 Exhibition could be

reached for 5 shillings from Doncaster using open coaches. But there were many other destinations. Excursions ran to sporting events, fétes and pantomimes, with musical (brass band) excursions also proving popular.

The Doncaster racecourse was a popular destination and excursion traffic to it took off quickly – in 1850 the GNR took 10,000 to the St Leger, and by 1876 it had become a major event. In 1867 the GNR had to borrow 276 carriages and all available siding space had to be cleared. By 1875 there were half a million passengers in race week; in 1872, 104 specials ran to the St Leger. In 1873, new platforms and a booking office were added. Numerous special trains carried horses, and there were special excursions for the well-to-do. So important was race traffic that, after the September 1887 collision at Hexthorpe, which claimed 25 lives, the wreckage was cleared in four hours, so that traffic could recommence! In 1888 there were 1,149 passenger trains to the races, and extra staff had to be employed, but this was the peak—by 1921, the total had fallen to 180 trains, and there was a dramatic decline after 1960.

Expansion

The railway expanded rapidly during the 1860s, and the GNR was at its most profitable in 1873.

When F P Cockshott was superintendent of the line, the GNR established a reputation for well-run main-line services. By the early 1870s it was operating a more intensive service of express trains than either the LNWR or Midland Railway. Hauled by Patrick Stirling's single driving-wheel locomotives, GNR expresses were some of the fastest in the world.

The GNR improved its access to West Yorkshire in 1866 by the joint purchase with the Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway of the West Riding & Grimsby line (Doncaster to Wakefield). It pushed outside its original area by jointly promoting with the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire Railway a Manchester to Liverpool route in 1865. Further extensions into Cheshire and Lancashire were soon agreed.

With steady growth in traffic during the early 1870s, the GNR had to invest heavily in the extension of the block signalling system, and interlocking, and improvements to stations and goods sidings. In 1875–80 the increase in revenue was outpaced by investment, and the railway risked over-extending itself by only just profitable extensions. To the east, the GNR gained access to the Norfolk coast by a joint acquisition with the Midland Railway of the Eastern & Midlands Railway from 1889, the system became known as the Midland & Great Northern Joint Railway.

An arbitration of 1870, concerning freight rates charged for coal traffic from south Yorkshire and the Derbyshire coalfield, led to a rates war with the Midland Railway. One consequence was the GNR's extensions into Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, as far west, initially, as Burton-on-Trent.

Ted Martin

(To be continued)

—

Society Bookshelf

Books published by our history societies: contact the Editor if you wish your society's books to be included

A History of Some Faith Groups in Bedford. A Special Issue of Bedford Local History Magazine, Edited by Bob Ricketts, CBE. Published by Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society. A4, 92pp, price £5 to non-BAALHS members, available from the Eagle Bookshop, 16–20 St Peter's Street, Bedford MK40 2NN.

At the Long Ford: A History of Langford, by Michael Rutt; Ed, Ted Martin. Paperback, 172 pp incl indexes. Price £7 (£10 by post). Langford & District History Society, 2021. from John Shipman (01462 700650). Email: j.m.shipman@ntlworld.com.

Beats, Boots and Thieves – A History of Policing in North Bedfordshire, By Des Hoar and Richard Handscomb. Sharnbrook Local History Group. 2013. Paperback, 146 pp, £10 from 24 Loring Road, Sharnbrook, Bedford MK44 1JZ.

Bedford History Timeline, by Alan Crawley and Bob Ricketts. Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society. 2019, Paperback, 94pp, 119 illustrations. Price £8, from the Eagle Bookshop, 16–20 St Peter's Street, Bedford MK40 2NN or £10 incl postage from Bob Ricketts, 68 Mendip Crescent, Bedford, MK41 9EP.

Bedford Town Centre Statues, by Stuart Antrobus, £5, on sale only at the John Bunyan Museum shop, Mill Street, Bedford, MK40 3EU**.** Tel 01234 270303. Tuesday to Saturday 11am to 4pm.

*Clophill in the Great War: Those who Died and those who Survived***,** by Colin Watt. Hardback, A5 landscape, 169 pp, £12.50 + £2.50 p& p. For purchase details see: website bit.ly/307uLMM or phone 01525 860922.

Colmworth and Neighbours History: Volume 5, March 2023. Published by Colmworth and Neighbours History Society: www.colmworthhistory.org.uk. 44pp including cover, price £6, plus £1.60 p & p from secretary@colmworthhistory.org.uk or Dave Jarrett, 3 Collingwood Road, Eaton Socon, PE19 8JQ.

Colmworth and Neighbouring Villages: Then and Now, by Colmworth and Neighbours History Society. 2018. Paperback, 46pp, 100+ illustrations, £5 + £2 postage from Dave Jarrett, 3 Collingwood Road, Eaton Socon, PE19 8JQ.

Henry John Sylvester Stannard with notes on his daughter Theresa Sylvester Stannard, by Richard Morgan. Bedfordshire Local History Association, 2018. 48

pp incl index. Available via the BLHA website http://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk, £5 + p&p.

Langford Then and Now 2006. Langford & District History Society, 2006. Paperback, 40 pp, 80+ photos, £4 from John Shipman (01462 700650). Email: j.m.shipman@ntlworld.com.

Langford through the Lens Volume 1. Langford & District History Society, reprinted with amendments 2021 to include *Langford: A Village Walk*. Paperback, 138 pp, 70 photos, £7, from John Shipman (01462 700650). Email: j.m.shipman@ntlworld.com

Langford through the Lens, Volume 2. Langford & District History Society. 1992. Paperback, 80 pp, 80+ photos, £3, from John Shipman (01462 700650). Email: j.m.shipman@ntlworld.com

.*Life in Bedford during the Second World War*, by Stuart Antrobus. Published by Bedford Architectural, Archaeological and Local History Society, 2021. A4 paperback, 102 pp, incl Appendices 18 pp, Indexes, 13 pp, 85 illustrations. Price £11, from the Eagle Bookshop, 16–20 St Peter's Street, Bedford MK40 2NN or £13, incl postage, from BAALHS (cheque payable to BAALHS), Bob Ricketts, 68 Mendip Crescent, Bedford, MK41 9EP.

Willington in the First World War by Robert Bollington. Gostwick Press. 2018. 96 pp, £6 from Willington Local History Group (cheque to be payable to them) c/o Rob Bollington, 2 Beauchamp Place, Willington MK44 3QA.

—

Publication Received

Bedford Local History Magazine, published by Bedford Architectural, Archaeological & Local History Society. Autumn 2023. Editorial; 'News: National awatd for Stuart Antrobus; 'Bedford Rocks: Popular Music, Culture and Rock and Roll 1968–1972, Bob Ricketts; 'A tale of three tramways', Bob Ricketts; 'Saving our heritage: a history of the Bedford Society, Bob Ricketts; 'Why not take a visit to Cardington?', Gordon Vowles; Review: *Henry Clutton: Victorian Architect of Gothic Revival Churches and Country Houses, Bob Ricketts*.

Free to BAALHS members. Price to non-members £4 from the Eagle Bookshop, 16–20 St Peter's Street, Bedford, MK40 2NN, or £6 by post from The Editor, Bob Ricketts, 68 Mendip Crescent, Bedford, MK41 SEP; bob.ricketts57@gmail.com, back numbers available on request from Bob Ricketts.