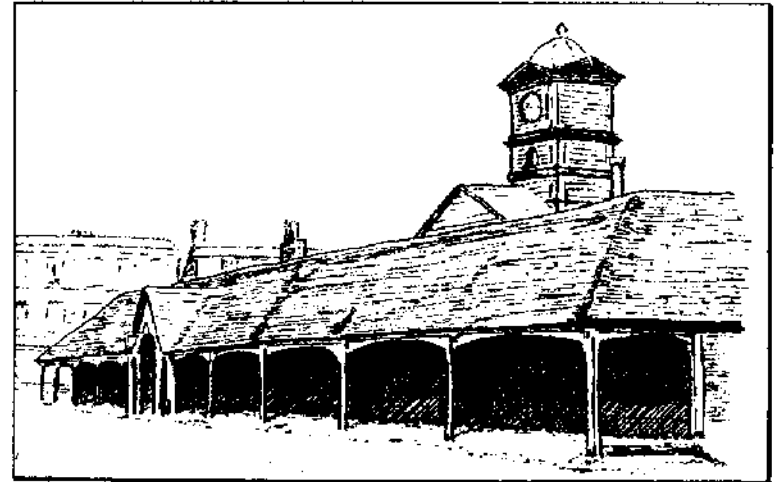


Dotton History Society



The Shambles in the Market Square

Newsletter Number 17 Autumn 1994

Society News

At our **April** meeting, Albert and Pamela Ormerod gave a fascinating talk on the journeys of a Baptist minister. Whilst tracing their family history they uncovered his diary which gave a vivid picture of life in 1856 as he journeyed from his home in Lancashire to London and thence on to Somerset. A transcript of the lecture and notes has kindly been donated to the Society and is available to members.

In **May**, on a damp and blustery evening, we walked the Parish Boundary between Wrestlingworth road and Hatley road. From this vantage point we were able to look out across most of the parish of Potton and beyond to Gamlingay and Biggleswade. On returning to the hall, we studied maps of the parish and discussed the changes that have occurred over the years.

The **June** the meeting took place at St. Mary's church, to coincide with the 900th Anniversary Celebrations, and began with a short performance by the church choir. We took advantage of the long summer evening to check on information from the graveyard survey made by the Society 10 years previously. Later there was an opportunity to view the photographic exhibition displayed in the church by Potton History Society as our contribution to the celebrations.

In **July**, Jack Dady revealed the fruits of his extensive research into the history of the parish of Hilton. Our interest in this village, with its unusual turf maze, was first aroused in the summer of 1993 when it was one of the stopping places on our coach trip. Mr Dady has uncovered records of the pre-Norman era, when the parish was combined with neighbouring Fenstanton. His ever present sense of humour, together with his vast store of knowledge on the subject made this a most entertaining evening.

Our 200th members meeting took place in **August** and included such varied topics as a look at some of our earliest speakers, reports on recent Society activities, delving into the

1978 scrapbook and a short history of the Shuttleworth Estate. Finally plans were announced to carry out a major project on *Life in 1945* to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the end of the war.

The meeting in **September** laid the foundation for the coach trip to the Fens which took place on the following Sunday. Mr Ron Cooke told the story of St Guthlac, who founded Crowland Abbey in the 7th century. The details of this story were taken from a latin text and a series of drawings which were made by the monks 150 years after the death of Guthlac. The original documents are still preserved in the British Museum and although they are too delicate and important to be handled, a facsimile is available for viewing.

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Other events

The Society has had an exceptionally busy year in 1994 with involvement in a number of local events, as well as arranging the monthly meetings and regular annual exhibitions. The 900th Anniversary celebrations of St Mary's Church meant not only the preparation and setting up of yet another photographic display but also finding amongst our reluctant members sufficient actors to take part in the pageant where they re-enacted the Great Fire of Potton. All too soon after came the Bedfordshire Festival, a three day event which took up yet more of our spare time and once again required the help of members who would be willing to dress up, this time in '20s style. None of our society's participation would have been possible without the help of members who came along and set up the photo displays, manned stands and donned costume.

All this activity, whilst being very important in promoting the Society to the outside world, has resulted in our own affairs being pushed into the background. It is hoped that we will soon be able to redress the balance and channel our efforts into the archives.

Research Rooms

The long-awaited move to the new premises in Biggleswade Road finally took place at the beginning of May. Much preparation work, in the form of packing and carpet-laying, had already taken place so that on the appointed day only the heavy humping remained to be done by the eager band of helpers. Most grateful thanks to all those who helped to achieve this awesome task.

The chore of unpacking and rearranging everything still has a long way to go and it is hoped to organise some working parties during the winter months to restore order to the collection. Dates will be announced at the October meeting.

A major advantage of the new rooms is the greater space they make available which means that one area can be used for committee meetings. A large table has been donated for this purpose (thank you very much Mr Brookman) and also doubles as a most useful work desk upon which to spread out maps and papers etc.

Access to the rooms can be arranged by contacting Mr Jack Hutchinson on Potton 260322 or any of the key holders.

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Forthcoming Programme

Nov 24th 1994 The Ivel Valley Project Joel Carré

Our Annual General Meeting, followed by an introduction to the scheme to create a countryside park in east Bedfordshire. Note 7.30pm start.

Dec 8th 1994 Historical Quiz Evening

Learn more about Potton in a light-hearted family evening.

Jan 26th 1994 E. Anglian Railway Architecture

A look at the buildings which appeared when railways spread across the region in the mid 18th century by George Pring.

The complete 1995 programme will be published shortly.

Exploring A Village

The 1994 Mid-Beds Local History Conference was hosted by the Maypole Heritage group at Ickwell on Saturday 18th June. It was one of the best attended conferences with over 50 people involved.

Dr Mark Bailey from the Cambridge Board of Continuing Education began the day with a talk on how villages have changed over the centuries. He made clear that many of our villages were developed to firm plans by landowners or Lords Of the Manor.

Our hosts then set us the task of studying Ickwell and Northill by splitting us up into a number of small groups each linked to a theme such as Buildings and Trades. We spent the rest of the morning looking in detail at Ickwell Green and then walking to Northill Church. After a presentation in the church outlining its history we made our way to the Village Hall for an excellent lunch and a look at a photographic display.

After lunch we returned to the church for small group discussions on the theme of 'Where is the Village going and what might it be like in 50 Years time?' The final session in the Village Hall consisted of a Forum chaired by Martin Lawrence from Harlington with Chris Pickford, County Archivist, and Betty Chambers, Beds Magazine as well as representatives from the Parish Council and the Beds Rural Strategy group. Discussion was wide ranging. There are no easy answers in trying to predict the future from a study of the past!

The Maypole Heritage deserve much praise for a very well organised day and for having the courage to tackle the issue of finding out if Local Historians can contribute to the debate on the problems facing Village communities in the 1990's. The series of conferences will continue next year when the Toddington Society will be the hosts.

Peter Ibbett.

The History of Potton Trust Fund - A Royal Connection.

After a successful programme of events to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977, the committee, under the Chairmanship of Douglas Coombes, reported to a public meeting, held on July 11th, that a profit of £725.23 had been made. The meeting was asked to suggest ways in which the money could be used to benefit the Town. Failing to receive any practical propositions, the Committee's proposal was put forward and accepted - that the money be used to finance the publication of a book or books on the History of Potton. I had previously been asked by Douglas Coombes if I would be prepared to work on such a project. Although I had agreed in principal, I had assumed that other, probably more acceptable suggestions, would be received. My assumption was not correct!

A Trust Body, elected to administer the fund, was set up as follows: Manager of Lloyds Bank, Headteacher of Burgoyne school, Chairman of Potton Town Council and two other people.

My life was to change drastically! Hoping that others would care to be involved in the "History of Potton", I called a public meeting on October 13th 1977 to consider the possibility of starting a Potton History Society. Enough interest was aroused. Volunteers were asked to serve on a planning committee and Miss M Gardner (Headteacher Burgoyne School), Mrs P R Yates, Messrs P Ibbett, E Mayston, N Parry, R Whitfield, and R Yates met on October 25th. Potton History Society was formed. (It is interesting to note that all committee members to date have been volunteers). Monthly meetings were arranged and members were encouraged to collect information and to create an interest in the history of the town. The Trust Fund, also registered as a charity, functioned separately.

Once research had begun, I realised that a comprehensive history of the town would be too expensive to produce. As a side line, old photographs were being borrowed, copied by Vera and Norman Parry and returned to their owners. These copies were

mounted and captioned, the first public exhibition being well supported. So with the Trustees approval, a picture book containing 150 photographs was published in 1981. It became an instant success, 500 copies being sold in the first week. This work was followed by:

1983	The Great Fire of Potton	P J Ibbett
1985	Pictures of Potton Vol II	Yates/Parry
1987	Potton Market Square	P J Ibbett
1989	Pictures of Potton Vol III	Yates/Parry

Proceeds from sales have always been returned to the Trust Fund. Work continued on the production of photographs, either as copies of old prints or the recording, by Trevor Ball, of current events and development. The collection of mounted, captioned photographs has now reached the 5000 mark. Displays are in demand for various public events.

As the Charities Act of 1992 states that it is possible to transfer the assets of a small charity to another with a similar purpose, a proposal from Potton History Society to take over the Trust Fund was presented to the Trustees at their AGM on February 22nd 1994. After discussion the proposal was agreed unanimously. To comply with regulations a report was given to the Annual Parish Meeting held on April 19th, a copy of the proposals being displayed on the Town Council Notice Board. After notifying the Charity Commission, £543.25 was transferred to the History Society on July 5th 1994.

Although information on the publication of books, the collection of photographs and research material has been given at monthly meetings, I thought it advisable at this time of change to report fully on the development of a proposal made in 1977... a worthy inheritance for future Pottonians.

As Honorary Secretary of the Trust Fund from 1977 - 1994, I would like to take this opportunity to extend my appreciation for the support and interest given to me by my fellow Trustees during the past seventeen years.

Patricia R Yates

Early Working Days Remembered

1937 - 1957

The following article has been extracted from the memoirs of John Whitmore. A complete copy of his memoirs is held in the History Society's archives and can be seen on request.

I came to Potton with my parents in September 1937 and took up employment with T.B. Kitchener Steam Plough Works, Potton.

We moved as a family to Fullers Hill, Gransden on the Friday, and I was picked up on the Monday morning at 7am. to commence my working life as a cook boy to a steam plough gang. I was picked up in a car which was used to transport working steam plough gangs. The rest of the gang were already in the car travelling from Potton, quite an ordeal for a mere fourteen year old meeting the rest of the gang for the first time.

The car was driven by Arthur Goldsmith and also in the car were Gang Foreman Jim Lenton, Driver Alfie Clarke and Ploughman Jack Endersby. I struck up a friendship with Arthur Goldsmith and we became what you would call mates. Sadly, Arthur passed away last year, 1993, which I suppose prompted me to write these few memoirs. It is nice to see the firm of T.B. Kitchener still operating from the foundry in Willow Road formerly known as Back Lane.

The Foundry in those days was full of engineering equipment i.e. lathes, drills, grinding wheels, two Forges, wheelwrights equipment and so on.

An electric buzzer was sounded at 7am., 1pm., 2pm. and 5pm. This time check could be heard all over Potton. Bert Albone from Gamlingay usually sounded the buzzer and if for

some reason he could not be there he would get one of us lads to sound the buzzer which we thought was very important. The method was to stand in the Foundry Yard until you heard the town clock strike and then run into the Foundry and press the button - some button, about 2" in diameter!

To return to the steam ploughing scene this was, of course, seasonal work say from when the hay was harvested June to October or when the weather became too wet for the large ploughing engines to work on the farms.



Although I said that I was picked up by car on my first Monday morning the usual way of transport was by cycle. I suppose on that first Monday a supply of oil and plough shares etc. were needed so hence the car which was one of the old square Austins with gate gears and a soft fold down top. We had two working cars actually both Austins one a soft top and the other a hard top, but cycling was the main method of transport.

The steam ploughing equipment comprised of two Engines, one plough, one Cultivator, one Drainer, Water Cart and one Living Van which was our home from Monday morning to Saturday midday. The Living Van was always parked as near to the field which was being worked as possible.

The cook boys job was to keep the Van clean, do the shopping and fetch the drinking water which was sometimes difficult because the village pump or other water supply was sometimes a long way and it could be up some very rough bridledways.

I used to have a pair of yokes (not seen these days only in museums). I could ride my cycle and balance two buckets of water if the going was not too rough.

The Engine Drivers would be out at the crack of dawn to get steam up for the days work. They would return for breakfast about 8 o'clock and then dinner at 1 o'clock, but between breakfast and dinner the cook boy would have to take a large teapot full of tea out in the field where the men were working and also in the afternoon at about 4pm. They would then work on until it was dark. One of the Engine Drivers preferred a pint of beer in the mornings instead of tea and so I always went to the nearest pub and bought him a pint of beer which was then 4 pence a pint. I remember one day I went on strike for some reason and never went for the pint of beer. When I gave this driver a cup of tea instead of his usual pint he threw the tea over me. The other men told me to empty the teapot over him. I am pleased to say that I refrained from doing that for that said driver, Alfie Clarke, much my senior was usually kind and helpful to me as a young lad of 14 to 15 years of age.

Another duty of the cook boy was to cycle home to Potton on a Wednesday afternoon and go round to the rest of the men's houses to collect food for the rest of the week.

I recall cycling home from Waresley, 4 miles, and returning with the weeks rations to Sand Lane, Waresley where we were working for Charlie Banks. He was Grandfather to the Banks of Sandy Seed Merchants. On returning to the Van that

evening I found that the rest of the gang had retired to bed (no television in those days). I decided to wash up the supper thing which annoyed the Gang Foreman Brink Lenton (Jim) who promptly told me that if I did not stop the washing up he would get out of bed and throw the bowl and all the crocks out of the Van, and I knew he meant what he said. I left the washing up until the next morning.

Another duty for the cook boy was to pack the Van up and make everything safe inside when we travelled from one farm to another sometimes quite a long journey. All the cycles had to be packed inside the Van and made secure. There was a Kitchen Range in the centre of the Van with always plenty of coal available from the engines. I recall that one day when we arrived at Tadlow Road, Wrestlingworth when I went to unpack the Van after it had been sited on the side of the main road Bedford to Cambridge, I found that one of the cycles had slipped and the front wheel had gone too close to the said Kitchen Range. The front tyre was burnt beyond repair. That was a major crisis, a new tyre had to be purchased, the cycle belonged to Alfie Clarke, and as I said before he was kind to me and I got off lightly.

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A photo in our exhibition at the Bedfordshire Festival brought back some memories to Frederick (Waddler) Saunders, another former employee of T B Kitchener & Co:-

Kitchener's men used to take the mattresses from the "living van" to Kitchener's Harness Shop in the Shambles, to be put on the flock picker.

Laundry was done by Aunt Annie Stonebridge in houses at the rear of the Chapel. Van boys would take the laundry from the Foundry through Chapel Yard and use a box mangle at Mrs Stonebridge's, who was the wife of Lewis (Slotty) Stonebridge.

A Victorian Ornithologist

The purchase of two books, each bought for a different reason, has prompted me to start a research project. This will have a natural history link with an emphasis on ornithology.

Amongst the Archives of Potton History Society is a book entitled 'The Journal of Emily Shore', published by her sisters in 1891, nearly 50 years after her death. Margaret Emily Shore was born in 1819 and died tragically of consumption in 1839. She lived in Potton and Everton between 1831 and 1836 and started to write her journal at the age of twelve. The first thing to catch my eye (when I looked at the book in the early part of 1993) was a portrait of her, aged nineteen, with a hoopoe lark on her lap. Quickly glancing through the book it was obvious that she had a passion for observing and recording natural history. What had she seen in Potton and Everton? I was intrigued.

As a member of the Bedfordshire Bird Club I purchased one of the 150 reprints of a book entitled 'The Vertebrate Fauna of Bedfordshire' by Jannion Steel-Elliott. This book first appeared six years after Emily's edited journals. My curiosity was getting the better of me.

On 23rd. September, 1993 I attended a Potton History Society meeting to hear a lecture given by Anne Harvey on Margaret Emily Shore. As a result of this lecture I was able to send away for a paperback version of Emily's journal, reprinted by the University of Virginia. I could hardly wait for the book to arrive as I was anxious to research her ornithological records and to find out more of her obvious passion for natural history.

Anne had mentioned in her lecture that she thought Emily had been quoted in a book called the 'Shell Book of Birds'. Where else would a member of the RSPB staff go? Straight to our library! The book had been published in 1966 and showed the portrait of Emily and the hoopoe lark. The Editor, James Fisher, wrote the following inspired words about Emily
"her youthful poems had some merit, but were few - the best

of them a paean to the willow warbler. By the age of eighteen (1837) she had learned over seventy of the birds of England's southern counties on her own, with the aid of the books of the day; at the age of fifteen she was well aware of the geographical variation of the songs of chaffinches. Her thoughtful diaries, with notes on bird song and behaviour together with fine original material on red-backed shrike, nightingale, skylark, redstart, goldcrest and other birds, show that if she had ever reached maturity and enlarged her obvious capacity for scholarship, as well as observation, she might have anticipated the behaviour stream in ornithology by more than half a century and perhaps reached the calibre of Mrs. Margaret Morse Nice, today's doyenne of bird behaviour studies."

On the 9th. December, 1837 Emily had 'The Account of a Cuckoo' published in the Penny Magazine and on the 16th December her essay 'The Golden Crested Wren' was printed in the same magazine. My sincere thanks to Anne for obtaining copies of these essays. By now I am well and truly hooked! I delve into the journal, searching as I read and reliving Emily's life. From her ornithological records I would like to quote just a few:-

Thursday 19th. July, 1832

We went to the Sand-rock. The sand-rock is very pretty on one side of the road, fronting it; it declines on each side into green hills, covered with fern and larches, which reach to the hedge. This rock is much inhabited by sand-martins and is completely pierced by the holes which contain their nests. The sand-martin is a very pretty bird, about the size of a swallow; the upper part of the body is a soft brown, underneath it is white; the shape is extremely elegant.

Wednesday 15th. August, 1832

The butcher-bird is in the habit of killing insects and small birds and sticking them (sometimes alive) upon thorns; now we found a poor humble bee stuck, living, on

a thorn in a hedge, and, as it is impossible this could be by accident (for the thorn came right through its body) we have every reason to conclude that the butcher-bird put it there.

The above entries were written while Emily lived in Brook House, Potton. She was thirteen years old.

On Monday, 24th. December, 1832 Emily and her family moved to Woodbury.

Thursday 18th. April, 1833

What we now take most notice of is the number of birds which frequent the garden. There are blackbirds and magpies, but very few sparrows; the robins are plentiful and very tame, and we today took great notice of a beautiful chaffinch very near to us, which chirped continually. We are making friends with a water wagtail.

Friday 3rd. May, 1833

Richard contemplates buying a linnets and cage, much to my dissatisfaction; for it is miserable ever to think of a bird, to which in a state of nature we must assign the range of at least a mile square, confined to less than the space of two feet; but to have it constantly before one's eyes is sadder still.

Thursday 16th. May, 1833

I did wake at the proper time, and at five o'clock took an exquisite walk through the wood (Whitewood). The nightingales were singing in great numbers.

Saturday 8th. June, 1833

We have been watching the birds a great deal today. I chiefly observed the redstart, which is very tame, and hops from tree to tree close to us.

Finally from this intriguing journal I quote the entry for Wednesday 13th. February, 1834;

Yesterday I saw a wryneck. This is a bird of passage, which commonly appears about the end of March, a few days before the cuckoo.

I could continue quoting from Emily's journal. She writes of a handsome kite, of the plants and flowers she finds on her walks in the fields between Woodbury and Everton; a green grosbeak; a waxen chatter; she makes a series of paintings of a singing bird for each month and finally the golden-crested wren.

Never did I hear it before. White of Selborne did not know that it sung - he said it had only somewhat of a note; Bewick says it is said to have a melodious song; Mudie that it sings early in the year, so that he at least knew it.

In 1836, at the age of seventeen, Emily is quite poorly, all through the spring and, in October of that year, is sent away to convalesce - she leaves her beloved Woodbury. Her journal continues with natural history entries. She refers back to Woodbury throughout the next three years.

Mystery still surrounds the whereabouts of the original documents and drawing from her diaries. I will finish my first article on the natural history records of Margaret Emily Shore by quoting her journal entry for Thursday 16th. April, 1835

The study of natural history seems to me to be one which belongs to the nature of man, and is born with him. I shall never believe that an individual exists who could not have been taught to love it, if led to it early. This, I believe, is the only pursuit of which this can be said, for I am not quite certain that it is true of a literary taste. The study of natural history is perfectly inexhaustible. I believe that if I were chained for life to Woodbury, and never allowed to ramble from it more than three or four miles (the utmost limit of my walks), and excluded as I am, by its situation, from all the birds that haunt mountains, rocks and the seaside (that is, haunting them peculiarly), and from most kinds that haunt all sorts of waters - I believe that even in this situation I should for ever be discovering something new.

I hope to discover more about Emily and her natural history records as I continue my research.

Boo Matthews

Life In 1945

1995 is the 50th anniversary of the ending of the last world war. The society plans to run a project over the next year to uncover as much about life half a century ago as possible. The aims of the project are:-

- * To record as much as possible about daily life in 1945 as the war era ended.
- * To create a 1945 scrapbook and Historical File of information discovered.
- * To compare life in Potton with regional and National events.
- * To present the results at a Society meeting (probably November 1995).
- * To place the final results of the project in the Potton Archives.

YOU CAN HELP BY:-

Recording memories; Investigating our Archives; Finding documents and photographs; Researching newspapers; Drawing Maps or illustrations; Investigating local organisations, trades, transport, fashions, leisure, sports, etc.

We would like to involve as many people as possible in collecting archive material. Our meetings over the next year will have a '1945' display where you can become involved with the project.

Peter Ibbett

Notice Board

Volunteer needed

We urgently require someone to write the regular monthly report of the members meeting for submission to the Biggleswade Chronicle. Only a short report is needed as invariably the Chronicle editor feels the need to chop lumps out if a lengthier piece is submitted. Please help us to ensure that this important publicity continues.

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Family History

An enquiry has been received regarding the MEAD family, thought to have been in this area in the 1850's. If anyone has come across this name during the course of their own research, please contact the secretary.

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Newsletter No 18

The deadline for articles to be included will be 1st March 1995. Please pass items to Mary Leigh.