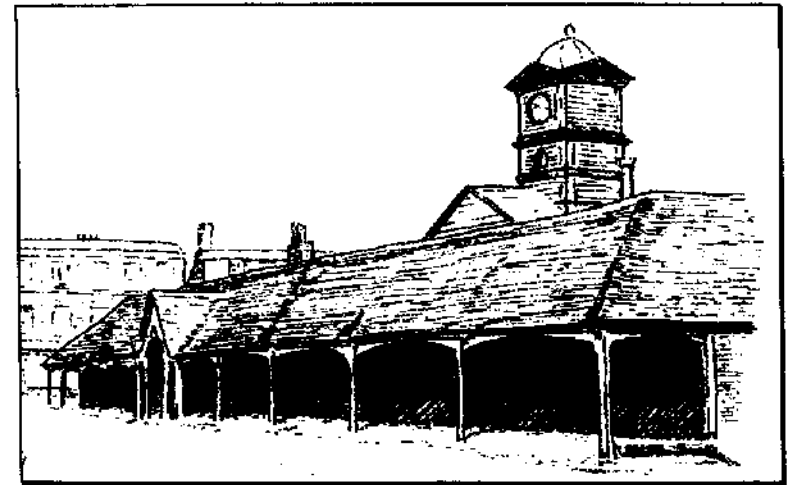


# Dotton History Society



The Shambles in the Market Square

Newsletter Number 13    Spring 1995

## Potton History Society Committee:-

Chairman	.....	George Howe
Secretary	.....	Mary Leigh
Treasurer	.....	Anita Lewis
Programme/Publicity Secretary	.....	Peter Ibbett
Committee Members	.....	Boo Matthews
	.....	Jack Hutchinson
	.....	John Kirkby
	.....	Rex Whitfield
	.....	Tony Crossley
Newsletter Editors	.....	Mr & Mrs Leigh

For access to the archives in our research rooms just telephone the key-holders;

Mr J Hutchinson ..... Potton 260322  
Mr G. Howe ..... Potton 260935  
Mrs M Leigh ..... Potton 260426

## Acknowledgements:-

Mr M Ibbett for his drawing of the forge on page 9.

Our continued appreciation to Mr Witten for displaying and selling our publications in Tysoe's Hardware Store.

We also thank the following for their continued support by advertising our meetings;

Lindsay's Bakery, Tysoe's Hardware Store, Burgoyne Middle School, and Sandy Upper School.

## Society News

At our **October** meeting the hall was packed to greet Tony Crossley for his talk on the history of our neighbouring village of Cockayne Hatley. His research had uncovered a wealth of information on this tiny hamlet and its owners through the centuries. Reference was made to Hatley in documents as early as the 10th century and the name was added to during the long period of ownership by the Cockayne family.

The society's AGM preceded the **November** meeting, and Mr Crossley was elected to join the existing committee, making a total of nine members. This is the first time since the inception of the society that the committee has exceeded the basic number of members required in the constitution. There is a great deal of work to be done in the archives, sorting, recording, indexing and so on and it is hoped that an additional member will give all of us more time to concentrate on these aspects of the Society's aims.

Once the official business was completed, Joel Carré, The Ivel Valley Project Officer explained the aims and objectives of his project and the means by which he hopes to achieve them. We saw slides of some of the work which has already been completed and also of schemes which are ongoing to improve the area alongside the River Ivel. Although Potton lies just outside the official boundary of the project area, it may be possible in the future to link up, perhaps with a circular walk.

In **December** Peter Ibbett organised the festive entertainment in the form of a quiz, based on photographs and cuttings from the archives. There were no winners or losers in this light-hearted evening but everybody gained a little more knowledge about the history of Potton.

The New Year got off to a good start at the **January** meeting when George Pring gave an illustrated talk on the three periods of development of railway architecture through the

19th century. Sadly, many of the buildings which he showed us have now been demolished but Mr Pring and his colleagues are attempting to record the details of as many as possible in the Great Eastern Region.

Another capacity audience welcomed the return of Tony Crossley in **February**. This time his subject was a more recent owner of the Cockayne Hatley estate. Mr Whitehead arrived in the early 1930's and set up the vast apple orchards which remained a feature of the local landscape for four decades. Although he was a charlatan and finally met his downfall and was forced to sell up in the mid 40's, Alexander Whitehead's flamboyant nature seemed to have captured the hearts of many local people. Their memories have helped Mr Crossley to build a vivid picture of this era.

In **March** Albert and Pamela Ormerod returned to Potton with their latest research. This time the subject was life in 1899, based on information found in the yearbook published by Lever Bros, makers of Sunlight Soap. The miscellany of facts and figures included in the book included such varied topics as the size of Britain's Navy, fashions of the day and the latest leisure activities, all of which the speakers had woven into a fascinating picture of the period.

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## Forthcoming Programme

May 25th Potton Cemetery Survey	7.30 START
Jun 22nd The Greensand Ridge	Andy Turner
Jun 25th Coach Trip	
Jul 27th Whittlesea and its Museum	Ken Mayor
Aug 24th Scrapbook Evening	
Sep 28th Emily Shore and her family	Anne Harvey
Oct 26th George Symonds of Potton	Peter Ibbett
Nov 23rd Potton in 1945	7.30 START

During the winter months members have been asked to help in the Research Rooms on a number of occasions. The excellent response has meant that a great deal has been achieved and some semblance of order is beginning to emerge from the chaos. Having rearranged the furniture, the next move was to make the place seem more homely by covering as much bare wall as possible with every poster and picture which came to hand. After finding a home for the boxes and stacks of paper which seemed to cover every available surface and corner, it was time to get down to the real nitty gritty of sorting, labelling and indexing the contents of all the shelves and draws. Although some listing had been done previously, items had been added to or removed from files so even these needed to be checked and brought up to date.

Much indexing and filing still remains to be done. Volunteers are needed to continue with these vital tasks. If you would like to help, please contact any committee member to arrange convenient times or come along to one of our pre-arranged sessions, announced at the monthly meetings.

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In the heat wave of July 1994, a carnival procession took place in the streets of Potton, wending its way towards the St Mary's Church 900th Anniversary birthday party and fete. PHS member Chris Miles was on the spot with his video camera, to make a unique record of this local event.

We would like to thank Chris not only for presenting the Society with a copy of his first class video but also for the considerable time and effort which must have gone into the finished product. Hopefully other members will be inspired to follow suit and make this the start of a new collection for the Society.

## THE B1040 TO CROWLAND

Roads have always played an important part in history. With a little research, a journey from one place to another becomes a trip into history that will draw you back along the route in order to discover more about our past.

On Sunday 25th September 1994 a party of 47 set off on the second Historical Day Trip organised by George Howe and Peter Ibbett. The aim was to follow the route of the B1040 to its source in the distant Fenland town of Crowland. The Fairways Coach retraced the route of our previous trip, passing through Gamlingay and Eltisley before pausing briefly at Hilton to remember details of the talk by Jack Dady earlier in the year. The tour dipped down into the Ouse valley at St Ives before climbing up onto the Huntingdonshire Heights at Woodhurst and Oldhust, whose communities had originated in clearings in the wooded landscape. At Worboys the fine Church and Manor House reminded the party of the sad tale of the infamous Witches, reflected in the unique weathervane on the central clock tower.

Passing Pelican Farm the vast Fen landscape came into view, making a stark contrast with the varied countryside of our native parish. The monks of a thousand years ago would have rowed across the waters to Ramsey Abbey from Bury Church. Today, only a small stream remains to remind the modern travellers of the solitude that drew the seekers of the religious life to the then remote Fens.

The waters pass out of sight under the main street of Ramsey and a large warehouse has been converted to flats where water, road and rail transport used to converge in a hive of commercial activity. Setting out into the Fens a modern windmill reminded the travellers of how its wooden ancestors had played their part in creating an ordered and well drained fertile landscape.

The road from Ramsey St Marys to Whittlesea is uneven but straight and passes through Parishes created barely 150 years ago as the last of the meres were drained. The brickyard chimneys stood out on the edges of the Fen island of Whittlesea, which still has an example of a mud wall with a thatched top! Here the party made its first stop and visited the little museum with its friendly staff and welcome tea and biscuits in the council chamber. 'If Whittlesea can do it why can't Potton?' was an oft heard comment!

The Coach passed on over the ancient Roman Fen Causeway and the modern course of the Nene to reach Thorney by 1pm. A guided tour of the remains of Thorney's Abbey and its Estate Buildings, provided by the Dukes of Bedford, was followed by a chance to view the Heritage Centre with its splendid displays and wonderful models. An excellent Ploughmans lunch was efficiently served to the travellers from far off Potton.

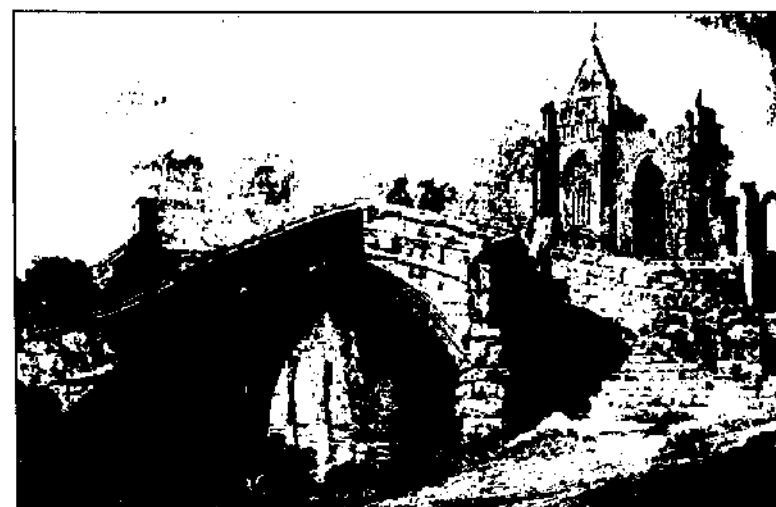
As mid afternoon approached the coach crossed the border into Lincolnshire with the towers of Crowland Abbey standing out over the landscape. Ron Cooke welcomed the travellers to Crowland, reminding them that visitors to the Abbey had always received full hospitality. Pottonians were no exception to this rule!

A tour of the town revealed the source of the B1040 to be at the famous triangular bridge, now landlocked but once essential to cross the waters that flowed through the centre of Crowland. A full tour of the Abbey was followed by a first class tea to round off the day.

As the party returned to Potton via Eye, Peterborough and the A1 there was much to reflect upon about the history of the towns along the B1040 and the hospitality of three historical groups of similar size to our own.

George and I would like to record our thanks to all those who supported us and made the trip such a success. We might even organise another one.....!

Peter Ibbett



Trinity Bridge, Crowland

During the tour of Crowland Abbey, our guide mentioned the fact that Saint Waltheof was buried in the Abbey grounds. My ears immediately pricked up and I was soon able to establish that this was Earl Waltheof who owned Potton as part of his vast estates in the time of William the Conqueror. Waltheof plotted against William on more than one occasion and eventually he was imprisoned and then beheaded. Two weeks later Abbot Ulfketal had the body reburied at Crowland as Waltheof had been the Abbey's patron. His lands at Potton subsequently passed into the hands of his wife Countess Judith, neice of William the Conqueror.

Mary Leigh

## From King's Cross to Potton

For years I have been talking of writing down what I remember of our family history but have done nothing about it. Last Christmas the family gave me a typewriter with orders to get writing. This has led me to do a little research in the public records and such like places and I came to Potton to see what the family graves might reveal and to have a sentimental journey to the town where I spent most of my boyhood holidays.

Reading your history of Potton I was intrigued by the story of the importation of soot and manure into the town from London for it was the manure trade that indirectly led to my family moving to Bedfordshire in the first place. My Grandfather, by name Joseph Thomas Smith, was in quite a good business in York Road, Kings Cross, which runs alongside the railway station, and was concerned with shoeing cab horses. It seems that the Metropolitan Police had the power to take a cab off the road if they found fault with horse or cab. Granddad had contracts with two cab owning firms to keep their horses shod and he had to bear the brunt of any complaint concerning the horses hooves. This involved some two hundred and fifty horses and he employed some twenty men. What it sounded like when twenty farriers were all at work at their anvils I can't imagine.

The old gentleman, he always wore a stiff white collar and a bowler hat, had one or two sidelines. He would attend horse sales to advise buyers rather as the AA. will advise second hand car buyers these days and he bought up the large quantities of manure that presented a disposal problem for the London stables and had it put onto the railway at Kings Cross to be taken to Bedfordshire at low rates. The railway wagons would otherwise have had to return empty.

The coming of the motor taxis broke his business up. Staying in London with less and less horses was useless, he by this time had eight children to feed, so they all moved to Potton, the only place where he had a few business contacts, and set up in a very small way in a stable in the yard of a Mr. Abbot, a coal merchant in Blackbird Street. The family rented a house in Chapel Street and later moved round the corner into Blackbird Street. One of the sons, Ernest, was by this time working with his father and I can just remember the great discussions that took place when it was learned that the other blacksmith in the town was selling his business.



The Old Forge. Brook End

Should they buy the other forge and combine the two firms? It seemed a crazy time to buy. Horses were on the way out even on the land, farming at an all time low ebb. The other man was a blacksmith while Joe was a farrier, concerned only with shoeing. The family had never owned a building, either domestic or industrial and Granddad was all for keeping his money in the firm, not buying bricks and mortar. However the deal was done and the two firms joined.

## AIRCRAFT CRASH IN POTTON WOOD IN 1945

Of the eight children, Florrie the eldest was a polio victim and never walked. My mother, Caroline was in domestic service in London when the move to Potton took place and so never lived in the town. She spent her holiday there though and always claimed it as her home. She and my Father were married in the Parish Church in 1911 and in spite of being the daughter of the blacksmith she claimed to have had the first motorised wedding in the town. They later came back to have my brother baptised and I still have his very brightly coloured baptismal certificate. Of the other six children, Joe and Lily were mental nursing in London though Lily later lived in Potton. Connie married Claud Fennemore, a Potton man. Tom was market gardening at Sandy. Ernie in the forge and Percy the youngest boy worked for the CO-OP until he bought the Post Office and general store in Wrestlingworth.

Holidays in Potton were wonderful. I remember Omar Bartle getting three new buses called Pip, Squeak and Wilfred after the cartoon penguins who were famous at the time; the squealing of the pigs from Olivers pork butchers shop on the corner of Blackbird Street on days when he was slaughtering; the smell of the tanyard and the dry, parchment like skins of the men who worked there; evenings when the adults played tennis in the garden of Clairmont in Station Road and I raked around with the children of the house.

Frank Sells

*Photos of Ernest Smith at work in the forge can be seen in the society's publication **Pictures of Potton Volume 3** which is still available at £3.00*

A Lockheed Liberator Mark 8, a 4-engined aeroplane, of 466 squadron, took off from Bassingbourne airfield on the morning of 18th September 1945. The aeroplane was new, having recently been delivered from the USA.

The crew were:

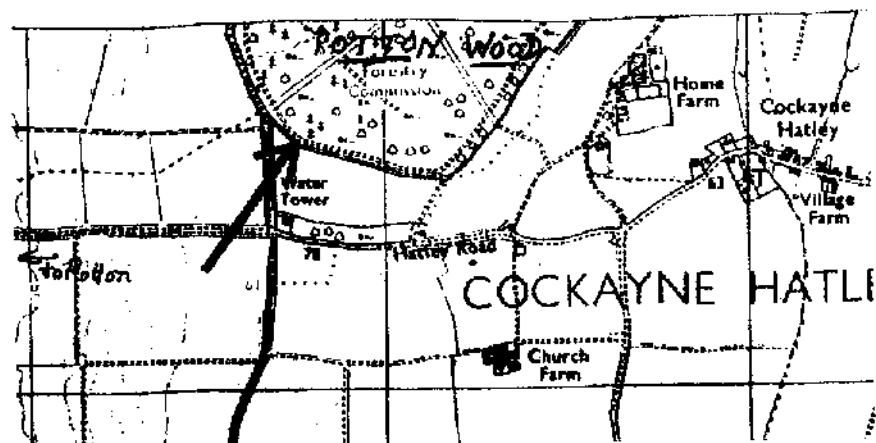
Flt. Sgt Ray Carling	(Flight Engineer)	RAF
Fg. Officer Frank Doak	(2nd Pilot)	RAAF
Fg. Officer Noel Gilmour DFC	(Navigator)	RAAF
Flt.Lt. Pat McNulty DFC	(Pilot)	RAAF
Flt.Lt. Edward Spiller	(Pilot)	RAF
Flt.Sgt. Roy Turner	(Flt. Engineer)	RAF
Flt.Sgt. Jim Potter	(Wireless Operator)	RAAF

The last member of the crew was Pat McNulty's dog, "Bitsa" a Scotty terrier, who was to play an important part in the subsequent rescue.

The object of the mission was to train pilots to fly Liberators, who were then to fly troops back from the East. The two Australian pilots, Frank Doak and Pat McNulty, who had previously flown Halifax bombers, were under instruction from Flt. Lt. Spiller - a very experienced pilot. Spiller and McNulty were in the two pilots seats. Frank Doak and Noel Gilmour were standing behind them.

In the morning they carried out routine circles and landings and then had lunch whilst the plane was re-fuelled with 2000 gallons of high-octane petrol. In the afternoon they took off to simulate single engine failure during take off. On taking off, therefore, the pilot cut the starboard engine. The plane climbed without any problems. The original intention was then to land with three engines but Flt. Lt. Spiller decided instead to carry out the two engined flying which was also required.

He therefore shut down the second starboard engine. The plane could not maintain height - nor was it possible to bank or turn left. The plane therefore flew straight ahead losing height - heading towards the rise of Potton Hill. Spiller then "unfeathered" the outer engine, obtained the required r.p.m and switched on - with no effect. He then, hurriedly did the same with the inner engine - again with no result. The plane lost flying speed, stalled and dropped. It ploughed into the edge of Potton Wood - nearly opposite the Water Tower.



Noel Gilmour records "I heard a loud bang, like someone kicking a tin can and knew no more until I awoke, seconds or minutes later (I know not), rather confused but realising that we had crashed and that, unbelievable, I seemed to be still alive.....I remember blindly tearing my way through the hot wreckage, realising I was burning my hands in the process". He crawled away from the wreckage and passed out. At this time it was late afternoon and still light. His next recollection was of being rolled painfully on to a stretcher. By this time it was dark and at least two hours had passed since the crash!

He was told later that an ambulance had come to collect the injured, but when they counted the survivors they realised someone was missing. They returned and located Noel in the wood by the barking of the dog, Bitsa, who had escaped from the plane and stayed with the unconscious airman. After 4 weeks in hospital, and with a broken ankle he was able to take the boat to Australia.

Frank Doak was thrown clear of the plane when it crashed. He was less seriously injured and remembered four men running to the scene. Two of them, including Mr Dennis, who was working at Church Farm, and Mr Sam Bonnett very bravely entered the burning plane and rescued at least one person - including Roy Turner, who unfortunately died later that night. Frank Doak was taken to "a farmhouse by the roadside" - almost certainly Church Farm Lodge - where two ladies cared for him until the staff car arrived.

The reasons for the crash are not entirely clear. The cutting of the two engines was done well below the authorised height - but this does not account for the failure to re-start the engines. It seems likely - according to Noel Gilmour - that the "mixture controls" were not re-set to "rich" from "idle cut off" when the attempt was made to start the engines. Noel Gilmour recalls seeing the controls still with the incorrect setting moments before the crash. An important contributory factor was that they had no "intercom": the RAF intercom in their helmets was not compatible with the US system installed in the plane.

Frank Doak and Noel Gilmour returned to Australia and live there today. Both have returned to see the site of the crash which is still (just) visible in Potton Wood.

Tony Crossley

*The exact location of the accident was marked on the map by Mr Doak and Mr Gilmour when Tony Crossley sent a copy of the map to them in Australia.*

## 100 Years of Potton Town Council

*On March 5th 1995 at St Mary's Church, Potton the Town Council held a Civic Service to give thanks for 100 years of Town Council in Potton. As well as the Town Councillors, many Potton organisations were represented at the service.*

The ever increasing size and complexity of Government on the national and international level in the second half of the 20th Century has revived an interest in local government. Local Government structures were set up in 1888 and 1894 which were to remain in existence until the Local Government Act of 1972. This "quiet revolution" saw 1424 local government areas in England and Wales reduced to 456. This structure is with us at present, although local government reorganisation is once more an item on the political agenda.

In 1895 in line with national trends, Potton Town Council was formed. There were 42 nominations, 29 candidates and 13 seats. The electors demanded a poll on 17th December 1894 when 13 men (no women) were elected. Edward Sills was the first chairman.

A living link with that first Council is Councillor F W (Eric) Jakes, whose grandfather, also named Frederick Jakes, was one of the original 13 members. The first Councillor Jakes was a market gardener and shopkeeper of the general grocery shop on the corner of Bull Street and Chapel Street. He died when Eric was only 3 years old, so little more is known of him.

Eric has been a member of Potton Town Council for 40 years. As longest serving Councillor, he was invited to speak at the celebration of 100 years of the Town Council in Potton which the Town Council hosted on 27th January 1995. Past and present councillors, civic dignitaries and representatives from Potton's Twin Town Langenlonsheim were invited to attend.

The German visitors presented the Council with a gift of Champagne, which will be opened when the new town sign is unveiled in the Market Square. Potton History Society produced an exhibition of photographs from their archives representing many of the functions of the Council over the years.

Councillor Jakes was elected to Biggleswade Rural District Council in 1964 and served as chairman from 1971-73. In 1974 he was elected to Mid-Beds District Council upon which he served as chairman from 1991 to 1993. He is chairman of the Governors of Everton First School and Burgoyne Middle School. He has been a church warden at St. Mary's Church for 32 years and a teacher at the Sunday School for over half a century.

In 1995 his long and distinguished service to the community was recognised and Councillor Jakes was awarded a M.B.E. in the Honours List. On March 7th he travelled to Buckingham Palace where he was presented with his medal by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

The Burghers of Potton are indebted to all those who have served as Town Councillors since 1895. It is to be hoped that there will be no shortage of individuals prepared to give of their time both in the imminent election and in future years.

Anita Lewis

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On Saturday March 25th 1995 Councillor Eric Jakes unveiled the new Town Sign which is on the wall of the Clock House. Councillor Jakes made a short speech and invited the onlookers to enter the building and to drink to the health of the Council and of its twin town, Langenlonsheim, who had provided the wine for the occasion.

Anita Lewis

## From the Scrapbook ..... 1985

- ◆ Very heavy snowfall in January - called the "big chill".
- ◆ Potton Town Council made a request to the County to consider a by-pass for Potton.
- ◆ Bridleway No 8, passing through the golf course was moved so that horse hoof marks no longer pitted the green.
- ◆ Former Land Settlement estates at Potton sold by auction for residential development - 0.61 acres fetched £63000.
- ◆ Potton villagers will only have their gas meters read twice a year under a cost cutting scheme by Eastern Gas.
- ◆ Steering committee formed for twinning with Langenlonsheim in Germany.
- ◆ Potton Wood was made a Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- ◆ Potton Consolidated Charities launched their book for £3.
- ◆ Recruitment campaign started by Potton Fire Service.
- ◆ Four East Beds History Societies held their first joint meeting in Biggleswade.
- ◆ Thieves wrenched a money box off a table at St Mary's Parish Church - it contained £2.50.
- ◆ New pavilion for Potton Bowls Club opened.
- ◆ New clubhouse for Potton Sports and Social Club opened at the Hollow.

Extracted from the scrapbook by Boo Matthews.

## Notice Board

### **World War II information wanted**

PHS member Trevor Ball is undertaking a countywide survey of pill-boxes, anti-aircraft gun sites, anti-tank obstacles, Home-guard gun positions etc. on behalf of the Bedfordshire Historic Record Society. Anyone with knowledge of such features can contact Trevor on 260287 most days. He will then carry out a survey of the structure (if standing) or a ground survey (if demolished).

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### **Family History**

An enquiry has been received regarding the WINEPRESS family, thought to have been in this area in the 18th/19th centuries. If anyone has come across this name during the course of their own research, please contact the secretary.

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### **Newsletter No19**

The deadline for copy to be included in this will be 1st September 1995. Please pass items to Mary Leigh.

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### **Bedfordshire Local History Association**

The Association will be holding its AGM on 13th May 1995 2:15 pm at Rice Trevor Lower School, Bromham. After the formal business, Dr Margaret Gelling will address the meeting on Place Names and the Landscape with special reference to Bedfordshire. Refreshments will be available after the meeting and a conducted tour of the surrounding area has been arranged, to include Bromham Mill and Bromham Park.