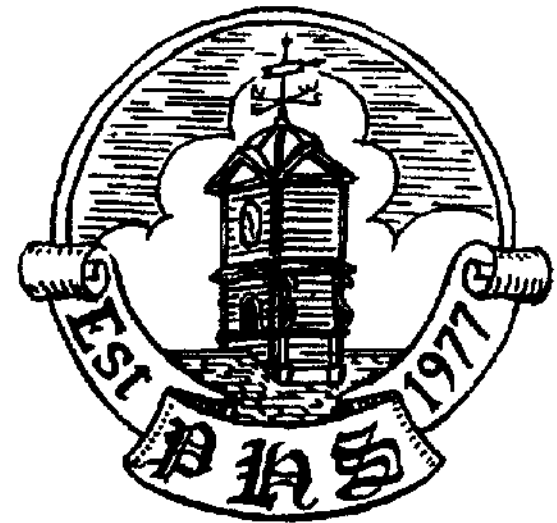


# Potton History Society



Newsletter Number 34    Spring 2003

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## Potton History Society Committee:-

Chairman	George Howe
Secretary	Jean McLennan
Treasurer	Anita Lewis
Programme/Publicity Secretary	Peter Ibbett
Committee Members	Ernie Wood
	Ken Lawson
	Christine Harper
Newsletter Editors	Mr & Mrs Leigh

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

Mr G. Howe	Potton 260935
Mr K Lawson	Potton 261209
Mrs J McLennan	Potton 261867

## Acknowledgements:-

Our appreciation to Potton Post Office for selling our tea towels.

Thanks to Keith Lawrence for his illustration of the Rose and Crown Hotel

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

Lindsay's Bakery,  
Tysoe's Hardware Store,  
Potton Library  
Potton Post Office

## Society News

Our **October** meeting took the form of a Silver Jubilee Dinner held at the John O'Gaunt Golf Club at Sutton. Members and guests enjoyed a three-course meal and old time music hall entertainment.

Founding Secretary Patricia Yates recalled the formation of the Society in 1977 and it's first committee meeting in her house. Peter Ibbett, the longest serving committee member, spoke of the way in which the Society had uncovered Potton's past through active research and hoped that it would retain it's youthful enthusiasm and the active support of it's members in it's next 25 years. Chairman George Howe thanked all those who had helped to make the evening such a success and looked forward to the continued development of the Society which was already planning new ventures for the future.

The **November** meeting began with a well attended Silver Jubilee AGM. Chairman George Howe reported on another successful year of activities. He thanked members for their loyal and active support. Treasurer Anita Lewis reported that the Society had a healthy balance sheet that included a recent grant from Beds County Council towards equipment to help with digitising material in the archives. The current committee was re-elected for 2003.

Peter Walker, who is currently Warden of Gamlingay Wood, gave an excellent pictorial account of his part of the English landscape. He reminded the audience of how clearance of the natural forest left small intensively managed areas such as Gamlingay Wood. The wood eventually became wholly owned by Merton College, Oxford. The coming of the Industrial Era and the Railway Age saw the gradual end of traditional woodland management. The wood, now managed by the local Woodland Trust, is open to the public every day.

The **December** meeting celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> year with a slide show illustrating changes in both the Society and the town. George Howe and Peter Ibbett provided commentary on nearly 100 slides from the Archives. Buildings had been demolished, from large ones such as the Victorian Manor House through smaller buildings such as the Salvation Army Barracks to the little office building behind the present Community Centre and new estates added.

The Society had established a reputation as one of the most active in the county with many exhibitions and publications. It's growing collection of old and new photographs are now stored in a special archive area. The Society has maintained its active spirit with Coach Trips and Anniversary Dinners as well as continuing to add to it's Archive and has gained a grant to acquire computing equipment.

The 26<sup>th</sup> season of talks began with a visit in **January** from Radio and TV contributor Dr. Twigs Way who presented a history of the Allotment. The English allotment began when the Enclosure Acts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries removed ancient commons rights from the working class. The allotment came into its own in the two World Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, promoted by central government as a means of raising food production. Allotments went out of fashion in the post war years but recent signs of renewed interest have grown with the demand for organic food. Dr. Way's humorous style of presentation ensured an enjoyable evening for all.

In **February** we welcomed back Alan Flowerday whose ancestor, Henry Hercock, was born in Northamptonshire in 1811, the same year that a Baptist Chapel was founded in Potton. He was apprenticed to a Boot and Shoe maker but his father, concerned about his exposure to 'the Sins of Satan', removed him from this employment. Henry wished to reform himself and became involved in the Baptist movement. He was offered the Potton pastorship in 1866 and remained in Potton until 1878 when he moved on to Leeds where he died in 1881. One of his daughters, Suzannah, ran a school for Young Ladies in King Street, whilst sons William and Charles ran a Printers and Stationers shop on the Market Square.

Geoff Sewell, chairman of the Beds Family History Society, joined us in **March** to tell of his grandfather's life and in particular, his experiences in the trenches at Ypres during the first World War. Geoff's talk was superbly illustrated by the many photos, maps and artefacts he had discovered during the course of his research, along with his own photos taken of the area as it appears today. He also advised us on the various sources available to those carrying out similar research.

We are pleased to announce that an additional member has been co-opted onto the committee. Christine Harper has been helping our refreshment team for quite a while and we are delighted that she has now decided to take on this extra commitment.

Our constitution provides for a committee of at least eight members. Now that Christine has joined us we have seven members, still one empty seat. We meet once a month, usually on the second Thursday, so if you would like to be our eighth person please have a chat with the chairman or any committee member.

### **POTTON HISTORY SOCIETY ENTERS THE DIGITAL AGE!**

With a grant of £700 from Bedfordshire County Council towards buying a computer system to help digitise our archives and additional finance from our reserves, we have purchased a computer, printer and scanner. We may add a digital camera in the future.

#### **Future Plans**

1. Storing our photographic archive of over 6000 old and modern photos and slides in a digital archive to act as both a backup and a resource for the future.
2. Storing our documents in a digital archive.
3. Providing a base for a Web site for the Society.
4. To enable presentations of society material including audio and video inputs.
5. To enable the production of CD-Roms of Society material.
6. To ease administration of society business and financial affairs.

#### **What can members do?**

- Help us scan and archive material into the computer.
- Carry out work at home on own computer system.
- Let us have any computer files relating to Potton to add to our Digital Archive.

Please see Peter Ibbett or any committee member if you would like to help in this aspect of the Society. [Pjibbett@aol.com](mailto:Pjibbett@aol.com)

### **The Cemetery Project (continued)**

As far as possible all the monuments installed at the Sandy Road Cemetery and all the burials since the Cemetery was first used have now been recorded, but of course it is an on-going project and I shall endeavour to keep the records up to date.

My next project is to do the same with the memorials at the Churchyard as I have done with the Sandy Road Cemetery. I have obtained on an indefinite loan from the Record Office the "yellow cards" which were completed by our Society members in the 1980s. I have made a start on sorting some five hundred records into some sort of order, but because of the time span (they go back to the 1700s) it is going to be more difficult than the previous project, although thanks to all the hard work done by Norman Parry and others, not impossible.

I am still getting enquiries regarding the births, marriages and deaths of our fore-fathers from various parts of the country and indeed the world and I am happy to help with these as far as possible. I have in my possession records of Potton dating back to 1602.

Ken Lawson, January 2003.

### **Forthcoming Programme**

May 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Denny Abbey and the Farmland Museum Setting the scene for our coach trip	Jeremy Rossiter
Jun 26 <sup>th</sup>	History in Your Hands Mystery objects from St Neots Museum	Anna Mercer
Jul 24 <sup>th</sup>	Visit to Ashwell Museum visit and guided walk 7pm start via members cars from Potton	
Aug 28 <sup>th</sup>	Round the Hearth How bygone Pottonians kept warm	
Sep 25 <sup>th</sup>	Two Gentlemen of Gamlingay The stories of George Downing and William Purchase	Jim Brown
Oct 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Behind the Counter How Micheal and Muriel Ibbett came to serve Potton.	Peter Ibbett

## Potton History Society's Silver Jubilee Dinner

Twenty-Five years is a long time for a society not only to be still in existence, but also still thriving, and very active. It's a milestone in our own history that could not be passed without a special occasion. Your committee gave the matter great thought, and with the success of our twenty-first celebrations only four years previously, decided we would do something similar. Months beforehand, individuals were given the various tasks required to organise such an event. A date of the 24<sup>th</sup> October was chosen, the venue "The John O'Gaunt Golf Club", and it was not long before the event arrived.

The room was laid out to accommodate seating arrangements for our dinner, and allow room for a stage area. Both appeared to work very well. On the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> October, Jean and Anita attended to your seating arrangements, and table decorations. 'Bustles and Beaux' were booked for our entertainment, and we were ready to celebrate our 25 Years.

Sixty-six members and friends attended, being greeted with a sherry reception. Much friendly discussion took place in the bar area before we were called to our places for dinner. The food and service was excellent. Speeches were given by myself and by two of our original members, Patricia Yates, who spoke about the committees over the years (further details in the next newsletter), and Peter Ibbett, who has been our Programme Secretary for the whole of the 25 years. The evening's events were well recorded by Chris Miles with his camera.

With a history society's members in a happy mood, what could be better than an "Old Time Music Hall" for our entertainment? Brought to us "At e-e-enormous expense" by "Bustles and Beaux", led by that famous master of ceremonies from Biggleswade, Horace Dilley, what a great show it was to round off our Silver Jubilee Celebrations.

Thanks to all those who helped to organise it, took part in it, and came along to it, all of you made our Silver Jubilee Dinner a great success. Thank You.

George Howe.

## A Glimpse into the Past

For generations, Pottonians have gathered in the Market Square to celebrate special events or to hear news of the day. A Saturday Market and a yearly Horse Fair no longer exist, nor do we hear a hooter sounding from the Tan Yard in Mill Lane (Royston Street) or from the Foundry in Back Lane (Willow Road), summoning the inhabitants to this central point to share news of such exciting events as the relief of Mafeking or election results. Fortunately, we have interested shopkeepers who keep us informed of the topics of the moment.

Such it was when sign writers appeared and changed the name of the 'Rose and Crown' to 'The Old Coach House'. Questions were asked which prompted me to evaluate information in our records concerning the Rose and Crown and the available transport of the day.



After the great fire of 1783, it was listed in the official report as 'The Crown', but in the records of the Manor of Much Manured, it was given its full title. At a 'Special Court Baron', held on November 24<sup>th</sup> 1784, it was reported that the deceased owner, Thomas Hankin, had, in a codicil to his will, left the site on which the Rose and Crown had stood, to his trustees to sell for the best price.

Rebuilding must have started quickly because, at the General Court Baron, held on June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1785, William Fowler was admitted tenant to 'the Inn called the Rose and Crown with the shops, granaries, stables, outhouses, edifices and buildings - lately erected'. According to Henington's Directory of 1785 'new buildings have the advantage of greater convenience with the beauty of improvement'. At this time, there was a weekly waggon (sic) service to St. John's Street, London.

Consulting Potton entries in thirty Trade Directories dated 1823/1940, references to the Rose and Crown vary. Starting as a Commercial Inn, it was called a 'Posting House' in 1830. At this time, horses were kept at public houses or inns to be used by post riders or to be hired by travellers. A coach belonging to William Hanscombe, grocer, tea dealer and tallow chandler, took passengers to Shefford every Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, whilst on several days during the week, carriers' wagons or carts travelled to London, Bedford, Biggleswade, Cambridge and Northampton.

In 1847, a horse drawn omnibus left the Swan Inn in the Market Square (Michael's Fish Bar and Savills) three times a week for the Golden Lion, St. John's Street, Smithfield. A carrier now travelled to St. Neots. Henry Powell, landlord of the Rose and Crown, was also a veterinary surgeon. J. Tyler's entry for 1854 refers to a 'Family and Commercial Hotel, tavern, livery stables and Assembly Rooms'. The latter was often listed separately under 'Public Rooms'. Trains in Sandy were met twice a day by an 'Omnibus or Fly' from the Green Man in Bull Street, passengers being conveyed 'to and from all parts of the town'.

After the opening of the Potton to Sandy railway in 1857 and its amalgamation with the Cambridge to Bedford line in 1862, only one carrier is listed in 1864: 'David Noble, on Saturday to Bedford'.

It must be emphasised that not all business people advertised in Trade Directories. As a fee had to be paid, this may have been a deterrent. Occasionally entries are repeated from previous years without being checked by the compiler, or, because of the delay in printing, the subscribers may have left the town or died.

E.M. Harrison's entry in 1890 refers to the Rose and Crown as a Public House. W.H. Fowler bought the premises in 1894 and by 1898 had expanded the business. The Rose and Crown is referred to as a 'Family and Commercial Hotel, posting in all its branches, providing broughams, dogcarts, wagonettes, funeral cars, and prompt attention to station orders'. In 1903 a table d'hôte is offered daily at 1am, but perhaps that is a printer's error and it should read 1pm. Customers were known to stay all night however, sitting in their favourite chair in the bar! By 1906, the enterprising Mr. Fowler had become a 'jobmaster', offering services equivalent to a modern day 'Job Centre'.

Under the heading 'Conveyance' in 1931 one reads 'A motor bus service runs between Potton and Bedford on Saturday, to St. Neots on Thursday and to Biggleswade on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday'. O.A. Bartle had purchased his first bus in 1926 to convey children to schools in Bedford during the General Strike. He was now offering a regular service.

Henry Fowler was owner and licensee from 1894 - 1934. The hotel was then purchased by Charles Wells of Bedford, and the entry in the Bedford, Cambridge and District Trades Directory for 1935 states 'Rose and Crown Hotel, Market Square, family and commercial, free house, motor cars for hire, garage. W.J. Lovell, proprietor'. The property was sold by the Wells family in 1979 as a 'free house'.

Patricia Yates.

## **The Queen's Golden Jubilee Celebrations in Potton, 31<sup>st</sup> May-4<sup>th</sup> June 2002**

We decorated our house and garden, some would say o.t.t, with flags and bunting and entered the competition, bought our limited edition "Golden Tickets" and studied the glossy programme in anticipation of the Golden Jubilee weekend.

We could hear the music of the live bands playing on Friday night as we went to bed. It was an evening planned for our grandchildren rather than for us, with plenty to follow over the long weekend. We waved at the glorious procession of Majorettes and floats in beautiful sunshine on Saturday afternoon then we greeted and enjoyed the music with dancing of the young musicians from our German Twin-Town Langenlonsheim area until midnight on Saturday.

We worshipped together in the huge marquee on Sunday morning and saw England playing Sweden in the World Cup football match on the big screen in there afterwards. (Disappointing result!) We ate our picnic on Sunday afternoon in the field together with at least a thousand Pottions and guests, still in glorious sunshine, with a cricket match and various football matches and jazz music all being played. We rushed home to prepare for the Sunday evening "Stars in Your Eyes" Spectacular. The fourteen artists with their fabulous acts left us wondering what on earth could follow that! Into bed in the early hours again and up at six to wave goodbye to the Sounds Express musicians travelling back home to Germany. We couldn't miss the Soap-Box Derby on Monday at "high noon" with crowds lining Bury Hill to see the twenty home made models scooting down the hill in pairs until the finalists were crowned with their laurel wreaths to great applause. We left the street party in the afternoon for the young families to enjoy because we had to be out again at night for the transformed again marquee, and the Wild West Party night. We were entertained by the brave ones riding the "Bucking Bull" all evening. Grandads, Mums and Dads, boys and girls all had a go. The line dancing and the Country and Western group were amazing and kept us up till midnight again.

Unfortunately we had to miss the mystery walk round Potton on Tuesday morning, (couldn't keep up the pace!) and we had to watch some of the Queen on TV, but the "It's a Knockout" tournament in the afternoon attracted crowds again and the four teams made fools of themselves and showed skills they didn't know they had, while providing a smashing final afternoon's entertainment. Tuesday night's "Gala Evening", a full house again, gave a finale for Potton to be proud of, all 'home grown' acts filling the Jubilee Marquee with their music and talents. A rendering of "God Save the Queen" sent us home exhausted. And we were only part of the crowd!

Morning, Noon and Night we were entertained for four whole days and five nights here in Potton to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. Potton did Her Majesty proud, but it wouldn't have been possible without the impeccable and thoughtful planning by the "Crew". They catered for all ages, the free-flowing cups of tea and squash all weekend, the hard working cheerful bar, the barbecues were enjoyed and appreciated by everyone. The presence of the Committee at all events, was unobtrusive or prominent whichever the event demanded, but whatever it was, it was GREAT.

The display by Potton History Society permanently on view was an added extra providing a quiet corner showing how Potton was an amazing place to live then as it is now and long may it stay that way! Our memories will last as long as we do and the records of the events will go down in history.

We didn't win the "Best Dressed House" competition, but, as the losers in the "Knockout" must have said, its not the winning but the taking part! And we certainly took part!

A big THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts to ALL concerned. Here's to the next time.

Pat and Brian Thwaites.  
6 The Ridgeway, Potton

## Visit to Tempsford Airfield – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2002

How privileged I felt to have been asked to join the friends and relatives of the crew of the Hudson FK790 lost on the 5/6th July 1944.

This story begins when George Howe received a telephone call from a Mr. Bob Body, nephew of the pilot of this aircraft, explaining that he was endeavouring to visit Tempsford and view the artefacts kept in the office of the Farm Manager.

He explained to George that, like many others, his family had no knowledge of the facts behind the letter they had received reporting his Uncle 'missing'. Bob has endeavoured over the years to find out more but, as we all know, the events at Tempsford Airfield have always been shrouded in secrecy and many avenues he pursued ended as dead ends.

The first major turning point in his investigations was the recovery of the aeroplane somewhere in Holland on the 6<sup>th</sup> July 1997, just fifty-three years to the day when it was shot down. He hurriedly booked a flight to Holland to witness the salvage operation. From this point his interest grew and he contacted any surviving members or relations of the crew and after many attempts managed to get permission to visit the 'museum' at Tempsford.

This meeting took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2002 at 10.45am and was attended by eighteen people. The crew were represented by the following:-

Bob Body	Nephew of the Pilot
Don Bunney	Brother of the Navigator
Joan Pearson (nee Withers)	Widow of Wireless Operator
Derek Eliot	Son of Rear Gunner

It was wonderful to chat to the people attending this gathering, some of which had served at Tempsford and they all had many memories. I suppose the most nostalgic tale was told to me by Joan Pearson. She was a bride of only one week when they managed to spend a few days together. The next she heard was three weeks later when an official letter was received from the authorities stating he was "missing"

The party assembled outside the 'office' where John Button had kept his collection of memorabilia and we waited in anticipation to view the collection. George and I were extremely interested to see this in view of the letter in the Biggleswade Chronicle that John Button had written and Mrs. Yates had reflected on at one of our Society meetings. What a surprise, the collection had been moved from the office to the adjacent rooms and the walls in this area had had a fresh coat of paint and there was some semblance of order of the documents. Unfortunately much of what was left was 'dog-eared' and faded, but no doubt in the future, if Bob Body has his way, it will be preserved behind glass.

There were two recent additions on display. A piece of perspex from the screen of the salvaged plane mounted on a plinth with the inscription:-

"Hudson FK790 – 161 Squadron  
Lost 6<sup>th</sup> July 1944  
Found 6<sup>th</sup> July 1997"

The other was a photograph of the propeller silhouetted against the evening sky on the occasion when the plane was recovered. The inscription on this piece gave the names and ranks of the crew and the agents the plane was transporting.

CREW	F/Lt. J.W. Menzies	AGENTS	Peter Kwint
	F/O K.R. Bunney		Fluen Verboff
	Sgt. D.J. Withers		Johannes Walter
	Sgt. E.M. Eliot		Jan Bockma

Afterwards we visited the barn that Bob Body had cleaned out that morning and photographs were taken of the visitors, which, of course, will be preserved in our archives.

We departed to the Church at Tempsford where the Rev. Barbara Ebeling conducted a most nostalgic service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance, which included two minutes silence making a fitting way to remember those brave men.

George and I then said our farewells, leaving the rest to dine at the Wheatsheaf and chat about their memories.

George passed on to Bob Body a copy of a photograph of the representatives of the crew that had been taken at Tempsford on that day. Bob kindly sent us information to accompany the photograph – a copy of which is in our archives.

Please see following item.

Jean McLennan

Bob Body  
Don Bunney  
Joan Pearson  
Derek Eliot

Bob is the nephew of the pilot of FK 790 – Flt Lt J.W. Menzies DFC. Following a twelve year search for any clue as to where his uncle's plane had crashed and the whereabouts of the body of Flt Lt Menzies, the recovery of the wreck of FK 790 on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1997, fifty-three years to the day after it was shot down, gave at least some answers. During the course of his search, Bob had been in touch with Don Bunney and Joan Pearson.

Don is the brother of Ken Bunney, the navigator on FK 790. Like other family members, Don had not known the exact nature of his

brother's wartime service but guessed that he had been involved in something "special". At the end of his last visit home, Ken had turned, on leaving, to wave goodbye, something he had never done before. Don had felt that this was the last time he would see his brother. He was right.

Joan Pearson is the widow of the wireless operator, Dennis Withers. They had been childhood sweethearts, and had been married only ten days when Dennis was killed. Bob had been in contact with Joan, through a series of coincidences, prior to 1997, and it was she, having been told of the salvage operation by friends in Holland, who rang to say that the wreck was being raised.

Derek Eliot is the son of rear gunner Eric Eliot. Following the raising of the wreck, Bob was determined to find relatives of other crew members and agents. An article was published in the Daily Mail covering the salvage operation and asking relatives to get in touch. Derek Eliot eventually did so.

In October 1998, Derek and Joan were present when Flt Lt Menzies was laid to rest, with full military honours, in Makkum, Holland, alongside the other members of his crew.

We feel that the bond which has grown between the relatives shows that the crew and agents aboard FK 790 did not die in vain. Indeed, firm friendships have been built between the four of us, the relatives of the Dutch agents and the townspeople of Makkum – surely the international harmony that was worth fighting for! Our meeting in July was established as a private commemoration for those directly connected with FK 790. However, over the past few years it has expanded to include those with a personal connection to Tempsford Airfield, either through their own service, or as supporters of the work done by Special Duties Squadrons, and we feel honoured that so many people wish to commemorate their courage with us.

Bob Body

## **Cinemas**

A very interesting book has been donated to the Society by Mr. & Mrs. Gray of Biggleswade and the following are extracts from that book.

### **Introduction**

A Robert Paul, a scientific instrument maker, in 1895 copied the unpatented design of the Kinetoscope and he produced a film of The Derby and one of the Boat Race – thus the film industry was born.

### **Local Bedfordshire Cinemas**

The book gives details of all the lost Bedfordshire Cinemas, including Amptill, Arlesey, Dunstable, Henlow, Kempston, Leighton Buzzard/Linslade, Luton, Sharnbrook, Shefford, Stotfold and Toddington. There are many fine pictures and advertisements for these cinemas.

The insight into the Cinemas of Bedford made me reminisce about my young days in Bedford. The Empire Cinema, where some quite daring films were shown – the Cinema was closed by the Granada Group in 1977, the Picturedome in Duck Mill Lane, where we used to sit upstairs accompanied by rats from the river; the Plaza, a much smarter place, over the other side of the river on the Embankment and the Granada on St. Peter's Street, where the best films were shown and 'live shows' were held to packed audiences.

My parents used to talk of their young days visiting the Palace Cinema, which was on the corner of Silver Street.

Of course, Biggleswade is featured in the book, and there are details of the Empire and Regal Cinemas and George's Hall, and Sandy with details of the Victory in Bedford Road, now the Roundabout Club.

In 1937 there was a proposal made by the Cox Cinema Company to build a four-hundred seat cinema on the corner of the Market Square, Potton and the former Valentine's Drapers Store site, but it was never built.

But Potton did have Randall's Cinema in Brook End. This was an example of the local village hall being used to show films. It had only a short life, opening in the late 1950s and finally closed in 1961. The Licensee, Mr. George Randall, showed 16mm films and must have taken a keen interest in the industry because he ran other local cinemas for brief periods. Events such as the erection of the gasholder, local weddings and Scout parades were featured.

George Randall was also involved in a cinema at Arlesey, which was opened by him in 1962 showing children's films. It is said that the building shook when trains passed by. He also ran Sandy Albany (once the Victory) for a short time showing local and National films. The era died a lingering death in 1967.

Jean McLennan 06/01/03

Some of the local films produced by George Randall have survived and video copies of them are in the Society's Archives. The original 16mm films are being held for the Society by the Anglia Film Archives.

This book, as with all other material held in the archives, is available for Society members to borrow, for pleasure or research, at any time. Just ask a committee member if there is any material you would like to have a closer look at.

## If only bricks could talk! Pt 3

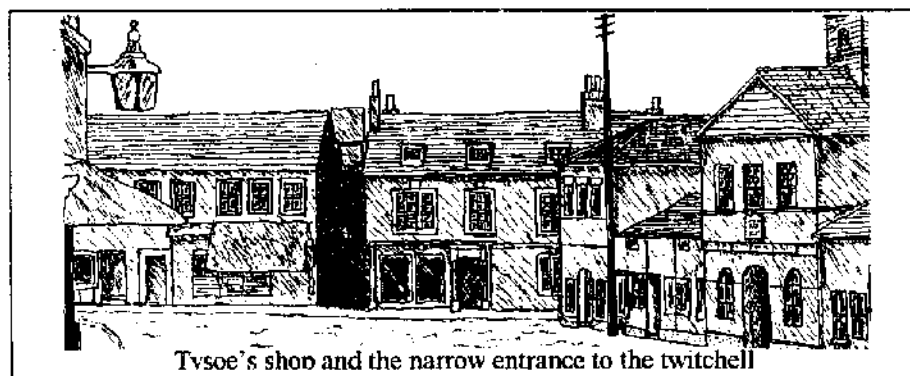
### The Life and Times of a Potton shop - Hidden in the loft.

The front view of a building is the one which most people use to form their feeling for its character. Yet a look around the back of a familiar building can often provide a change of view.

My childhood home is no exception to this. The shop front view featured in the previous article is a contrast to the view of the building from its rear garden. Two wings of late eighteenth century red brick stand behind the 'Tysoe's' shop front and overlook a yellow Victorian brick kitchen and bathroom. Above this is a roof of grey Welsh slate, which held back a secret for over a century.

When the present roof was created the roof space was closed in. In the middle 1990's my father had some repairs carried out to the roof and two bundles of documents from the 1850's saw the light of day for the first time for nearly 150 years!

These invoices and letters originated from the time when Henry Inskip was the Ironmonger on Potton Market Square. He took over in the late 1840's and was able to take advantage of the rise of the railway to develop his trade. His card is an impressive advertisement for a small shop in a rural Market town of under 2000 inhabitants. He was able to proudly boast that he could 'procure Implements from any Manufactory in England at the Maker's own price.'



Tysoe's shop and the narrow entrance to the twitchell

The 1861 Census reveals that Henry was aged 36 and had been born in Shefford and that he employed 5 men. His wife Ann had come from Sproxtton in Leicestershire and was aged 34. They had, on census night, two young daughters, Mary and Laura and a housemaid, a cook and a nursemaid to help run their household. Also in residence at the time was Thomas Dickinson, a Wesleyan minister from Yorkshire. A strand of non-conformity was ever present in the nineteenth century lending spice to local affairs. The quiet garden behind the modern shop would have been a hive of family and ironmongery activity with horse and cart and jumbled implements taking up every available space.

The invoices above the kitchen provide the proof that items flowed into Potton from all over the country. Some are from Bedfordshire, including Howard's Britannia Iron works at Bedford. The invoices of this era often featured the works buildings. One of them shows the full extent of the Bedford works together with two trains and the ornate gateway, which still survives near to Bedford hospital. An 1854 Howard's invoice states that the goods ordered will be sent by 'Allen'. Mr Allen was one of the local carriers who would have taken the goods slowly by road to Potton. Later invoices state that the goods will be sent by 'rails' as Potton became linked in to the national rail system.

Hence Henry Inskip was able to obtain his implements and materials from all over the country. Invoices from London, Birmingham and Leeds testify to the efficiency of the new railway era. The 1850's and 60's were to see the rise of 'Victorian High Farming' as new inventions and scientific progress provided a leap forward in agricultural productivity. Small rural Ironmongery traders benefited from this prosperity among progressive farmers. It was a pleasure to find an 1854 invoice from the Coalbrookdale Company, complete with picture of the original Iron Bridge and the statement that carriage was by 'rail to Peterboro'.

Henry Inskip was one of the leading traders of his community so it is not surprising to find that he played a part in local parish affairs. The documents included letters relating to his work as Parish Surveyor where he took his turn at administering the upkeep of the local roads. Other documents relate to more mundane but essential local business such as cleaning local ditches or digging out new drains and cesspits:-

***Estimate for Barrel Drain and Cesspools.***

*Potton. Mr H Inskip.*

*Wm Yerrill estimate for making a Barrel Drain from the sespool against the Oak Hill up to the Rail Road wall and to make 4 sespools in it at a 14 inch diameter. To find all materials in my work & labours. To be dug out two feet deep and 2 feet wide so as to be covered over with 10 inches of Earth. The length of it is 161 yards. I will engage to finish the work for the sum of £24 5s 0d.*

*Remain your humble servant. Wm Yerrill.*

Sadly Henry was to die at a fairly young age leaving his wife a widow by the late 1860's. The sunny economic climate of the Inskip years was to fade into the agricultural depression of the 1870's. The bricks of the Ironmonger's were to witness near disaster as a Guy Fawke's escapade nearly set the town alight and the contents of the shop were sold off in an auction of nearly 1000 lots in the late 1870's. The story of this downturn in the buildings fortunes will be told in the next newsletter.

Peter Ibbett

The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable help of his colleagues in the Potton History Society and in particular Patricia Yates and Norman Parry who provided some of the original research upon which this article is based. The author can be contacted at [pjibbett@aol.com](mailto:pjibbett@aol.com).

## NOTICE BOARD

### Fenland Coach Trip – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> June

Our day trip into the Ely Fens will be visiting Denny Abbey and its Farmland Museum and also Burwell Museum. The cost will be £16 per person, which will include coach, entry fees, guided tours and a ploughman's lunch. We anticipate a 9.30am start from the Market Square and return by 6pm. Bookings are already well under way, so don't delay if you would like to join us on this superb value trip. Phone Peter Ibbett on 01480 812731 to reserve your seat

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### Want to do more?

Turn to page 4 to find out how you could help the Society, either as a committee member or by becoming involved with computerising our records.

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### Tea Towels

Many of you will already have seen, or maybe even purchased, our splendid Potton Tea Towel. These can now be obtained, priced £3.75, from Potton Post Office as well as at our monthly meetings and exhibitions.

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### Newsletter no. 35

Your articles, letters, comments and memories are always most welcome, no matter how short or long. Please pass items to Vera Parry, Mary Leigh or any committee member. The deadline for copy to be included in the next issue is 1st August 2003.