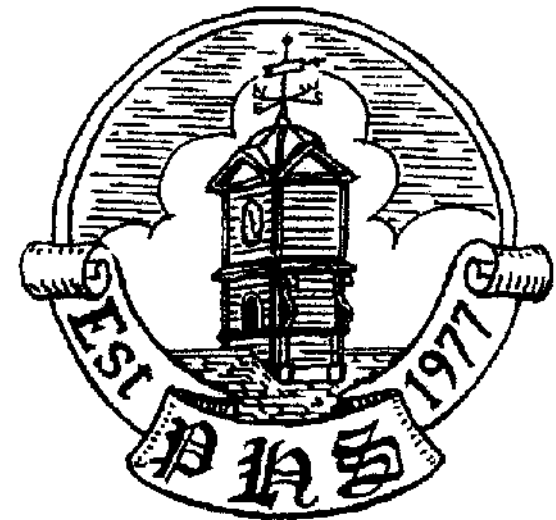


Potton History Society



Newsletter Number 36 Spring 2004

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

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Mr K Lawson Potton 261209
Mrs J McLennan Potton 261867

Acknowledgements:-

Our appreciation to Camerons Newsagents for selling
our books and to Potton Post Office for selling our tea
towels.

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

The **October** meeting featured the story of Michael and Muriel Ibbett who owned and ran Tysoe's the Ironmongers for much of the second half of the last century. Peter Ibbett looked back at the early life of his parents until they came to Potton in 1948 after their marriage and took over an Ironmongery business that had been active since the early 19th century. They soon became part of the local community and through hard work and friendly personal service gradually developed the shop as the town renewed itself after the decline of the early 1900s. As the more mobile society of the 70's and 80's put pressure on small shops, Tysoe's continued to thrive through its ability to meet local needs and supply items not found in the new DIY superstores. The couple also restored and maintained a building which had risen out of the ashes of the Great Fire of Potton in 1783 and developed its garden during their retirement years in the 1990's.

In **November** the story of Omar Bartle, researched by Patricia Yates, was presented by Peter Ibbett. Omar Arnold Bartle was born in 1880 and grew up in a town where the arrival of the Salvation Army stimulated the formation of a Skeleton Army and a town band in response to the newcomers. The young Omar saw a range of activities on the Market Square from the annual Horse Fair to celebrations for Royal events and Victory parades. His marriage to Nell Kitchener in 1902 was to last over 69 years. Next, George Howe presented the results of his research into Bartle's Buses. Pip, Squeak and Wilfred were well known nicknames given to three of his original buses in the 1920's. Bartles' fleet gradually grew in the 1930's to enable him to provide regular local services, as well as day trips to attractions such as the new Whipsnade Zoo and seaside resorts on the East Coast. By the War years double decker buses appeared in the fleet. The service was well known for putting its customers first and packing in all those who needed to get home! George also showed his models of the buses, painted in the Bartle colours.

The very well attended meeting also celebrated the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Potton Car in the town with a specially made cake. The 26th AGM heard that the Society was in a healthy and active state. Following the officers reports, the existing committee was re-elected unopposed. No nominations were received for the vacant seats.

A Local History Archive Quiz was presented by Peter Ibbett in **December**. A series of photographs from the current Society Archive illustrated the range of items looked after by the Society and provided material for a number of questions. Members were also quizzed on their knowledge of the History of Potton, touching on subject as diverse as the medieval manors, market tolls, John Wesley's preaching, census figures, trains and buses, the Land Settlement and the Clock House. Festive refreshments completed the evening's entertainment.

In **January** local Pastor Stan Evers provided a talk on 'Gods Smuggler', alias William Tyndale. Born in Gloucestershire, he was educated at Cambridge University where he became part of a reforming group in 1516 who met at the White Horse Inn. Later he developed an ambition to translate the Bible into English to enable the ordinary man to understand God's word. This, in the turbulent world of Tudor politics, was an action regarded as treason by the authorities. Tyndale had to flee to the continent where he succeeded in translating and publishing the first New Testament in English against a background of constant personal danger. Copies were smuggled back into England where booksellers found selling them were burnt at the stake. The authorities eventually caught up with Tyndale and had him burnt at Vilvorde Castle in Belgium in 1536. One year later Henry VIII ordered the placing of Great Bibles in every parish church. Tyndale's translation formed the main part of the material used in the new Bible. His original work lives on and today can be found on the internet.

Neil Renwick, the Heathlands Awareness Officer at the RSPB, was the speaker at our **February** meeting, looking at the history of heathlands and their future prospects in our area. Now rarer than tropical rainforests, these manmade habitats were created by our ancestors 5-8000 years ago as they cleared woodland for agricultural use. Once the natural nutrients were lost from the soil they moved on, leaving heathlands behind.

Bedfordshire Heathlands lie along the Greensand Ridge from Leighton Buzzard to Potton and one such area became the headquarters of the RSPB in the 1960's. Further heathland has been acquired near to the Lodge and is to be regenerated to provide improved habitat for local plants and wildlife. Maps from the Society archives showed Local Heaths and extracts from the 1830's diary of Emily Shore recorded that Gamlingay Heath was "famous all over England for the rare flowers to be found there".

The history, restoration and future use of Moggerhanger Park was presented by Simon and Jenny Cooper, at our **March** meeting. The site was purchased in 1791 by Godfrey Thornton, then Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, who engaged Sir John Soane to design a new house. Work was completed in 1796, with various other additions during the next 40 years. During the 1914-18 war, the Park was requisitioned as a hospital for wounded servicemen, then sold to the Health Authority to be used first for TB patients and later as an orthopaedic hospital. Closed by the Health Service in 1987 it was finally acquired by a consortium of Christian Charitable Trusts which has undertaken the restoration work. The house and grounds will be open daily to the public in the summer, whilst being used as a conference and training centre at other times of the year. See Notice Board for details of our visit to the Park.

Potton History Society Digital Camera

A grant from Mid-Bedfordshire District Council has enabled us to acquire a digital camera to add to our computer system. The Olympus C-40 will enable us to capture 21st Century Potton in 4 mega-pixel clarity. The camera will enable us to store as many

images as we can take and view them at leisure on our computer. They can then be archived on CD-R discs for future generations of Pottonians to use. We will be able to select images to print out and add to our main collection without needing to send any film for developing. Any members who would like to use the camera to record any aspect of Potton Life should contact George or Peter.

Archive Collection now on Disc

One of the main reasons for the society to have a computer is to protect the very large and valuable collection of photographs in our archive. We require a back-up to preserve this collection for the future. We need to restrict the amount of times we manhandle the books in which the original photographs are mounted, including the number of times they are used for display. But, its no good having archive material if it cannot be used.

The committee decided the way forward was to continue the present system of having our base collection of captioned photos in book form, adding all new photos to this existing system. Alongside this we would also have all of our collection scanned and placed on disc. This would have the added advantage of the discs being kept in a different location in case of, heaven forbid, any unforeseen damage. We would use the same method of indexing the computer files as we have used for our base collection. My motto is keep it simple. To view, or even to place some of our collection on show, we can use the computer generated images, which will help to prevent damage to our base collection.

We have, at the time of writing this article in January, had our computer for one year. We took about three months deciding on an indexing system, and subsequently, to make full use of computer technology, enhancing the index to make it even easier to find a specific picture in the collection. This includes using a series of letters to find pictures containing various subjects, or various blocks of years, or whether the picture is in black and white or colour.

For example, if you want to see if we have a picture of a horse in the market square, by making an enquiry with the appropriate letters, any pictures including these two subjects will be found, and it really works! Wonderful.

But, how did this transform from committee decisions to reality, and how far have we got so far. Well I am extremely pleased, and overwhelmed to be able to report, the project was started in June 2003. It is now only January 2004, and the project is complete.

How did we manage that you might ask? We do get volunteers in this society, and bless the members who do such splendid jobs for us. One such member on this occasion is Bill Lavender. Quite a whiz on the key board---of a computer. Starting in June, Bill and I visited the rooms weekly for about three months. When Bill got settled into the job, he came up with various improvements to our suggested system, making it even more user friendly. We progressed at a very steady pace, about two hours at a time was all you really wanted to do.

After two months or so, Bill did his sums, and worked out it was going to take about six years to complete this project, during which time we would still be adding to the collection. He decided to do the scanning work at home, and we would meet in the rooms every one or two weeks to down load, and for Bill to have more books. Still tweaking the system as he progressed, it was just before Christmas when Bill had the last lot of books. Into January, and completion before our members meeting. This enabled me to announce this marvellous feat.

Our archive collection of nearly six thousand photo's are all on just five discs, and the task completed in only about seven months. What an achievement. THANK YOU BILL.

George Howe, Chairman

Forthcoming Programme

- May 27th Bedfordshire Footpaths Ed Burnett**
The Liaison Officer of the Parish Paths Partnership explains his work in enabling local groups to develop footpath use
- Jun 24th Visit to Roxton**
7pm start via members cars
Members of the Roxton History Society will provide a tour of their village, including the church and thatched chapel. Note -- no meeting at the Community Centre
- Jul 22nd Potton Footpaths Walk Evening**
7.30pm start
An Outdoor evening to check some of our local footpaths. Display in Community Centre. Alternative footpaths programme if wet
- Aug 26th Schooldays in Potton Local Evening**
Material from our Archives and members memories will illustrate changes in local education over the last two hundred years
- Sep 23rd Music Making in Potton**
An evening devoted to some of the history of music and music groups in Potton. Watch for final details
- Oct 28th What People Had in There David Short**
Houses 1600-1700
The local history writer and researcher from Ashwell provides an insight into daily life in the times of the Stuarts and Cromwell

The Mystery Sign Up Gamgy Road - Part 2

Although the sign commemorating Alderman F W Braybrooks which I wrote about in our Autumn newsletter is no longer a mystery, after seeing it mentioned in an article in the Biggleswade Chronicle on 10th October 2003, I went along Gamgy Road, only to find it had disappeared. By talking to Richard Baker, our county councillor who was also mentioned in the article, this mystery was soon solved. He had removed the sign, and done a first class job of personally repairing and repainting it.

One morning in November Richard invited me to accompany him up Gamgy Road to photograph the replacing of the sign, now looking very nice, back in its original place. He also planted a few daffodil bulbs around it. If you go to Gamgy have a look on your left on the way, it looks very nice back in its original condition thanks to Richard Baker.

After the above mentioned article was in the Chronicle, I had a phone call from a Mr. Brian Bonfield from Great Barford, who a few years previously was told of a similar sign there. This one had unfortunately been broken by a grass flailing machine into several pieces. He, being a welder, repaired it and with the local council's knowledge, had it on the wall of his garage. I informed Richard Baker of this and he offered to paint this one as he had done the Potton sign. This was duly done, and once again I was invited to record this time the handing over ceremony. This sign was identical to that of Potton's, except it commemorated their Alderman J. Arnold Whitchurch JP, after whom, I believe, the Whitchurch ward in Bedford South Wing hospital is named.

We have been informed of two other places in Bedfordshire where these signs were erected in 1951, but it is not proven as yet. In view of this, I think we can be reasonably sure that commemorating various Aldermen around Bedfordshire by planting an avenue of trees, with a similar sign, was carried out during the Festival of Britain Year.

They say there is nothing new in this world. We think we have just found this sign up Gamgy Road in 2003. Well, something happened that broke the monotony for Bill Lavender whilst placing our archive collection onto disc during the time all this was taking place. What was it? He came across a quiz picture taken in about 1984 by Trevor Ball. Yes, you have guessed it. The very sign we thought we had just found for the very first time after all those years is in our quiz section. Still, it showed the difference in the paint left on it, after almost twenty years, and it certainly looks different now. So did I when Bill showed me the photo!

George Howe.

--oo00oo--

Archive Quiz – Dec 2003

Here are some of the questions. How many do you know?

1. What did Aelfhelm give to Ramsey Abbey in 960?
2. How many serfs were there in Potton in 1086?
4. Which Potton building was first mentioned in 1094?
7. How many houses were there in Potton in 1671?
8. Which preacher visited Potton in 1742?
9. What destroyed part of Potton in 1783?
10. Which family became Lords of Potton Manor in 1795?
12. Which new company lit up Potton in 1854?
13. What could be caught on Biggleswade road in 1862?
14. What did James Wagstaff buy in 1864?
15. What pleased most Potton parents in 1876?
17. What issued its first ticket in 1926?
18. Who gave land to help the unemployed in 1934?
19. Which year did the rebuilt Clock House open?
20. Which year did the new Fire Station open?

For answers turn to page 23

Sutton Pack Horse Bridge In My Lifetime

After reading our PHS Autumn newsletter I suppose there has always been an air of mystery surrounding the when, and why the bridge was built. We do however, as suggested in the article, have a little more knowledge of when it was built.

During 1986 the bridge went through extensive repairs to the foundations. The bed of the stream was excavated, and revealed four elm beams. These were placed across the stream for the bridge to be built on. Tests on these beams revealed a more accurate date of the mid-thirteenth century when the bridge was built.

At one time the bridge had a steeper hump, but the approaches have been built up over the years making this less steep now. The last known changes to the bridge before 1986 were around the 18th or early 19th Century.

As wool was an important commodity in medieval times and carried by pack horses in convoy, with everything having to be kept dry, I believe the bridge may have been built both for this reason, and the condition of the stream bed in those days. When I was a child I used to paddle in the ford. The bed of the stream towards Potton was clay, and further down stream, the other side of the ford was gravel, which when trodden on moved and gave me that feeling of sinking. The road through the ford was not built up road until around 1900. In the years before this, the road surface would not have been so solid. It would also have been more prone to high water levels through the ford. This must have been a problem for horse drawn carts in the latter years, as indeed it would have been for packhorses, in the mid thirteenth century, making reasons for a pack horse bridge.

Built of local ironstone, this bridge unlike many other packhorse bridges was never made wider to take the traffic of today, which still goes through the ford.

Christine Harper

Memories of Potton

There are some members of this Society who live far away from Potton, they have joined us mainly because they are seeking help in researching their family history. One lady wrote to me last year hoping to make contact with the Schwatz family, who lived at 16 King Street from around 1930 to when Nellie Schwatz died in 1981.

She wrote and said she was a regular visitor to Potton in the 1940's- 1950's and I asked her to send her memories of Potton at that time. This is what she recalls:-

Potton in those days was small and friendly with lots of green and open land. She remembers the old ford and would love a photograph (this has been sent to her, together with others of King Street). She recollects the old playing field with its smelly barn which she now knows was the tanning shed, the 'Hollies' and the two girls who lived there -- Nat and Billy -- and the great times with their pony; milking their goat, or trying to; long walks with her Aunt Nell; the old Shambles where they used to hang out; going to chapel on a Sunday. She recalls the walk up the Causeway to the Church on the hill; her Aunt's house known as the 'Red House'.

She continues by saying *Potton was a child's delight and she used to come every year. But how it has changed, but not for the better. They were able to cycle wherever and the only car she knew was the one that belonged to the Hollies.*

She has asked me to try and find someone who remembers her Aunt Nellie Swatz and her Uncle Carl, who made umbrellas for a living and asked if anyone knew of his place of work. He died in 1941. I was fortunate recently to come across a photograph showing her Aunt which, together with one of King Street and Sutton Bridge, I sent to her and she wrote she was thrilled to receive these photographs.

If anyone remembers this family can they please get in touch with me and I will forward any information on to this lady.

Jean McLennan

The Coach Trip

It was mid-summer in Potton and a local coach company had advertised a day trip to the seaside, the destination Yarmouth. A popular day trip with plenty to do for everyone. Although not being an organised party trip it still attracted nearly a full coach load.

With only an odd seat vacant here and there the coach set off from the Market Square for Yarmouth. The weather looked promising and in any event all were intent on making the most of their chosen day out. The journey down to the coast was uneventful and on arrival Bill, the coach driver, told the day trippers to be back at the coach station by 6.30, he bid them cheerio and have a good day and off they all went.

Mums and dads with their children headed for the sun drenched beach and some for the funfair. Others seeking out bargains in the shops and a few headed for Yarmouth race course. The weather was just perfect and all would benefit from the good bracing sea air. But, as ever, all good things come to an end and slowly the weary day trippers returned to the coach station for their journey home.

Bill was already in his driving seat with a word of welcome as everyone boarded the coach. Harry and Jack had been to the races and took their front seats near the entrance, they obviously had a good day out, their luck showed on their faces. A helping hand for the unsteady and the weary was readily available from that jolly pair. Bill got up from the driving seat and said to Harry "Got to spend a penny, won't be a tick the we'll be on our way."

As Bill returned Jack looked round at the passengers, some were sitting in their original seats and others had changed places. "All here?" said Bill. "Not quite sure" replied Jack. "Well I'll give any latecomers a few more minutes then we'll be on our way" said Bill as he took his seat again. Bill started the engine and as he pulled away from the coach station he said "Keep your eyes peeled, just in case there's a latecomer - you never know!" then he headed for the Norwich road.

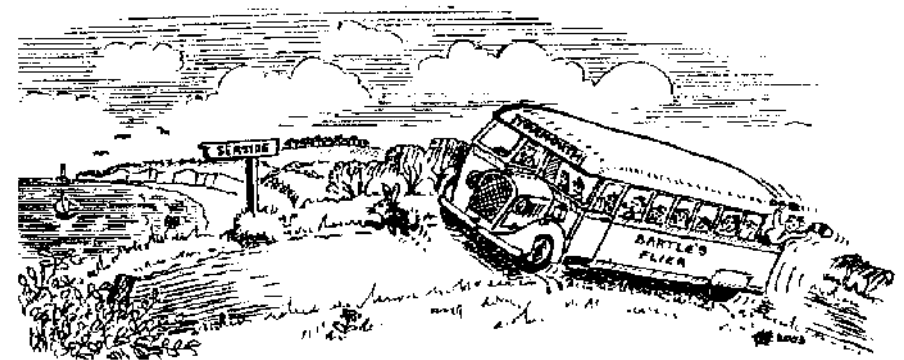
Just then who should Jack see walking unsteadily towards the coach station was Charlie. "Stop" cried Jack, "there's Charlie". Bill pulled to the side and stopped the coach, saying "Right you two, nip

out and help him on board". They were soon helping Charlie, a bit of a loner, up the steps of the coach. "Come on Charlie, we'll soon have you home safe and sound" said Jack. "Ta ever so" mumbled Charlie, slightly the worse for drink. Bill laughed "That was a close shave" as they guided Charlie to a vacant seat at the back of the coach.

Off went the coach again. "He's certainly enjoyed his day out" said Bill knowingly, "hope he gives us no trouble". Harry replied "Don't worry about Charlie, he's most amiable, especially when he's had a drink or two". He glanced at Charlie who had settled back in his seat and was beginning to nod off. Harry and Jack grinned at one another as they too sat back to enjoy the drive home.

Arriving back at the Market Square in Potton, weary but happy, the day trippers bid goodnight then headed for home. To Jack and Harry befell the not too difficult task of guiding Charlie safely home. He didn't live too far from the square so it was no trouble for the two punters, it was not the first time they had seen 'Charlie the loner' home. "Here we are" said Jack as he knocked on Charlie's front door. When Charlie's daughter Edna opened the door she just stood there, mouth open wide, shock, amazement and disbelief all flitted across her face. Harry hurriedly assured her, "It's OK, Charlie's alright, he's had a few but he's home safe and sound". Edna blurted out "I can see he's OK - but what have you brought him home for? He's supposed to be on holiday in Yarmouth! He only left this morning!"

Retold by K G Lawrence



Michaelmas Labour Fairs

I was recently reading an article on Hiring Fairs which brought back memories of tales my Grandfather told of these fairs which were held at the end of the harvest around about 29th September on Michaelmas. In some parts of the country they are known as mops or hiring fairs, statute fairs or 'statty fairs'.

From the mid 1300s, farm labourers had been able to hire themselves out, but it was several decades later that they were given any sort of protection against unscrupulous farmers. Local Justices would meet and agree upon new rates of pay and terms of working conditions each Michaelmas and once these were agreed the farm labourers would present themselves in the nearest market town for hire.

Male and female workers presented themselves for hire and indicated the type of work they did by carrying an appropriate tool of their trade. Dressed in their best they would stand around whilst the farmers and their wives would walk up and down inspecting those waiting to be hired. The labourers would also inspect the farmers and often information was passed from one to the other of those waiting to be hired about the conditions of working for a particular family. Once they had been chosen a coin would be handed over known as a 'fastening penny' which more or less meant there was no going back, although some would take advantage of such an arrangement and go and offer themselves for hire elsewhere.

By the end of the 19th century, workers began to want more freedom, a chance to move on to another job after a matter of weeks rather than months and the hiring fairs began to lose popularity. Very few survived long into the 1900s in their traditional style.

Jean McLennan

The Statute fair was one of four fairs held annually in Potton through the centuries. It is not known when the last one was held. Post Office Directories of 1847 and 1854 record statute fairs held in the autumn months whilst Kelly's Directory for 1898 records that a fair was held but "*the custom is in decline*".

The Potton Journal of Saturday September 23rd 1871 gives us the following:

The Michaelmas Statute Fair was held on Monday last as customary. There was little or no hiring done, those changing their servants and servants changing places preferring to advertise in local papers for the supply of their wants rather than resorting to the old fashioned and very questionable practice of lagging (apprehending) in the streets to do their business. The statutes is confused in our minds with fairs for cattle. The lower animals certainly have the best of it. If they gain no new owner they are willingly received again by their late masters

In 1950 enquiries made to Mr Chapman, Clerk to the Parish Council at that time, drew the response:

The Horse Fair had lapsed and the Hiring Fair was for pleasure only but was often missed due to lack of site.

Local historian, H A Campling, in his 1950's article "Potton Past and Present" tells us:

Even the last fair to linger on, the State Fair, has now died out.

J.M.

Given the success of recent celebrations in the town, wouldn't it be wonderful if at least one annual fair could be re-established. *Ed.*

Two Peters of Potton

Those of you with a complete set of Society Newsletters might remember the revelation in Newsletter No.4 in 1983, that there was another Potton on this planet! Mrs Yates had been passed an enquiry from Mr Eberdt, of the Communications Hall of Fame, Sutton, Quebec, who was contemplating a study trip to England. Contact between the two Potton's was sporadic until Peter Downman and myself set up an e-mail link in late 2002 resulting in the exchange of material.

In early October 2003 Peter Downman visited family relations in East Anglia and spent a day in Potton before returning home. Mrs Yates and Chris Miles helped me in giving him an insight into our area and the Society. The Society archives now have a photograph of two Peter's of Potton by our 1951 town sign! I hope to include a little information about Potton, Canada in forthcoming newsletters. The following is from a publicity leaflet:-

Potton is known for its beautiful, seasonally changing panorama, including a prominent range of mountains (the most famous being Owl's Head) that borders the peaceful Missisquoi valley. Streams, brooks, the meandering Missisquoi River and clear waters of Lake Memphremagog add to its splendour as do large tracts of wilderness including a major Eastern Canadian hardwood stand.

Potton winters deserve to be enjoyed! Down hill, cross country, on rinks and frozen ponds, on sleds and snow shoes, fishing on Lake Memphremagog! Or on foot wherever the spirit takes! In February the town celebrates winter with the Optimists Club 10 day or more long carnival including a variety of activities, a community-sponsored supper and two days of cribbage tournaments.

Spring arrives in Potton with the return of migrating birds, the stirrings of hibernating animals, new plant growth and swollen rivers and brooks racing by noisily. As well sugar bushes come alive, woodcutters rush their last logs out before the spring thaw, spring skiers enjoy their last runs, and the outdoors becomes home to cattle happily returning (at last!) to their fields.

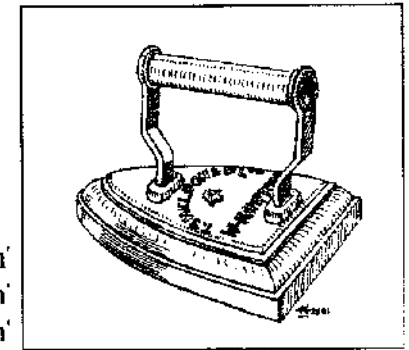
Peter Ibbett

The Smoothing Iron

The 'Smoothing Iron' illustrated measures only 5¼ inches from toe to heel - it was approximately 4 inches shorter than the modern day 'Rowenta' electric iron. It was made of solid metal and weighed in at about 4lbs whereas the 'Rowenta' only tips the scale at 2¼lbs. I believe the raised letters 'W-HAMPTON' is short for Wolverhampton.

I recall the following lines we used to sing at school. I believe there were other verses and maybe someone can recall the whole song?

'Twas on a Monday morning
When I beheld my darling
She looked so neat and charming
In every high degree.
She looked so neat and nimble-o'
A washing of her linen-o'
Dashing away with a 'Smoothing Iron'
Dashing away with a 'Smoothing Iron'
Dashing away with a 'Smoothing Iron'
She stole my heart away.



I recall my mother using this style of iron with which to do the regular weeks ironing for my five sisters, my brother and I. Two irons were used, one to work with whilst the other was heating up on the kitchen range. No thermostat for those irons, it was experience gained over hours of ironing that was the key to a job well done, iron shaped scorch marks were avoided at all costs. A thick cloth was needed to wrap round the hot metal handle and extra care had to be taken to wipe the ironing face clean of any smuts from the coal fire before starting to iron the clothes.

I think back in amazement that my Mum, bless her, was able to cope every week with the mass of clothes that she had to deal with and all after the hand washing and wringing - no washing or spinning machines in those days.

Keith Lawrence

A Winter's Tale

I had occasion recently to read some reports from the Bedfordshire Times which are held in our archives. This particular article dated January 1879 is reprinted to indicate the drastic effects of bad weather in December 1878/January 1879.

The severe weather that has prevailed for the last six weeks has caused a large amount of distress in this district. It is estimated that in this town there are upwards of a hundred labourers out of employment and great poverty exists. It is painful to see so many strong able bodied men lounging about at the street corners waiting for employment which it will be impossible for them to find until there is a great change in the weather. Field work is almost entirely suspended and gardeners and farmers are employing men at a daily loss. Should there be a continuance of the present frost, it is feared that many who do not now actually want for food will do so. No steps have been taken to relieve the distress in anything like a systematic manner, but one gentleman, Mr W Peters, has started a soup kitchen and has also given away some hundreds of pounds of meat, chiefly amongst the widows of the town and the families who are usually in his employ. But it is hardly to be expected that one individual alone can bear the expense of anything like an adequate supply for all the poor. Contributions would be forthcoming, but no one seems to take the lead in the matter. In other severe seasons concerts and other entertainments have been got up, and the proceeds devoted to alleviating distress, but since the Church of England Temperance Society has obtained a footing here the funds require so often replenishing, that the balance remaining in hand from the late entertainments was handed to this society for the benefit of their Reading Room, to the annoyance of some who took part in the entertainment and who considered the funds had better have been devoted to charity.

The severity of the weather has shown its effects upon the health of the old people and a study of the register of deaths for Potton district shows that since November fourteen old people have died whose united ages amount to 1106 years, or an average of 83 years each. This speaks well for the longevity of the district.

The frost has also made great ravages amongst the small birds, hundreds of blackbirds, thrushes and other kinds of song birds being seen dead in the fields and hedgerows.

JANUARY 1879 – SOUP DISTRIBUTION

We are glad to announce that during the past fortnight a very welcome distribution of soup to those who have been reduced to straightened circumstances by the severe weather has taken place. Subscriptions for the purpose were generally and generously given and the Market Gardeners of the neighbourhood liberally contributed vegetables.

Jean McLennan

From the Beds Times 16th February 1889

The fall of snow which occurred on Sunday night was the heaviest since last February, it being about a foot in depth. On Monday morning Mr Richardson, the energetic waywarden, had the snow plough at an earlier hour than has ever previously been known, and by breakfast time the approaches to the town and the principal streets were passable. It is to be hoped that the snow will not be allowed to remain in huge banks by the sides of the pathways, as it was for weeks last year, to thaw and injure the streets. There are plenty of labourers standing idle, and the waywarden knows from past experience that he will be supported in all he does by the ratepayers. The traffic on the railway was not delayed. Two powerful engines cleared the down line from Bletchley to Cambridge, and brought the first up train to the advertised time to the minute.

If only bricks could talk!

The Life and Times of a Potton shop- Part 5.

From sack carrying to bicycle making.

'Just going down to Tysoe's' has been a familiar statement in Potton for over 120 years. George Tysoe died in 1915 yet if he were able to revisit the town today he would recognise a great deal about his former home, in which I was born and grew up.

George Tysoe was a familiar face in Victorian and Edwardian Potton and, according to an obituary, had been connected with the ironmongery on the market square since the age of 12. It would appear that he worked his way up from the shop floor to eventually owning the shop and its site. He had been born in Bedford as George Tyso on the 1st May 1822, the son of Henry, a labourer, and Charlotte Emery. His journey through parish and census records is a lesson to all those who assume that the spelling of an individual's name remains unchanged!

In July 1847 the Potton parish register records the marriage of George Tiso to Sarah Theobalds. By 1851 the census records that George Tison, age 27, was a porter living at the top of Bull Street in Potton. He was most probably a market square porter moving goods to and fro around the town. One recollection of George was of a tall and strong man who would happily take a bet from you that he could beat you in a sack carrying race!

By 1861 George Tico, porter, and his dressmaker wife, Sarah, were living in Ostler Street with 4 daughters and a young son, Henry. In 1871 George Tysoe is listed as an ironmonger's assistant living in Horslow Street. Ostler Street and Horslow Street are the same street showing how local pronunciation caused problems before the erection of street signs! After living in Station Road in 1881 as an ironmonger, George is finally listed in 1891 as living in the building which carried his name into the 21st century.

A picture of the shop, taken around 1905, shows a building which has changed little since the era of the horse and cart. Two large external gas lights illuminate the shop window using gas provided by the Potton Gas and Coke Company. The sign over the shop proudly advertises G. Tysoe and Son, Ironmongers, as agricultural implement agents and manufacturers of the Warrior cycles. To support this the window shows several bicycles. Their sale would have provided George with useful income from the latest craze. Mr Leslie Carter, in 1985, recollected that

'Tysoe the Ironmonger built cycles from scratch in the early 1900's and passed the business to William Perry by 1914. We used to build cycles from the raw. The tubes came in and we cut them up into lengths, built the frame and then we had a big iron cabinet in which we painted the frames and then they were stoved in enamel by high flame gas. The rims just came in with the hubs and the spokes. We used to assemble the wheels, fit them together, trim them and build the bicycle.'

This would undoubtedly have been how George and Henry produced their bicycles in a workshop which still exists behind the shop. A newly discovered ledger, starting in the 1890's, gives details of the prices at that time:-

Mr Blundell,	1 Ladies Eagle bicycle	£12	10s	0d
1897	1 Gents type 7	£12	10s	0d
	2 bicycle lamps		8s	0d
	1 bell		2s	0d
	1 bag		1s	4d
	Saddle pad		1s	6d
Total		£25	12s	10d

The ledger shows regular entries for accessories and repairs. An advert shows some of the prices later in the first decade of the twentieth century.