

POTTON

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HISTORY SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

Surrey

(with illustrations)

J. W. S. C. R. V.

Male of Kelling in the  
County of Northampton.  
who departed this life

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NO. 1

AUTUMN 1980

## THE FIRST NEWSLETTER

On the 13th October 1977 a meeting was held in the Old Fire Station to consider the formation of a Potton History Society. The meeting elected a committee which was given the task of organising the society. In the three years since then the society has taken firm root and developed in ways which the original committee members did not anticipate!

We plan to produce three newsletters over the next year. Their aim will be to keep members fully in touch with society activities and also to provide a means of sharing information about the past history of Potton.

We shall be glad to receive members opinions and comments on this new venture as well as any items they would like published.

Peter Ibbett

## OUR COVER

### Stone 256.

The Gravestone Survey of Potton Church Yard continues. The aim is to record the details of all the stones (nearly 500!) by the end of this year. Mr Howe and his family have pegged all the stones for easy identification. Society members have each been allocated an area of the grave yard to cover. Please help us by completing your section.

The inscription on each stone is to be recorded as accurately as possible. Our cover shows the type of detail required from stone 256 of our survey. The inscription probably reads:-

SACRED to the Memory of JAMES GRAY late of  
Kettering in the county of Northampton who  
departed this Life May 6th 1820 Aged 35 Years

## P I C T O R I A L P O T T O N

On visiting our recent exhibition, newcomers expressed surprise at the quantity of material which had been amassed during the three years of our Society's existence. Originally a side issue, the collecting of photographs has become an all-absorbing and fascinating task. Fortunately, among the Society's members are two keen photographers, Mr. and Mrs. N. Parry, who have devoted much time in copying photographs for our mutual benefit.

Many local events were photographed by G. B. Symonds at the turn of the century. His son J. H. Symonds, who lost his life in the First World War, is reputed to have been a bird photographer of great promise, his work appearing in 'Country Life'. If only the photographic plates of these two Pottonians were now available what a unique collection of photographs could be made!

An article found in the church chest refers to a photograph of the Manor House 'which was in existence as recent as 15 years ago. As the present 'Manor House' was completed about 1870, the photograph referred to is of early origin. Similarly, the storm of 1879 created such havoc that 'photographers were busy photographing the spot'. Where are these now?

The picture postcard was an ideal way of communicating with friends and relations who had left the town and some have returned for copying from far afield. Trooper S. Jakes serving in South Africa in 1905 received a view of loaded carts outside Potton station and was told 'we are busy in Potato Season, usual scene near Potton Station at night'.

Unfortunately, only one Horse Fair picture is known. An early view of the Fire Station appearing minutely on a souvenir card has yet to be traced in the larger version.

There are many gaps in the Potton Collection, yet a 'snap' of the family may reveal a background worthy of inclusion. We appeal to all Pottonians, therefore, to make a search. The family album may contain the record of an event worthy to be copied for posterity!

Patricia R Yates. Secretary.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

A full programme of monthly meetings is organised by the Society. At the time of writing speakers have been booked up to November 1981! The full programme will be available to members in their membership card which will be issued after the A.G.M.

Meetings to take place in the next few months:-

### October 23rd. DEATH ON THE A.I. Miss Patricia Bell

We welcome back the county Archivist to the Society. Miss Bell has been looking into social life in East Bedfordshire and has uncovered information about deaths in the region of the Great North Road.

### November 27th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

TRADERS TOKENS      Mr.D.J.Gaunt

Please make an effort to be present at 7.30 for our A.G.M.

After the A.G.M. Mr.Gaunt from Bedford will talk about Traders Tokens in 17th century Bedfordshire. These perhaps anticipated our credit card system!

### December 11th/13th. FILM SHOW      Mr T Ball.

Our third film show. We hope to show a mixture of old and new items from our growing film archive. Full details to be announced.

### January 22nd      BEDFORDSHIRE RAILWAYS      MrD.J.Cadman.

A return visit from Mr Cadman who gave us a talk on Railways two years ago. In his illustrated talk he will look at the county railway scene past and present.

Support your society! We provide an excellent programme for members subscriptions. Visitors are always welcome.

Peter Ibbett Programme Sec.

DAVIES THE DRAPER

Take a look at the following details from the 1671 census return for Potton.

BENJAMIN J DAVIES        Draper        Age 37  
                                    Born Neubuth, Pembroke.

Wife:- Janet, age 36, born Poplar, London.

Family:-

Arundel	Age 13	Born Poplar, London
Richard	Age 11	Born Poplar, London
Walter	Age 9	Born Forest Gate, Essex
Piercey	Age 7	Born Arundel, Sussex
Montague	Age 3	Born Potton, Beds
Albert	Age 2	Born Gamlingay, Cambs
Claude	Age 1	Born Potton, Beds.

Servant:- Susan Story, Age 15, born Tempsford.

I came across this interesting family whilst working on my Project to trace the changes on the Market Square in the last 150 years. Through the generosity of the Potton Charities the History Society had been able to purchase copies of the census returns of Potton for 1851, 61 and 71. These give the above detail for every family in Potton at the time of the census.

Let your mind dwell, as mine did, on the bare details given in the census return. Some intriguing questions come to mind, one or two of which were answered for me at a recent meeting of the Potton History Society.

It is not difficult to let ones imagination wander from dusty facts to wondering about the real family that they conceal.

A visitor to the Market Square of 1871 would have moved through a tide of East Bedfordshire conversation as they moved from shop to shop. The speech of shopkeepers such as Charles Tebbutt, James F Judd, William Housden, Thomas Judge, Joseph Edwards, William Masters and Richard Richardson would have reflected their Potton birth.

But perhaps there was a corner of the Square (probably at number 4 or 5) where the visitor would have a change from the local dialect. A conversation with Davies the Draper might well have involved a change to a Welsh wavelength.

Visitors to the shop may have had to switch between a strong Welsh accent to a distinctive London variant of the English language in moving from the owner to his wife.

Or maybe imagination goes too far and Benjamin had moved from Wales at an early age and had no real Welsh accent! Whatever the truth the well travelled family must have brought a distinctive touch to their corner of the Square.

What should cause Benjamin Davies to be in Potton? Alas the carefully handwritten script from 109 years ago cannot help us. But it can tell us something of the route he took in coming to Potton.

One may guess that Benjamin found his way to London where he might have worked in the Drapery Trade and eventually set up on his own. He has married a London girl when about 23 so he was perhaps not too rash a person!

The place of birth of his surviving children ( would he have been lucky enough not to have lost any? ) shows his wanderings in coming to Potton.

It is the variation in place of birth which is one of the interesting points about the children of Benjamin Davies. This variation could be a real problem to a family which fell on hard times and had to go 'on the Parish' for Poor Law relief. People were chargeable to their Parish of Birth and any children to their place of birth. Families were split up by this law and dispatched to their respective places of birth. One hopes that Benjamin never fell on hard times.

It is a common assumption that people did not move very much until the arrival of the car and modern transport. However by 1870 the Railway Age was in full swing and the line through Potton must have increased the movement of families in and out of the Parish. It would seem that Benjamin and his family made full use of the latest technology of their day.

Perhaps Benjamin was simply a wanderer for he only appears in the Trade Directories for Potton in 1869 and 1871. By the next directory of 1876 his name has gone.

The point that puzzled me most as I looked at the carefully handwritten script from 109 years ago was the names given to the children.

Arundel is not a common name and probably was not in 1858 when he was born but it is not a strange one. Nor are Richard and Walter.

But what caused Benjamin and Janet Davies to name their next two sons Piercey and Montague?

Piercey for the son of a draper? One only hopes that their fourth son did not suffer too much in later life!

And what is the importance of Arundel to the family? They named their first son after the town and had their fourth son born there!

Something of interest lies hidden here which imagination finds it difficult to uncover. I thought about this strange Arundel problem but could find no simple answer apart from some family connection with the Sussex town.

In March when I contributed an imaginary walk around the Square of 1871 to a Society meeting I paused at Davies the Draper and mused aloud about some of the points above.

Later, during our tea and biscuits break a member of the audience introduced herself to me and told me that she thought that she had the answer to my Arundel problem. Her explanation was very simple and I am certain as near to the truth as we are likely to get.

My lady visitor had worked 'in service' in her youth in London. This gave her the necessary insight to the problem.

She was certain that Janet Davies was a servant in the London house of an important Arundel family. It apparently was a habit of some servants to name their children after members of the family that they worked for. It would seem not unlikely that Janet was transferred to her masters main home at Arundel or used her connections with the Family to stay at Arundel for a time.

So Arundel, Piercey and Montague are perhaps not such a mystery after all. One wonders if the people of Potton had some extra gossip material about the Davies Family!

Interesting that a chance visitor to the society should be able to contribute to our knowledge of some of the people who have made up the past in Potton.

Peter Ibbett



## FROM THE CHAIR

Over the last few years there has been a move away from the traditional concept of history. Many of us remember our school history only as long series of dates, Kings and battles. Nowadays the emphasis, both in research and teaching, is on the way of life of all branches of society.

Much of the change stems from the more scientific approach to archaeology made necessary by the need to extract the maximum amount of information from a site before it disappears for ever beneath a motorway or housing estate. Organisations such as Rescue and the B.B.C. with its 'Chronicle' programme have done much to arouse the interest of everyone in the events and people who make up our past.

At the same time many of us feel that the modern world treats us all as mere cyphers or numbers stored away in an impersonal computer and we wish to establish ourselves as people with a history and a background. This I believe is the main reason for the growing interest in all aspects of local history.

A Society such as ours in its efforts to build up a picture of the past is adding its little bit to the knowledge of how people lived not only in this area but in countless communities of a similar nature.

Maybe we will come across a few 'Black Sheep' in our past but they have always been with us and will always be. So let us continue to record what we find and what we do for the benefit of ourselves and those who follow us.

Norman Parry      Chairman

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

To be held on Thursday November 27th 1980  
at 7.30pm Community Centre, Potton.

To be followed by 'Traders Tokens in 17th  
Century Bedfordshire ' by Mr.D.J.Gaunt.

This will be the third A.G.M. of the Society. The work that the committee do is largely behind the scenes. A typical committee meeting starts at 7.30 and lasts until at least 9.30. There are at least 11 monthly meetings a year. In other words committee members give one day of their year to sitting down and talking about the Society and its affairs!

It is to be hoped that as many members as possible will attend the A.G.M. if only to show their appreciation for the work that the present committee has done during the year.

Apart from the normal items of an A.G.M. the present committee will submit a revised constitution and proposals for a change in the present level of members subscriptions.

Please support your society by attending the A.G.M

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NOMINATION PAPER FOR MEMBERS.

I hereby nominate .....  
for the committee of the Potton History Society.

Proposer :- .....

Secunder :- .....

Return to Mrs Yates, 31A Royston Street, Potton.

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\*\*\* SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE FROM NOVEMBER 1980 \*\*\*

## Q U E R I E S

### Where did the name 'Potton' come from?

'Amongst several explanations of the name of Potton the most acceptable appears to be either 'farm where clay pots are made' or 'farm in hollow or valley'.

There is no other such place name in England.

The earliest mention of Potton is in a document dated 960 A.D. concerned with a gift of land to Ramsey Abbey.'

Extract from the leaflet 'Potton, Bedfordshire' by Mrs Patricia R Yates.

If you have a question about Potton that we may be able to answer please send it to 'Newsletter' c/o Mrs Yates, 31A Royston Street, Potton or mention it to any committee member.

## C A N Y O U H E L P ?

We are always on the lookout for further information about Potton. We are able to copy photographs and return the originals to their owners. Two members would welcome additional material:-

Market Square. Peter Ibbett is compiling a file on the shops of the square from 1823 on. If you have any memories, invoices or materials from Square shops before 1960 Peter would be very pleased to hear of them.

Film Archive. Trevor Ball is compiling a film archive for the society. This includes film shot now which will become a record of Potton Life in 1980. He would be interested in any old film of Potton even if it is family film with Potton scenes. He would also be interested in any scenes which are worth filming as a record for the future.

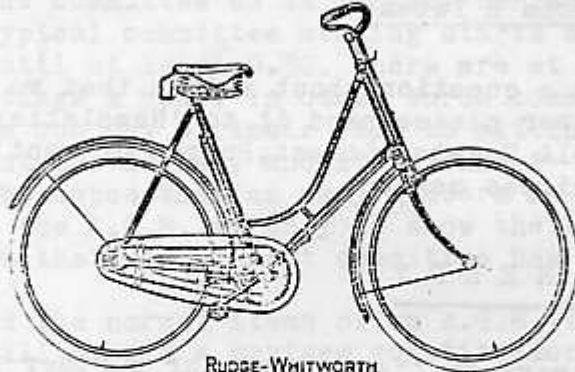
Please help us by passing on any information that could be of interest to us.

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