

# Potton History Society



Potton Manor

Newsletter Number 13    Spring 1994

### **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
Newsletter Editors .....	Mr & Mrs Leigh

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

Mr G. Howe ... Potton 260935

Mrs P. Yates ... Potton 260328

### **Acknowledgements:-**

Thanks to Mrs Matthews for allowing us to use her drawing of Potton Manor, featured on the front cover.

Our 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 the **AGM** in **November** our chairman of sixteen years Mr Norman Parry retired. Archive Secretary, Mrs Patricia Yates, also chose to take a break from her duties on the committee, having served, like Mr Parry, since the inauguration of the Society. Although the loss of two such long-standing committee members will inevitably be sorely felt, we are fortunate that both are continuing to do a great deal of work in the background.

Mr George Howe was unanimously elected as the new chairman.

Following the AGM, George was again in the limelight when he assisted Peter Ibbett in telling the story of the Potton Fire Service and its changing role in the local community.

In **December** we were entertained by Ken Page from Biggleswade History Society. We were treated to some excellent slides of bygone Biggleswade, together with a commentary which brought each picture to life and demonstrated Ken's enormous depth of knowledge about his home town.

At our **January** meeting, Peter Ibbett was back on the trail of the B1040, this time revealing some of the fascinating information about turnpike roads which came to light when he was planning last summer's coach trip. He traced the rise and fall of the turnpike from the first Act of Parliament to its final decline with the coming of the railways.

In **February**, with the help of Mike Horgan, we were transported back through the mists of time, looking at the evidence on the ground of the very earliest inhabitants of the county, from the ring ditches of the bronze age through to the mounds and ditches left by middle-age settlers. Much of the

information researched by Mr Horgan is to be included in a book on the archaeological sites of Great Britain which will be published later this year.

At the **March** meeting, Peter Walker brought with him an ancient ciné-projector which was a talking point in its own right. His object, however was to show films which he had taken during the 1950's of the activities of Potton Scout Troops. Mr Walker also brought some of his large collection of scouting memorabilia for us to look at, which, together with the many memories he shared with us, provided a fascinating evening.

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### Research Rooms

The Society has been offered the use of premises in Biggleswade Road to replace our existing rooms which must be vacated in the near future. As soon as a separate electricity meter has been installed we shall be looking for volunteers to assist in preparatory work in the new area and eventually to assist with the removal of our collection.

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### Local Government Review

A great deal of information has been received regarding the various options which are being suggested for Bedfordshire. The committee felt that the features of local government which most concerned the Society would be the continuing existence and growth of the County Record Office and the County Planning Department. It was therefore decided to write to the Commission in support of a single unitary authority for Bedfordshire, in order that these important services should not be fragmented or suffer from lack of funding.

## Forthcoming Programme

### May 26th On Foot in Potton

Investigating the footpaths and boundaries of the parish.

\* Note 7.30pm start.

### Jun 30th 900 years of Potton Church

Viewing the Society's photographic exhibition in the church and checking on the graveyard survey made 10 years ago.

### Jul 28th The Parish of Hilton

**Jack Dady**

A chance to learn more about one of the villages visited as part of our coach trip along the B1040 last year.

### Aug 25th Local evening

A look at what is going on in the Society.

### Sep 22nd Crowland and its Abbey

Find out about this Fenland town and its ancient abbey in a presentation given by Crowland Town Society

### Sep 26th The B1040 to Crowland

**Coach trip**

Watch for details of this Historical Day Trip, a follow up to last year's visit to Ramsay.

### Oct 27th Cockayne Hatley

**Tony Crossley**

Although only a tiny hamlet, Cockayne Hatley has a long and interesting history.

### Nov 24th The Ivel Valley Project

**Joel Carré**

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

\*Note 7.30pm start.

### Dec 8th Historical Quiz Evening

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

## Bedfordshire Local History Association News

An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 22nd January 1994 to consider the clarifications to the constitution. Regrettably, insufficient members were present to form the quorum required for the formal voting procedures to be carried out. The executive committee proposes to place the modified constitution before the AGM in May for ratification.

The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on 21st May 1994, 2.00pm at Chicksands Priory. It will be followed with a talk by Dr. Margaret Bonney, Editor of the Local Historian, the journal of the British Association for Local History. The talk will be entitled "Writing and Publication of Local History in the 1990's". It is hoped that there will be an opportunity for those attending to have a look round the Priory.

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## Potton Library

Potton library recently took a step into the twentieth century when it was linked into Bedfordshire's computerised library service. This should mean that books held in other libraries in the county are much more readily accessible to local readers. An open afternoon was held to celebrate the occasion and, using material taken mainly from the Society's Archives, a display was set up on the history of the Clock House. This building has housed Potton's library since it was rebuilt in 1956.

The Society has a small permanent photographic exhibition in the library which is managed by Jack Hutchinson and which he changes on a regular basis. By maintaining this display we hope to stimulate an interest in Potton's history among local people. We would be pleased to receive members comments and suggestions regarding topics for inclusion.

Since I last wrote for the Society's Newsletter (Summer 1991), all has been quiet, except for the sale of Manor books, which still surprises me and delights the treasurer! (Have you bought your copy?).

On the death of Miss Emilie Smith in December 1991, Mr F W Jakes was given a pair of paintings from her estate which showed two views of the old Manor house. We knew of its existence and had tentatively located its position (see Manor Book, pages 17 & 18). Now, with these pictures, we can positively identify the site (4, Everton Road) and its appearance, confirming a sales document in the Society's collection.

Not until the middle of 1993 did anything further happen but when it did it was full of surprises. In July I had a request from the High Green Society in Sheffield for the loan of pictures of Otto von Smekal, Madame Eva Pokorova and their work in Sheffield, as Newton Chambers, the firm they worked for before coming to Potton, was celebrating its centenary. Pictures were sent for their exhibition and we hoped people might recall Smekal. One man remembered making pipe work for him whilst others remembered him but could not recall anything in particular.

The next surprise occurred in August when Madame Pokorova's nephew visited Potton to view her grave. Unfortunately I did not learn of this at the time so a valuable opportunity was missed to find out about Pokorova's background and of Smekal's work in Czechoslovakia. We still remain in the dark, but a Manor Book was purchased so perhaps this may provoke comment!

Later that month Mrs Yates had a surprise visit from Frederick Gouldthorpe-Smith's granddaughter, whose father had lived at Potton Manor. Mrs Anthea Cox has sent some very interesting copies of photographs of the family at the Manor and also a letter detailing family history. (see next article)

However, as is always the case, more questions were raised and to this end I again wrote to the High Green Society, asking for their help in tracing Gouldthorpe-Smith through Sheffield Trade Directories, as he had described himself as an Automobile Specialist. A recent reply revealed the following confusing facts in White's Directory of 1903 where Gouldthorpe-Smith is listed as a car dealer at 138 Devonshire Street whilst living at 420 Glossop Road. He does not appear at No 138 in 1905 but in 1907 is still living in Glossop Road. Also listed in 1908 at No 420 is a Sydney Smith (son Sydney is only 11 at this time). In 1910 there is no entry but we know that by this time he was living in Potton. The area today is a park as it was bombed during the war but the High Green Society are going to look in the library for old photographs of Devonshire Street to see if his car dealing premises are shown. We await developments!

On moving into Judith Gardens this year, Mrs Mollie Westlake sent a copy of the Manor book to a friend, Mr K Tudor. In his reply to Mrs Westlake he recalled visiting Potton with Smekal and Pokorova when they were about to purchase the Manor. Mr Tudor commented that he found Smekal secretive about his work and his reason for buying the property! It was a surprise to find he was a partner in the firm of Kershaw Tudor, to whom I had already written after finding the address in Smekal's papers. We hope Mr Tudor may remember more of his visit.

It has really been amazing that these events have occurred ( and together ) after such a long time. Many more questions have been raised, some answered, but no doubt time will give us a few more "Bits" of the fascinating saga - can you help?

T C M Ball

**NB.** Due to the generosity of Potton Timber Company, who financed the printing of "Potton Manor - an Enigma", Potton History Society has received £1039.00 from sales.

*As mentioned in the previous article, Anthea Cox, nee Leigh-Smith, visited Potton in the summer. Extracts from her letter dated 10th October 1993 follow:*

Ethel Mary Leigh, born in 1871 in West Leeds, married Frederick Gouldthorpe-Smith who originally came from Sheffield. He had been a stockbrokers clerk to either his father's or his grandfather's firm. Ethel's brother became three times Lord Mayor of Leeds and another brother was believed to be connected with dentistry. The couple had a son Sydney Larome Gouldthorpe-Smith, in 1897, who in fact was my father! They loved to travel in Europe, and liked Italy and Switzerland in particular. They visited Bournemouth a great deal, as the pine-scented air was considered very good for the health. When Frederick's grandfather or father died, he inherited a great deal of money and may also have benefited from relatives in America, by the name of Larome.

My father remembered being at Manor Park, and used to tell me a few stories about his childhood there. He had a private tutor, who was taken on to educate Sydney ready to enter the clergy, join the forces, or perhaps teaching. The family entertained a great deal, and on one occasion Lewis Carroll came to the house. Art and music interested the family and Frederick was apparently the initiator of a music festival in Suffolk which is still in existence today. On some occasions Sydney was sent to Switzerland for tutoring. He remembered getting into lots of trouble on two occasions in particular. He ate his father's huge prize peach, grown especially for some important show, that had taken months of special care to grow and was his fathers pride and joy. Another time, he was left on his own at dinner with the butler in attendance. He decided to order him to leave and was scolded for being so cheeky. Frederick loved cars but it was just an expensive hobby. They were all the rage at the time.

He owned a Daroc, one of the very first cars. The number plate apparently tells you that it was only the 26th car made.

Horticulture was another hobby and apparently craftsmen from Italy were brought over specially to design a marble fountain in the conservatory. When the war started in 1914, Sydney was so keen to join up that he ran off to do just that, but was hauled back as he was under age. He was bought a commission as an officer in the RAF. His younger brother, Vernon, later became an architect.

My mother recollects Ethel saying that Frederick was always off talking to someone else, especially at parties. She felt neglected, but he bought her expensive jewellery to make up for this. Divorce was not financially favourable to women in those days, they did not automatically get half of everything. However, she left Manor Park, sold all her jewellery and went to live in an ordinary house in Boscombe, Bournemouth. He greatly regretted losing Ethel, but later married a Jewess. My mother believes he went to live near Brighton. By the time my father had married for a second time, in 1926, Frederick was reported as deceased. My father never believed this had been true (it may have been a convenient cover-up on the occasion) and later tried to trace him, without any luck. Ethel married Leith-Nielson in 1917 and later Mr Patterson before coming to stay at my mother's house. Ethel had instructed her son to use the new name of Leigh-Smith and later just Smith was used. Sydney married my mother aged 52 and she 34, a nursing sister. They had two children, Charles and myself. Charles remembers Ethel as a shrewd business woman, especially as far as houses were concerned. My father died suddenly one night, aged 73, when I was 13.

Anthea Cox (nee Leigh-Smith)

## Common or Open Fields.

Discussions after the October meeting showed that there was some confusion about the term common fields or open fields as used in the context of pre-enclosure landscapes, both descriptions have their origins in Saxon times but the original concept would have been considerably modified by the 18th century. Basically common means that the same system of cultivation was used by a number of occupants of small pieces of a large field, the cropping programme and divisions of land being decided at an annual Manor Court which all tenants were bound to attend and at which, in theory they could have their say in the running of the village economy. Open means that the fields were without hedges or fences and as they were often of 200 - 300 acres in extent they must have resembled the so-called prairie fields of today. Both terms are the product of writers and landscape historians and it is unlikely that the small farmers who operated the system ever used such descriptions.

It was at one time thought that the method of land use exemplified by the open field system was introduced by the Anglo-Saxon settlers who entered this country after the collapse of Roman rule but there does not appear to be any evidence of similar agricultural practices in their homelands of north-western Europe. It is now believed that the original settlers were family groups who farmed independently of each other and that, for reasons which are not yet fully understood a coming together to form village communities took place around the 8th century. Among the theories put forward to explain this move is an economic one which presupposes that a community based agriculture would have been more productive than one based on small individual holdings. Another theory is that the family groups came together for protection in the face of raids from Danish or Viking invaders and remained as villages after the danger had passed. The fact that the open field system is confined to the eastern part of the country would tend to support this latter theory.

The clearance of land for cultivation around a village would have been a communal task with all able-bodied men involved, once a large enough area for the immediate needs had been ploughed it would have been shared into strips equal in number to the households engaged in the clearance. As and when more land was required further clearances and allocations would have taken place. It is likely that each cleared area was called a furlong and was given a name, some of these having survived to the present day. The difference in size between furlongs can be explained, a small one could be older and have been produced by fewer people or have originally been much more difficult to clear whereas the converse would be true of a larger one.

Gradually over the years households built up an entitlement to strips of land in the common fields but they did not always have the same ones, it was normal practice to share out on an annual basis with the good and bad land being taken in turn to prevent any individual having an unfair advantage over his neighbour. Note that it was the house that acquired the entitlement and not the individual who lived there.

The system of open field agriculture was well established by the time of the Norman Conquest and despite being modified by their land owning policy, continued in use probably reaching its peak in the early 14th century. It continued for a further 200 years being adapted and modified as circumstances required until a rapidly rising population brought about its demise for the same reason that it had replaced its predecessor, it was too inefficient to supply the needs of the community.

A research report on land usage with particular emphasis on the Enclosure Acts of 1775 and 1814 is in preparation, this will expand on the information given above.

Norman Parry

## 'Fires Should Be No More'

*In researching for the November Fire evening I was delighted to rediscover the following newspaper article from October 1877 in our own archive collection. It made an ideal introduction to our look back at the history of fires in our town.*

PECULIARITIES OF POTTON. Potton is a wonderful place. All the characteristics of a great city exist in it in miniature. If any of the more enterprising of that not inconsiderable class in Bedfordshire whose boast it is that they have never set foot in a railway carriage care to know by experiment what life is like in a great metropolis, they cannot do better than make a pilgrimage to Potton, where, by a simple process of magnifying and multiplying, they may revel in all the wealth of incident and excitement peculiar to great centres. Not only are the commoner adjuncts of civilization reflected, such as local legislation, petty parliaments and tiny tempests of party conflict, but the rarer experiences of gigantic capitals find faithful imitations passing current in Potton. In one such close counterfeit it triumphantly excels, namely, that of Fires. Intelligent observers will not need to be informed that fires, frequent, enormous and disastrous, are proofs incontrovertible of a high state of civilisation in the country that produces them. Where, for instance, is the city in ancient times that could boast of over one thousand fires per annum, an average of three each night? This grand distinction belongs to London alone, yet proud Potton bids fair to rival in its degree even the first city in the universe. Scarcely have the echoes of eloquent orations in the senate chamber died away, or the roars of the Potton multitude over all absorbing

contests or banquetings become subdued under the influence of viands or victories, but there arises the Fire cry which throbs into valiant activity the dosing patriots as though the day of doom were to be adverted by their own bravery. The heroes of old may boast of deeds which song has made renowned, but future generations will cherish (or ought to) the name and prowess of proud Potton's patriots. Their rulers of the nineteenth century played them false in their favourite epidemic of Fire, they confided the wellbeing of their noble citizens to the protection of waterless buckets and unpumpable engines, and it rendered the fetching and throwing of water a gymnastic feat, but these hindrances only served to demonstrate the sturdy stuff of which the men were made. We tell today the story of one of these Fires with its moral, in the hope that when at some not distant period the history of Potton comes to be written, the historian may have to record that just before the dawn of the millennium the people of Pottonopolis took council together and amended their ways by putting wise men as rulers over them, who decreed that water should abound, engines work, good pumpers be supplied with better pumps, and vigilance grow in the Police, to the end that incendiarism should cease and fires should be no more.

*Within 20 years of this article Potton could boast a Steam Fire Engine that was the match of any in East Bedfordshire and was to play a large part in ensuring that Potton was no longer "famous for Fires".*

Peter Ibbett



## St Mary's Church Celebrations

This year, 1994, marks the 900th anniversary of St. Mary's Church in Potton. It is difficult to envisage that our church was already in existence in 1094, nine centuries ago. That represents a large time span for Potton History Society to research; some work has been done but this is a large aim and there is much still to do. Are there any latin readers out there with time on their hands?

The Society will be joining in the celebrations of the anniversary, starting off on Saturday 11th June at 19.30 in the church, where a pageant will be held. We will be re-enacting the great fire of Potton which occurred over 200 years ago in 1783. Many other local organisations will be playing their part, portraying the changing life in Potton from 1094 to 1994.

From 27th June we will be providing a photographic exhibition of the history of the church. This will be on display in St Mary's for two weeks. The date of our meeting will be moved to 30th June to coincide with the celebrations. By way of a change, the meeting will be held in St. Mary's Church itself and, weather permitting, will include a visit around the graveyard.

On Saturday 2nd July, the usual Potton Church Fete will take a different stance this year when, after the judging of the floats has been completed, a procession will make its way from Burgoyne School via the Market Square to St. Mary's field. There will be many attractions, including side shows, various stalls and amusements on offer at the field for all to enjoy. Numerous additional events are taking place at the church during the month from 11th June to 10th July.

To ensure that the Potton History Society will be able to maintain its usual high standards throughout these events we would appreciate any help that you can give, or any time that you can spare.

George Howe

## S. Mary's Church, POTTON.

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# MUSICAL SERVICE

Will be held on

Sunday, Sept. 20th, 1931

At 6.15 p.m.

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Soloists:

**Miss Annie Bartle, A.R.H.M.**

**Mr. A. H. TAYLOR**

**Mr. W. GOODSHIP**

**Mr. O. A. BARTLE**

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The Collection will be given to the Choir  
Music Fund.

PRINTED BY ELPHING, POTTON.

R. B. BAGSHAW, VICAR.

One of the many handbills of church events to be found in the archives. Are there any Old Pottonians out there who remember these musical services.

## Penance

*An order of penance to be performed by Judith Endersby of Potton in the County and Archdeaconry of Bedford - Single woman. (dated June 1725)*

A search through documents in the County Record Office have so far revealed only one case of penance involving a Potton person. In 1725 Judith Endersby was ordered, for her offence of "having a bastard child born of her body within three years last past", to present herself in the Parish Church of Potton "coated in a white sheet from the shoulder downwards holding a white wand in her hand". Thus attired, she was instructed to stand by the Ministers reading pew throughout the service and thereafter make a public confession of her sins and pray for God's forgiveness.

The reputed father of the child, John Thorn, was also required to make a public confession during a church service in Potton, but there was no stipulation as to his manner of dress, nor to the specific wording he was to use, as there was in Judith's case.

Evidence gained from the parish registers shows that there was a close family connection between Judith Endersby and John Thorn. The Vicar and Churchwardens of the day may well have considered the relationship incestuous, which would account for the severity of the punishment. There must have been many more instances of illegitimacy which were apparently not similarly punished.

It was perhaps for the best that the burial of the child was recorded the day after his baptism, as he would surely have suffered for his mother's sins had he lived.

## Notice Board

### Church Pageant - help needed

The Society will be taking part in the Church Pageant on June 11th 1994. Each section of the performance is to take between 5 & 7 minutes, our topic being "The Great Fire of Potton". We would like a few more volunteers to take part in our display, not necessarily with speaking parts.

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### Committee

Although we already have our full complement of eight members on the committee, we would like to co-opt one or two additional members in order to spread the workload a little. We meet once a month, usually on the second thursday. If anyone is willing to take on this extra commitment please contact any committee member.

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### Coach Trip 1994

Arrangements are now well underway for our next coach trip which is planned for September and will visit Crowland Abbey. Further details will be announced at the Member's Meeting in May.

**Potton History Society would like to wish  
St. Mary's Church a very special and happy  
NINE HUNDREDTH  
Anniversary.**