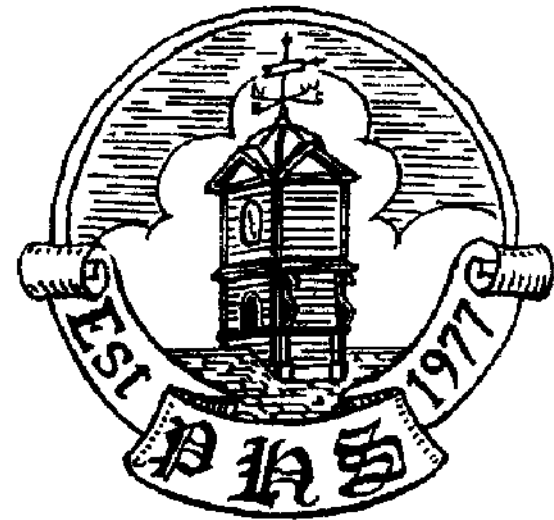


Dotton History Society



Newsletter Number 29

Autumn 2000

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Potton History Society Committee:-

Chairman	George Howe
Secretary	Jean McLennan
Treasurer	Anita Lewis
Programme/Publicity Secretary	Peter Ibbett
Committee Members	Boo Matthews
	John Kirkby
	Norman Parry
	Tony Crossley
	Ken Lawson
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
Mr N Parry	Potton 260728
Mrs J McLennan	Potton 261867

Acknowledgements:-

Thanks to Keith Lawrence for allowing us to use his sketch of
Roxton Congregational Chapel.

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

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

Lindsay's Bakery,
Tysoe's Hardware Store,
Harper's Barber Shop.

SOCIETY NEWS.

Society Meetings

The Secret of the Seal.

The March meeting of the Society featured Mr Ken Clark and his collection of early letters from India to England. Letters were carried on the ships of the East India Company. They were often duplicated in case of disasters at sea. A 1797 letter from Bombay to Edinburgh cost 8d to land in England and 2s 3d to travel from London to Edinburgh. One writer painted a glowing picture of a life in paradise in India compared to the unrest and food riots in England. Mr Clark had found that there was, for a brief period in 1944 an Indian Army Post Office in Potton (number 32). Any memories of this event in Potton's history would be welcome.

Out of the Hatbox.

Pamela and Albert Ormerod returned in April with a presentation showing aspects of an airman's life in Egypt in the 1920s. Pamela's father was in the RAF servicing and flying aircraft. Pictures that he took both on duty and at leisure were stored in an old hat box until they were researched for this programme. A number of photographs showed the living quarters and Christmas celebrations. Others were of the aircraft used by the RAF and of early passenger planes in some of which the pilot sat in an external cockpit. Local scenes included shots of the Pyramids and the towns of the Delta before modern buildings and tourism changed the scenery for ever. The talk showed how careful research could help to capture some of the realities of a previous era.

The Fenland Story.

Featured at the May meeting were Mr Ernie Hall of Whittlesea and his collection of Fenland stories and photographs. His talk looked at the influence of drainage on the Fens, allowing the Fenland rivers to release their waters into the Wash more easily.

One of the pastimes in winter was ice skating, a talent for which Fenlanders were justly famed. Large shallow inland lakes were called meres and one of the last great Meres at Whittlesea was only drained in the mid-nineteenth century. Fenland waterways provided a means for transport of goods on suitably designed boats. Fenland settlements such as Ely, Crowland, Kings Lynn and Wisbech have their own individual personalities.

RSPB at Sandy Lodge.

The June meeting was an evening visit to the RSPB at Sandy Lodge. The unseasonal weather prevented an outside walk but this was more than made up for by an extended tour of the house which forms the Headquarters of the RSPB. Publicity Officer Derek Niemann assisted by Boo Matthews provided an in-depth treatment of the building and its history. The Lodge was built in 1870 by Arthur Wellesley Peel, a son of Robert Peel for £6,695. In 1934 the house was acquired by Sir Malcolm Stewart of the London Brick company who was also the last Lord of the Manor of Potton. The RSPB bought the Lodge in 1961 for £20,000. It is now the hub of an organisation with over one million members.

Ordnance Survey.

Mr Eric Lund paid a return visit in July to continue his history of maps and map-making. The need for accurate maps became apparent after the 1745 campaign in Scotland and it was as a military department under a Royal Engineer's officer that the Ordnance Survey was set up. Using a system of triangulation started originally in France the whole of the United Kingdom was eventually mapped to an accuracy unequalled anywhere else in the World. Although the triangulation points are no longer used, having been replaced by satellite systems and electronic measuring instruments, they can still be found. Many are being cared for by enthusiasts who have adopted them to ensure that a particular part of the Survey's history is preserved. No longer under military control the OS is a self financing department relying on its sales of various types of maps to continue its work.

Sutton then and now

August's local evening was devoted to the village of Sutton. Using slides produced by Trevor Ball from archive photographs and modern views and documents from the parish records, Patricia Yates was able to describe the changes which have occurred in the village. The estate records of the Burgoyne family from the 16th to the 19th centuries, sale catalogues and the school records were used to give an insight into a way of life now scarcely imaginable to those used to modern conveniences. Bob Darlow was the Sutton postman for over twenty years, some of his memories of the round were read by the Chairman in Bob's absence. These provoked a few more reminiscences from the floor. A transcript of Bob's message will appear in the next newsletter. An interesting evening enjoyed by all who were present and a reminder of how diligent research can produce a wealth of historical information from a very small place.

--oo0oo--

12th Bedfordshire Local History Conference, June 2000.

Roxton were the hosts to the latest in the annual series of Local History Conferences now in its second decade. One of the smallest groups in the county put on an excellent day centred on their parish which attracted over 60 visitors to the Parish Church which served as the main conference venue.

John Neale from English Heritage began the day with an overview of the work of his organisation from the large to the small and of the problems of getting buildings listed and gaining grants to maintain them. Stephen Coleman from the Bedfordshire Archaeology department provided a historical introduction to the parish of Roxton with a series of slides of crop marks illustrating developments from pre-Roman to medieval times in the area.

The middle part of the day was given over to the traditional walk to view the local buildings of interest. Roxton has a unique thatched Congregational Church and a wonderful example of a timber framed barn at Park Farm which were much enjoyed by the visitors. Lunch was held in the modern Parish Hall followed by the official unveiling of a Millennium Parish History Information board.

The afternoon session delved into real local history with contributions from David and Onslow Stocker who had discovered that their ancestors had originated from Roxton and who had traced a full family history from 1200 including a direct ancestor who made it to Lord Mayor of London for a brief period before succumbing to the Black Death. Don Clarke from the Roxton group completed the conference by looking at the ways in which the nearby River Ouse had played its part in the history of the Parish with its floods and its role as a transport highway.

The day demonstrated how a small group can organise a successful day by utilising the great variety of sources available to Local Historians. This aspect of Bedfordshire Local History life is in good health with potential venues for the next two years in the wings.

Peter Ibbett.

Forthcoming Programme

Nov 23rd	Mail Boxes	Mr N Alston
	The story of the development of post boxes	
Please note	7.30 start for the AGM	
Dec 7th	20th Century Potton	
	Our look back at our century as the millennium draws to a close	

Our Potton Millennium Celebrations

and how our Potton History Society played its part.

After a very busy few months for several of us leading up to an extremely successful NINE WHOLE DAYS of Pottonians celebrating "THE MILLENNIUM", I, with my wife Beryl are now relaxing cruising the wonderful River Rhine. Why should I be reminiscing our celebrations whilst on holiday and all this way from Potton. Well when an event, thanks to all who participated, was as successful as this one, the feeling of a high lasts a while and what better place to write these now happy memories on paper than only a few kilometres from the place Potton is twinned with, Langenlonsheim. Not quite being on the Rhine but Rudesheim is and that's where the following reminiscing took place.

That something should happen in Potton to celebrate the millennium was at the suggestion of our vicar, Wyn Beynon. It was he who called the early meetings at which I was a delegate on behalf of our PHS. These early meetings paved the way with ideas which were expanded and very successfully carried out by a properly constituted Potton Millennium Committee led by Carol Leggatt. Their story, hopefully will be told one day and recorded in Potton's history but my story is of the part our PHS played in these celebrations.

Each society or club was invited to play a part during these nine days. What part could our PHS play? Well we could record the event as it progressed. This we would almost certainly do as a duty to the community as a history society. BUT! What could we do ourselves towards this great week. Something larger, maybe different than we could do in our normal venue. Something that would interest our members and hopefully the community of Potton as a whole.

Our usual way forward in these circumstances is to set up a sub-committee. This we did, Peter, Jean and I drew the short straws. Ideas were floated, the way forward began and we wanted something completely different. We came up with the idea of a series of six historical sketches joined by a narration, to be called "The Potton Story", depicting life in Potton during the last 1000 years, condensed into about a 1 hour show. This to start the celebrations off on the first Saturday afternoon. Also an exhibition, for which we are very grateful to the millennium committee allowing us the space we permanently had in the marquee for the whole nine days.

Several sub-committee meetings later, deadlines set to research 1,000 years of Potton, write scripts, have them checked for accuracy, ask for volunteers to act, to be stage hands, hold rehearsals on Potton Station, obtain costumes and props, it was soon getting close to the big day. We had just one person who had acted before, our Sylvia whose advice and help to me as a first time director was invaluable. The Tuesday before, helped along by tea and coffee made by Beryl, the final rehearsal with all of us budding drama students looking forward and wishing it was all over at the same time.

As if all this wasn't enough, Peter assisted by Jean had been researching and putting together, checked by Norman "The Potton Story", a small booklet complete with a time line, very good value for only £1 and a programme was produced specially for our show, Saturday 1st July year 2000 at 3pm. We along with the Millennium Committee spent the two previous Saturday mornings informing the community of the coming of this great event. The Potton Millennium Marquee went up on schedule on Thursday, most of our exhibition, including the Potton car was put together on Friday, not to mention this was also prepared in the previous few weeks. The magic day was now here.

Costumes and props were placed in order for the show in the marquee. But as we were first to put on a show, there were some questions of the unknown to be answered, position of the stage, marquee poles, how best to keep out of view behind the stage, sound and lighting. With a small insight on Friday, a better knowledge on Saturday when the stage went up, with everyone doing their bit, we made it.

2.40pm Saturday ... a few people in the audience, how many will come along? A good full page in the millennium programme which was dropped through everyone's door, our programme given out prior to the show and the two Saturday mornings have all been worth it as by 3pm seats were almost full with people still coming in. We purposefully delayed a few minutes to get people settled in. We estimate about 180, which was more than we could have hoped for.

All in position, all of us nervously dreading it, quick are you OK Peter and as director I had to tell myself "go for it now".

Well..... what more can any director ask for, everyone without exception absolutely done their best. After the show, the huge change from dread to feeling like they could do it again was tremendous.

The biggest and best thank you we all received was from a wonderful attentive audience who were with us all the way and for us to know our Potton Story was much appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed. What ever part you played in our great Millennium event for our Potton History Society whether it was large or small, active or audience, Vera's tea makers or the drinkers a very big "THANK YOU". Weren't the rest of the nine-day millennium events a great success as well. Well done the Millennium Committee and a big thank you for facilitating the PHS during the nine days. Also for donating various items from this great event for safe keeping to remember the 2,000th year of the birth of Jesus Christ ----- AMEN.

George Howe.

Another playlet submitted too late for inclusion in the programme.

TIME FOR REFLECTION.

Setting. An elderly couple are sitting in their chairs, (one upright and one rocking chair) by a table draped with an old table cloth. On the table stands an old oil lamp, there is a tea tray with a lace cloth spread on it and two cups (HIS AND HERS) and a biscuit barrel nearby. There is an old style knitted tea cosy covering the tea pot. On a small cupboard an old wireless set with two photo frames, one of their wedding and the other of their children. The couple when seated face the audience (the man on the left and the woman on the right) as though facing a nice blazing fire. Their old rag rug adds comfort to the hearth with a companion set to one side. A couple of red lights (screened from the audience) are made to flicker as if from the fire. This completes the scene.

NELL- enters with the tea pot and puts it under the cosy.

She picks up her sewing and starts to repair a pair of long-johns. She calls out,

EBBY THE TEA'S MADE.

From off-stage EBBY calls out

RIGHTO, I'M COMING. *He enters and Nell looks up at him.*

EBB- 'BRRR!(rubbing his hands) IT'S COLD OUT THERE TONIGHT- I'VE JUST LOCKED UP.

Nell nods and continues her sewing, whilst Ebb walks over to the fire and warms his backside.

NELL- looking up says 'COME ON THEN—LET'S ALL FEEL THE FIRE !.

EBB- *moves to his seat rubbing his warm backside, sits down on the edge of his chair and stretches his hands forward to the fire to warm them. Then rubbing his hands together he settles back in his chair, then says :-*

'AH ! THAT'S MORE LIKE IT'

Peace reigns for a moment or two.

NELL- *stops sewing and glances over at their wedding photo. With a lingering look sighs, 'AHHH' Then holds up the long-johns to display the holes in the knees. Ebb looks at the garment.*

NELL-*looking at the holes says:-*

'WE MET AND MARRIED A LONG TIME AGO'.

EBB- 'AH! *he says* AND WE WORKED LONG HOURS WHEN WAGES WERE LOW'.

NELL-*agreeing says:-* 'NO TV OR RADIO, NO BATH, TIMES WERE HARD'.

EBB- *follows closely with:-* 'JUST A COLD WATER TAP AND PRIVY IN'T YARD'.

NELL-*just as quickly,* 'NO HOLIDAYS ABROAD, NO POSH CARPETS ON FLOORS'.

EBB- *leans out of his chair towards her, points to the fire and says,* 'BUT WE HAD LOGS ON THE FIRE - DIDN'T LOCK OUR BACK DOORS'.

NELL-*reaches over and touches the photo of her children and says,* 'OUR CHILDREN ARRIVED - NO PILL IN THOSE DAYS'.

EBB- *sits back in his seat and smilingly says:-* 'AND WE BROUGHT THEM UP WITHOUT NEED OF STATE AID'.

NELL-*pointedly says :-* 'THEY WERE QUITE SAFE TO PLAY OUT IN THE PARK'.

EBB- 'AND THE OLD FOLK COULD GO FOR A WALK IN THE DARK'.

NELL-*puts down her sewing and pours out two cups of tea, then thoughtfully shaking her head,* 'NO VALLIUM - NO DRUGS - NO LSD'.

EBB- *picks up his cup of tea then says:-* 'WE CURE MOST OF OUR ILLS WITH A GOOD CUP OF TEA', *he then takes a sip* 'AH'S LOVELY'.

NELL- 'BUT IF YOU WERE SICK, YOU WERE TREATED AT ONCE'.

EBB- 'NOT FILL UP THIS FORM - COME BACK IN SIX MONTHS'.

Both pause as they dunk their biscuits and drink their tea

NELL-*picks up her sewing again then says:-*

'NO VANDALS, NO MUGGINGS, THERE WAS NOTHING TO ROB'.

EBB- 'THOUGH WE WERE ALL QUITE RICH WITH A COUPLE OF BOB'.

NELL-*nodding agreement says:-*

'PEOPLE WERE HAPPY IN THOSE FAR OFF DAYS- KIND AND CARING IN SO MANY WAYS'.

EBB- *reaching for his paper says:-*

'THE MILKMAN AND PAPER BOY WOULD WHISTLE AND SING' *opens his paper then continues:-* 'AND A NIGHT AT THE PICTURES WAS HAVING A FLING'.

NELL-*sadly says:-*

'WE ALL GOT OUR SHARE OF TROUBLE AND STRIFE'.

EBB- 'AND WE JUST HAD TO FACE IT THAT WAS THE PATTERN OF LIFE'.

NELL-*puts her sewing aside and relaxes saying:-*

'BUT NOW WE LOOK BACK THROUGH ALL OF THOSE YEARS'.

EBB- *he looks up from his paper:-*

'WE DON'T DWELL ON THE BAD TIMES, THE TROUBLE AND TEARS'.

he puts his paper to one side and they look at one another and smile.

Then turning to the audience, together they say:-

'WE REMEMBER THE BLESSINGS, OUR HOME AND OUR LOVE' 'AND WE SHARED THEM TOGETHER - THANK GOD UP ABOVE !'.

They both sit back in their chairs - close their eyes and the firelight goes dim.

THE END.

K.G.Lawrence.

In At The Deep End.

The events for the Potton Millennium celebrations were well advanced and in the town everyone buzzed with excitement and anticipation. The participants were discreetly preparing and honing their speciality productions. The teams of helpers were being marshalled into a backstage force that the organisers knew were the key to the smooth running of such a mammoth operation.

Me! Well, I was relaxing in Baltimore USA, I was there to attend the wedding of my nephew and his bride-to-be. For me Potton was on the other side of the world and knowing I had only one task that was required of me for the Potton History Society, to construct a display table for their historic presentation in the marquee and I had just over two weeks to make it ----- a piece of cake! That would be my direct contribution on my return. So all I had to do was to forget the hive of activity at home and enjoy my sojourn and celebrate our first family wedding of the New Millennium.

What progress man has made over the last 100 years, from sailing ships to my transport in a Boeing 777 across the Atlantic in a little under 8 hours. Then I was whisked back again in a Boeing 767 to arrive home happy, refreshed and ready for anything --- Then there it was !. An ominous brown envelope on the door mat, it was awaiting my immediate attention with detailed instructions written - of all places - on the outside of the envelope. Something was inside - it was a script --- I'd been hijacked, I had been press ganged into a sketch about the Great Fire of Potton in 1783 (I don't need to look up that date any more).

Panic stations, my first reading was in 2 days time - I'll never learn that lot by heart in 2 days! What shall I wear? I know I've got greenish fingers but when it comes to acting I'm as green as grass. However there was one plus in my favour, the local dialect - I talk like that anyway!

I tried to remember the lines but the years have left no more space in my grey matter so I attended the reading with a distinct dread of letting down those that had had a misconception of my acting ability. My relief came when I found that we would not have to remember the whole script and we would be able to read it - if necessary verbatim. I heaved a big sigh. That first reading of mine on the stage of Potton's old station platform opened my eyes to the latent talent we have in our history society.

That evening our privileged audience was a nest of four young blackbirds up in the Gods - they were most attentive and their mum kept them fed regularly throughout their ordeal. We never heard a tweet out of them all evening, not even at curtain call - could that be an ill omen? Anyway I left knowing that everyone was prepared to give of their best - and I also knew that my list of jobs had grown. Why do we volunteer?!

The next day it was down to the Charity Shop, seeking out a floppy hat and at 50p a bargain. Back home I stiffened the rim to the shape I wanted by the insertion of a ring of wire. Not liking the colour black I painted the hat with a buff undercoat and this resulted in a dark brown - that would have to do, time was getting short and I didn't want wet paint dripping down my face.

My second reading at the same venue, (good old George, and the tea and biscuits supplied by his good lady) this time the reading went really well and the full narration and sketches was timed by Peter and it met the proposed schedule. Our previous captive audience had since flown the nest - I hope we were not responsible for their departure. In my sketch there is a reference to a hot air balloon and 'Lo and behold' over the horizon there appeared a HOT AIR BALLOON !. I took that to be a good omen, so the Potton audience was in for an informative treat.

At the final reading a few small changes were made and a full dress rehearsal was approved by all. WE WERE READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD.

That Saturday in the huge marquee the stage awaited us green troupers - would we have an audience? YES! BLESS THEM! An estimated crowd of nearly 200 were treated to a resume of the history of Potton over the last 1000 years and our encouraging reception was gratefully received. We are hoping to tread the boards at the next Millennium - then we'll be the skeletons in the cupboard.

Hollywood directors can contact us on www.potton.com.

Keith Lawrence

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POTTON WEATHER.

I should have known I was tempting fate when I mentioned Potton's weather in the last newsletter. On the 6th of July during a torrential downpour lightning struck one of the blocks of houses in The Paddocks. Luckily there was no structural damage to the properties but hundreds of pounds worth of damage was caused to electrical equipment including televisions, video recorders, telephones, answering machines and computers.

Lightning exhibits strange effects, in our house an answering machine was ruined but the telephone plugged into the same socket was OK. In another room an extension phone and a computer modem were both damaged, a lighting fuse blew in one part of the house but the remaining lights and all power sockets survived without harm. I don't know what effect it had on other people's nerves but it is not an experience that I would want repeated.

It is only when something like this happens that one realises how much we rely on modern technology to be able to communicate with family and friends, a few days without internet access and withdrawal symptoms were setting in, luckily our local computer company were able to supply replacement parts quickly.

N.P.

Potton Public Houses.

The recent articles in the Biggleswade Chronicle by Ken Page gave a comprehensive review of Potton's Pubs, past and present and they will no doubt be referred to many times in the future. A couple of errors crept in, the one concerning the off-licence in the Market Square was corrected in the third article but the original location of the Fox and Crown was wrongly given.

The site was said to have been at 25/27 Biggleswade Road. Past occupiers of the cottages had assumed this because there were cellars under these properties. None of the cottages are earlier than the 1870s and the Fox and Crown, known to have existed prior to 1776 is last mentioned in the 1876 Return of Licensed Premises when the owner and occupier was Germain Wagstaff.

The deeds of 19 Blackbird Street show The Old Fox and Crown on that site. Land belonging to the inn included all that which is now covered by the present Fox and Crown Cottages, the odd shaped piece behind the advertising hoarding and a small field to the rear. Germain Wagstaff acquired all of this property in 1865 and gradually rebuilt the Blackbird Street houses and erected the buildings now known as Fox and Crown Cottages in place of five old cottages which were on the site. Germain died on 17 March 1873 and in his will dated 6 December 1871 he appointed his brother James of Islington and his son in law as executors and trustees. The will refers to seventeen cottages and a codicil dated March 1872 refers to the eighteenth, newly built which had cost £60. The will specified that if Germain's son W.H. Wagstaff wanted to buy the cottages, land and orchard within twelve months of his fathers death he could do so on giving three month's notice and on payment of £1515. The James Wagstaff referred to in the will was the one who purchased the old Potton Manor and who rebuilt it in the 1870s.

N Parry

Not a Village

The following correspondence demonstrates that our members are active in making sure that newcomers to Pottton get their facts right.

To
The Sales Manager
Persimmon Homes

From
Myers Farm
Pottton, Sandy
Beds. SG19 2RG.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Re. Sales advertisement in *THE ADVERTISER*.
Millars Chase.

POTTON IS NOT A VILLAGE. It is a small market TOWN and has been since at least the 12th century.

Up until the 17th century anyone calling it a village were publicly HANGED on the Market Square ; but since then with the general softening up of punishment a £100 donation to a local charity is considered sufficient,

For further details contact John Allen at above address.

This letter, sent by John Allen prompted the following response:

*Persimmon Homes (Midlands) Ltd.
The Old Brewery, Towcester Rd.
Milton Malsor, Northampton.*

*We thought that Pottton was a village
Our advert caused a frown
This charming location
We now find is a town*

*With Market Square and character
A quiet place to be
Our show home is now open
Why not come along and see*

*You're welcome there at any time
To walk around and see
And if there is a quiet time
We'll even make you a cup of tea*

*We got the ad wrong
For this we are sorry
The threat of hanging
Has caused us to worry*

*Charity donations
Are regularly made
To McMillan Cancer Research
To help poor souls be brave*

*So please accept
And we ask that you do
That our donation's been made
With ne'er a to 'do.*

From Coalbrookdale To Potton.

The recent find of a collection of documents relating to Potton ironmonger Henry Inskip from the 1850s included an invoice from the cradle of the Industrial Revolution. It was in 1779 that Abraham Darby III erected the first bridge made of iron from the nearby Coalbrookdale furnaces. The invoice of October 20th 1854 records the dispatch of two fenders, a bronze air valve and a basket for the sum of £1 5s 2d. The order was dispatched by rail to Peterborough. It is interesting to see how quickly the developing rail network enabled firms to send their goods to destinations all over the country.

Peter Ibbett.

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1901 Census Project

The Public Record Office have noted the concern expressed by local and family history societies in respect of the plans to make the 1901 census available only in electronic format (except to large-user organisations). A series of explanatory talks are being given by PRO staff to family history societies and other interested parties but these appear to be more in the way of public relations exercises to allay the initial fears of inaccuracies and transcriptions errors which users thought were inherent in the methods proposed for the project.

No announcements have been made of any increase in the availability of the census on microfiche which is what many societies would like to see. At present it would appear that we will have to rely on the County Record Office to make those individual sections of the census which we require available to us. The County Archivist is aware of our concern and has said that he will do whatever he can to help when the time comes.

World War 1, POW Camp ?

A letter was recently received from an organisation called The Prisoner of War Internment Camp Project - 1914 to 1920, asking if we, as a Society had any information on German PoWs in Potton during WW1. It is known that there were prisoners here during the 1939-45 War and that they were employed on local farms but nothing is known about any similar arrangement in the earlier conflict. When our Society was first formed someone mentioned to Mrs Yates that a small group of prisoners were billeted in one of the Market Square houses and that they were engaged in timber felling and removal of same from Sutton Park but no local evidence to back up this statement has ever come to light.

A world wide list of Places of Internment headed 'Prisoners of War Information Bureau' has a cryptic entry for Potton between those for Potter's Bar, Middlesex and Protectorate of South West Africa.

Potton (Working Camp under Pattishall).

Pa (Pot)

Potton, Beds.

From this one would assume that Pattishall in Northants. was the main camp and that detachments of prisoners were taken to other locations to carry out specific tasks. Bedford Record Office have nothing on WW1 Potton prisoners in their archives which relate to the County War Agricultural Committees of that period. There is the possibility that these working camps were administered by another organisation such as the Board of Trade or the PoW Employment Committee and that somewhere the reference Pa (Pot) is hiding some hitherto unknown piece of Potton and Sutton's history. If anyone has any information which will throw a ray of light on this subject please get in touch with me.

Norman Parry

A Step into the World of Romanticism

During the recent Local History Conference I was privileged to have a conducted tour of Roxton Congregational Church. This Church is approached by a path tucked away behind houses. As I approached I felt as if I was stepping back in time and joining other worshippers from a bygone age. A similar building is on the Shuttleworth Estate - both are thatched and timbered, but this one at Roxton has a wing on each side.

The original building was once a barn belonging to the Metcalf Family, the then owners of the nearby Manor House. It was converted to a place of worship from the 31st May 1808 and at that time Ministers from different religions were invited from time to time to conduct a service, with Mr Metcalf filling in when no Minister could be found. During Mr Metcalf's lifetime (died in 1855) not only did he provide the building and act as temporary Minister, but he also provided financial assistance.

In October 1823 a Thomas Nottage became the first full-time Minister and was succeeded in 1831 by a Henry Winzer. Regular Ministers followed until the resignation of David Prothero in 1947. After 1947 the services were conducted by theological students from Cheshunt College Cambridge until pastoral oversight was undertaken by St Neots Congregational Church.

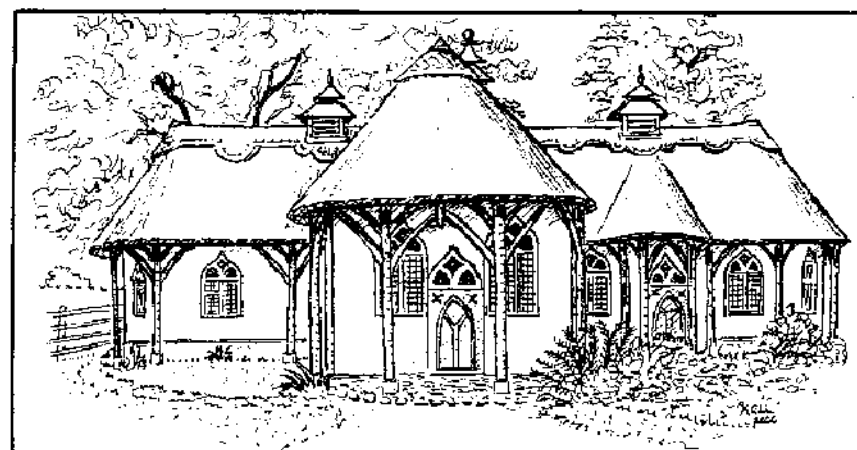
Over the years the Chapel has had two fires, the first of which was started from a spark from a stove, and was brought under control by the villagers of Roxton who were at a mid-week meeting. After that electric light and heat were installed. The second fire occurred on the night of 18th May 1937 during a thunderstorm. Lightning struck the belfry and set the thatch on fire. Due to the prompt action of a Mr W Jefferies, the damage was not extensive and after repairs a lighting conductor was fitted.

In 1941 Mr Philip Bath presented the Chapel with an organ, replacing the harmonium. The new organ came from a private house in Highgate which had been damaged by the blitz. There are two very beautiful stained glass windows in the Chapel - one commemorates the loss of Mr & Mrs Prothero's son and the other was presented by Mrs J Bath in memory of her husband - this one was installed in 1997.

The Chapel as a whole is most fascinating - the middle is occupied by wooden benches, where I sat and visualised the scene in the 1800's - this was obviously the seating for the estate staff and villagers. Either side of this main area is enclosed seating, approached by private doors, where the Lords and Ladies of the Manor must have sat. The private doors to these seats are very low and narrow, giving us some idea of the stature of our ancestors. Each side of the main Chapel are two wings - originally built as a Sunday School Room and a Day School Room. There is also a very tiny vestry as one enters from the left hand side of the building.

Extensive restoration has been undertaken over the last 10 years, funded by fund-raising events and grants. Toilets have been added, together with a new roof on the School Room and replacement of the north wall. Services are still held each Sunday at 3p.m. in winter and 6p.m. in summer - long may they continue.

Jean McLennan



1881 Census - Former Potton Residents.

The project to list those people enumerated in the 1881 census as having been born in Potton and living elsewhere in the United Kingdom (except Ireland) has been slightly delayed but should be available in the Society Archives by the time you read this. The reason for the delay has been the problem of interpreting the transcription errors between the original census and the copy which forms the basis of the LDS Cd-ROM.

Many of those who left Potton had probably done so for economic reasons but there were still a considerable number of them in impoverished conditions as the lists of those in workhouses show. 11 people from Potton were in Biggleswade Union, 5 of them were elderly singles and the other 6 were children under the age of sixteen, 5 of them with ages ranging from 5 to 15 having the same surname and probably an orphaned or deserted family. The total number in that Union was 134. The Bedford Union in St. Peters housed 265 inmates, 168 males (1 from Potton), 72 females (2) and 97 children (0). Other Workhouses show similar figures, the one at Caxton which served the predominately rural area of south-west Cambridgeshire housed 80 adult inmates and 43 children. The reason for this appearing in my list is that one of the inmates was a lady who had been born in Potton.

Society was very much divided into the 'haves' and the 'have nots', apart from the ones mentioned above there were 103 prisoners in Bedford Jail ; 93 males and 10 females, 1 of whom was from Potton. Two other jails appear in the list because ex-Potton people were on the staff, Mary Bond a widow was housekeeper to the governor of Borstal prison near Rochester which at that time was a male prison with 475 occupants. Not far away at Chatham, John Burnham was one of 18 assistant warders helping to control 1075 prisoners.

In contrast John Endersby was a groom employed at Baldersly Park near York where Sidney Lane, a magistrate and non-practising barrister had a staff of 26 to look after himself and his family of 8. In Bedford, Emma Kefford aged 14 was a "nurse" in the household of Dudley Elwes, a 43 years old retired Army officer, his wife and their 11 children aged between 2 and 17 ; 4 other servants were also employed.

In London, Fanny Arundell was the under housemaid in the establishment of Sir Robert Lush, a Privy Councillor and Judge of the Court of Appeal; here the family of 5 had 7 servants. At the Travellers Club in Pall Mall, Elizabeth Knight was one of the 24 servants employed there.

Business men who had left Potton and made good include the Tylers, briefly mentioned in the last Newsletter. All the following were said to have been born in Potton. Although church records only include Alfred and William, the sons of Mary and Henry, a Potton shoemaker it is probable that Ezra and Henry were of the same family.

Alfred was living in Leicester and was said to be a Shoe Dealer employing 96 men and 35 women; in addition he owned a farm where 10 men and 2 boys made up the staff. Ezra was a Master Shoemaker in Wolverhampton employing 9 men, 5 boys, 6 women and 6 girls. Henry, also in Leicester was a Leather Factor but was not listed as an employer, similarly William, a Boot Manufacturer was listed as a boarder at a hotel in Caernarvon, North Wales. There are other Tylers said to have been born in Potton but no attempt has been made to link them together or to the shoemakers family. Some additional information on the Tylers can be found in the family section of the Society's archives.

N Parry

Mr Smith the Blacksmith.

In the Spring newsletter mention was made of the reminiscences of Frank Sells concerning his ancestors in Potton. A copy of his notes including some photocopies of photographs has now been received from his daughter Mrs Mary Barratt and they give an insight into the working and leisure activities of Pottonians in the early part of the last century.

The transition from being the contract farrier to a firm near Kings Cross which owned two hundred and fifty cab horses and which closed because of the advent of motor taxis to being a blacksmith in Potton must have been quite an experience. The notes make interesting reading but they are one person's thoughts on the way he saw the Town and what happened here.

Writing about the tanyard he mentions ' a flat truck piled high with dripping wet animal skins which bounced up and down like a jelly'.....' the smell from these was putrid and filled the whole area'. Omar Bartle "could always be seen doing every job going on his own buses, driving one moment, taking fares the next, filling up with petrol, changing a wheel or cleaning the coachwork". Mentioning Biggleswade and its cinema which was a favourite venue for Potton people Mr Sells says " part way through the film would stop and a slide would flash onto the screen ' Bartle's bus for Potton leaves in four minutes' . Groans all round, a mass of heads would bob up and half the audience would walk out".

Among the various members of the family mentioned is Mr Sell's Aunt Florrie, Florence Elizabeth Smith born in 1888 and who was struck down by polio when a child and who was confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life which ended in 1965. There are photographs of her and other members of the family in our collection. This small booklet on the Smith family is a welcome addition to our growing collection of reminiscences and is well worth a read.

NOTICE BOARD

Greensand Project.

The term Greensand, first used commercially by the Greensand Nursery and now adopted by the Potton Medical Practice has spawned a new outfit known as the Greensand Trust, part of the Ivel Valley Countryside Project. Their aim is, in their own words 'to conserve the historic identity of the Greensand Ridge'. As part of this work a Sandstone Project has been initiated the purpose of which is to carry out surveys to identify local sandstone structures and to advise on the restoration and conservation of those that remain. Work would be carried out by local volunteers under the guidance of the Sandstone Project Officer.

If anyone would like to know more about sandstone or would like a copy of the information pack please contact Martin Caddy, Sandstone Project Officer, The Forest Office, Haynes West End, Bedford MK45 3QT, telephone 01234 743666 or fax 01234 743699 or e-mail greensand@freeuk.com.

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Ivel Valley Walks

The full range of Ivel Valley walk leaflets, including the Potton to Sutton Circular Walk, are now available free of charge from Potton and Biggleswade Libraries.

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Newsletter no 30

Your articles, letters, comments and memories are always most welcome. Please pass items to Norman Parry, Mary Leigh or any committee member. The deadline for copy to be included in the next issue will be 1st February 2001.