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# POTTON HISTORY SOCIETY

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Weather Forecast—Fine and Warm.

SO BOOK YOUR SEATS

AND

ENJOY A LOVELY RIDE

TO THE

New Whipsnade Zoo.

BARTLE'S COACHES

Leave Potton at 1.30 p.m.

Next Sunday, July 9th,

Also on

Sundays, July 23rd, Aug. 6th, & 20th.

RETURN FARE 3/9.

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## Newsletter No. 6

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### OBSERVATIONS

Many important activities, involving the Potton History Society, have taken place since the publication of Newsletter No.5.

The collection of photographs and documents, connected with St.Mary's Church, was brought up to date and mounted for the Flower Festival of Summer 1984. Many visitors were attracted to the stands, and the Secretary and her husband enjoyed interesting conversations with the viewers. A donation of £25 was presented to the Society for the work undertaken.

During the weekend commencing September 16th 1984, the Potton Scouts celebrated their fortieth anniversary. Cupboards were emptied, attics searched for log-books, photographs and camping souvenirs. All were on view in the Bull Street Headquarters. The Society also mounted its scout collection, and was able to borrow further photographs for copying.

Early in November, work started on Picture Book No.2. After much discussion, research and the copying of loaned photographs, it was possible to choose 150, covering the period from the 1880's to the late 1930's. Copy was delivered to Russell Associates on January 22nd.

The Bedford Archaeological Society is visiting the town on July 3rd. for the purpose of following the path of our great fire. The evening will be concluded with the showing of the fascinating audio-visual epic, which has already been enjoyed by six other organisations.

A circular walk, from St.Mary's Hall, which includes the Causeway, King Street, the Market Square, Sun Street, Bull Street, Horslow Street and Meeting Lane, has been prepared for St.Mary's Singers' German visitors. A numbered map will accompany the information, now being translated.

One of the last typing tasks, undertaken by Ralph Yates, was the completion of the history of Potton Consolidated Charities. This work has been approved by the Bedford Record Office.

Patricia R.Yates.

## PARISH REGISTERS

What do Elizabeth Taylor, Thomas Atkins, Grace Darling, Dan Albone and Henry Hall have in common?

They are all names which appear in the Potton Parish Registers in the 17th or 18th centuries.

My reason for looking at the registers in the first place was to find out as much as possible about the family of Nicholas Sparks, the only direct casualty of the 1783 fire. There are nineteen entries in the registers, the spelling in some cases being Sparks, and in others Sparkes. In the list below, the ecclesiastical year, which began on March 25th, has been changed to the civil year for those entries which occur between 1st January and 24th March.

25-01-1734	Baptism	Nicholas an adult
12-07-1738	Marriage	Sarah and William Barber
21-12-1738	Burial	Mary - Widow
04-07-1740	Baptism	Pechy - son of Nicholas and Letitia
14-07-1741	Baptism	Fourby - son of Nicholas and Letitia
27-07-1742	Baptism	Mary - daughter of Nicholas and Letitia
30-07-1742	Burial	Mary - daughter of Nicholas and Letitia
28-11-1743	Baptism	Nicholas - son of Nicholas and Letitia
27-01-1746	Burial	Nicholas - son of Nicholas and Letitia
14-02-1746	Baptism	Mary - daughter of Nicholas and Letitia
24-06-1747	Baptism	Nicholas - son of Nicholas and Letitia
25-09-1747	Burial	Nicholas - son of Nicholas and Letitia
08-12-1747	Marriage	Ann Sparks and John Gillians both of Duntun
05-08-1748	Baptism	Letitia - daughter of Nicholas and Letitia
21-01-1750	Baptism	Jane - daughter of Nicholas and Letitia
08-07-1751	Baptism	Nicholas - son of Nicholas and Letitia
04-05-1753	Baptism	Appleby - son of Nicholas and Letitia
29-10-1781	Marriage	Thomas Sparks of Wimpole and Elizabeth Grant
22-08-1783	Burial	Nicholas

The register entries quoted raise a series of questions, some of which will be virtually impossible to answer. Others could be profitably followed up by research into the registers of Potton and other parishes. Consider the following:-

1. Did the original family, which came to Potton, consist of Mary, a widow, and an unmarried son and daughter? Where did they come from? Where did the remaining seven children of Nicholas and Letitia, who were born between 1740 and 1753, go? The entries appear to indicate that there was considerable movement in and out of Potton. Were there economic reasons for this? Was any particular part of the country involved?
2. Who was Letitia and did Nicholas go far to find his bride? Was it normal practice for Potton men to marry women from other parishes, and vice versa?
3. Which Nicholas was buried in 1783? Was it the one described as an adult in 1734, and who would have been aged around 70 by then, or was it his son, Nicholas, baptised in 1751, who would have been in his early thirties?
4. Was the interval between births, in this case an average of 15 months, normal for the time? A brief look at other families shows that the Sparks family were unusual, and that the normal was about 2 years.
5. Was there any evidence of marriage anticipation as shown by pre-marital pregnancies and illegitimate births, and was this related to economic circumstances? How did past societies compare with modern ones in this respect?
6. Was the mortality rate as high as is often stated and was it particularly so for children? What was the expectancy of life in Potton in past years?

7. Can we identify from the mortality figures, years in which there were epidemics or food shortages resulting in a high number of deaths from illnesses or disease relating to malnutrition?

An abnormally high number of burials in Potton in the years 1699 and 1729 are consistent with national figures. It is known that in England, many were due to plague, which has been virtually non-existent since the latter date.

Answers to these questions would go a long way towards giving us an understanding of what life was like in the past. It is hoped that, over the next few years, research into the Parish Registers will give us a greater insight into the Potton of the 17th and 18th centuries.

For those who are interested in what happened to Sarah Sparks, who married William Barber in 1738, her son was baptised on 23rd February 1742 . He was given the christian name of 'Sparks'. Sarah died in July, 1751 and was buried on the 7th. There are no more details, but her age was possibly around 35. There is no further mention in the registers of William Barber or of his son, Sparks.

#### Norman Parry

N.B. Nicholas Sparks was employed as Schoolmaster by the Potton Charity Trustees in respect of Mr.Caryer's bequest. Money had been left to enable eight children 'at any one time or in any one year' to be instructed in Reading Writing and Arithmetic. They had to be inhabitants of the town, and members of the Church of England.

Nicholas lived in King Street, and after the fire, his executors claimed a loss of £51.

O.A.BARTLE, OMNIBUS PROPRIETOR, of POTTON

The people of Potton, and neighbouring villages and towns, such as Biggleswade, Sandy and 'St.Notes' (as they say), who were around in the 1940's and '50's, will well remember going shopping, or to the 'flicks', on one of Omar's buses.

Omar started in 1925 with a small 14 seater Chevrolet, Reg.No. NM 7096. He bought it new, and it was the first of three such buses, nick-named 'Pip, Squeak and Wilfred'. They were purchased in July 1925, June 1926 and May 1927, respectively.

By 1936, after eleven years in business, Omar had about 17 buses. It was in this year that a photograph was taken in Potton Market Square of nine of the fleet. It is No.85 in our first book of pictures. It is thanks to this picture, together with technical information, obtained from a colleague in the Sandy Transport Society, that at last some details can be put together about a very important, but almost forgotten part of Potton's history.

If this sounds like an appeal for information and photographs, yes it is! Until recently, we have only had two photographs and an early time-table. Now some technical information and a picture of a Bedford bus has been obtained. But still no pictures of the bus garage on the corner of Sun Street and Royston Street have appeared. Later, the site was used for Norman's Garage, which in turn was demolished so that Royston Court could be built.

Continuing with the information at present available, Omar, altogether, purchased about 37 buses and coaches between 1925 and July 26th 1953, when his fleet was taken over, but hardly used, by United Counties. Bartle's old fleet could be seen at the Bedford bus garage, on approaching St.John's, by train.

Omar Bartle had purchased various makes over the years, such as: Chevrolets; Gilford 1680T; Dennis - Dart, Lancet, Ace; Bedford - Sunny, Dodge, Guy Arab. Bodies fitted to the above chassis were: Wycombe; Duple: Thurgood; Strachan: Weymann.

His entire fleet consisted of single deckers, with the exception of two Guy Arab II, 51 seaters, rear entrance, Weymann bodied double deckers, built in 1945 and 1949.

So in 1953, there came an end to the era where you could have: 'Popped to Gamgy', 'Went all the way round Wresswoth to Bigglesidd' and 'Yer must a went to St. Notes Market of a Thursday'.

I can remember (just) sitting in one of his buses on Biggleswade Market Square 20 minutes before it was due out. As there were several people aboard, it was driven to Potton, then returned for its scheduled service. When the National took over, though, buses would probably be cancelled, and often were. 'Missed ole Omar for a few years, didn't we?'

. . . . .

The Potton History Society would welcome any photographs, information, time-tables etc. Also, another small part of Potton's missing transport history concerns the British Road Service depot and its fleet.

Where was it?

Off Biggleswade Road, beside the Royal Oak.

What is there now?

The Ridgeway.

George Howe

PHONE: 16 POTTON.

MEMO. FROM \_\_\_\_\_

**O. A. BARTLE & CO.,**

OMNIBUS PROPRIETORS &

AUTOMOBILE ENGINEERS.

**MARKET SQ., POTTON, BEDS.**

## FAMILY HISTORY

William Robarts journeyed from Zululand last August to visit Potton, birthplace of his grandfather. After having lunch in the 'Rose and Crown' (John Tyler, great-uncle, had been hotelier in 1853) it was suggested that the secretary of the Potton History Society be contacted. Perhaps she knew of the family!

On consulting the Post Office Directory of 1847, it was discovered that great-grandfather Emery Robarts was listed as a boot and shoe maker and his brother James, as a coal, iron and timber merchant. Both men traded in the Market Square.

Copies of letters, written in the 1850's, have since been received, together with the following story.

Grandfather William was born on December 20th 1847. His family, consisting of father, mother Martha and six month old sister, Emma, left for Natal on September 22nd 1849, travelling on the 425 ton Barque Aliwal. They arrived in Durban on December 10th 1849, but Emma had died on the voyage. In 1850, a brother, Walter James was born, but only lived three months. William's mother died of T.B. in 1855, when he was only seven years old. His education was very limited, but he grew up to become a Surveyor, Architect and community leader.

William Robart's name is receiving publicity at the moment. At least three of his designed buildings have been declared National Monuments. Several others, unfortunately, have been demolished. The Durban Marine Hotel, which in its day, was considered to be the best hotel in the Southern Hemisphere, is his most notable design.

As Government Surveyor he laid out several of the early farms and towns of Natal. He drew the official street plans of Durban in 1882. The British Admiralty commissioned him to survey the Aliwal Shoal, south of Durban, which is in the sea and a dangerous shipping hazard. It was actually sighted on the family's voyage in 1849, and named after their vessel.



William Robarts was Durban's mayor and City Engineer at the same time. He was the sole judge of plans submitted for the Durban City Hall, which can be seen today, and his manual of Survey Formulae is still in use'.

This 'son of Potton' died in 1903, aged 55. His grandson concludes by saying, 'He predeceased my birth by many years, but I have grown very proud of him'.

\* \* \* \* \*

According to the obituary of Emery's brother, James, circa 1892, the Robarts family moved from Biggleswade to Potton in 1823. On the death of James Carrington, 1860, auctioneer and estate agent, James Robarts added this business to those he already had. His coal yard and office, situated in Sun Street, was rebuilt after the fire of 1870. (The site is now being developed as 'Queensbury Lodge').

Playing an important part in local life, James was an assessor of taxes for the town, he represented the Parish on the Highway Board, voiced publicly his concern over the management of Potton Charities, and was elected Chairman of the School Board, on the death of the Rev.W.Bidwell. He supported the Liberal cause, agreed with religious freedom and was a member of the Congregational Church.

A talented musician and composer, he and his family were involved in many of the Town's social events. (This gift has been inherited. Our visitor's daughter is a music teacher.)

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As can be seen, family history is not just a collection of names and dates. Inherited characteristics and family achievements can also play a most important roll.

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We have little contemporary writing of the 19th century, so the contents of the letters, already mentioned, are of great importance. They will be reviewed in our next issue.

## RECOLLECTIONS

Further extracts from Mr.Cyril Croot's taped memories describe his life at Standalone Farm as a teenager. His father was foreman for Mr.G.Kitchener.

'I used to think the farmers fed the cattle better than they expected the workers to be fed, because they had the best..linseed cake, cotton cake, barley meal and bran'.

When the bullocks were fat, they were taken to Biggleswade Market. The boys were responsible for shutting field gates and preventing the cattle from getting through gaps in the hedges. 'We'd be running for two or three miles in the fields'. When they eventually arrived in Biggleswade, the auctioneer would give them sixpence. 'We were lucky in those days'.

'Another job was taking store cattle to Croydon where the boss had some farms. We would walk them there, running about the fields. Then we'd walk home. I suppose we'd do twenty miles at least. We didn't think anything of it. ..it was better than work. I suppose living on a farm, we had to be on the go more than most'.

'Another job on the farm for the boys was what we called 'pulling cuttings out'..That was when the machine came for threshing the corn. That used to be a real dirty, dusty job. You'd get dust in your ears, nose and throat, and all over your clothes. You would be in a heck of a mess by the time you had finished. We didn't take any notice of it really..We'd work in dust for a week. Nobody said anything about lung disease'.

'Talking about threshing, there used to be loads of rats and mice about..you'd pick them up by their tails and dispose of them..Going back a bit, mole catching during the first World War used to be a good trade..I got as much as half-a-crown a skin..You used to get 2d for the tail as well..'

### SOCIETY NEWS

It was decided, at the September Committee meeting, to advertise for willing helpers to assist the Secretary in indexing the ever increasing Society collection. Response was immediate:-

'Browsing through the advertisements in Cox's window one morning, one card in particular attracted my attention. Mrs Yates required help with the mounting collection of memorabilia, being donated by Potton residents, to the Society. People were anxious for old records, photographs, bill-heads etc. to be preserved, so that present and future generations could look back and see the changing face of Potton.

During the past few months, I have been indexing, and reading, much printed material. It has become clear that some changes have been more acceptable than others. Many people, for instance, were dismayed when the Shambles were to be demolished, as letters and articles in the newspapers of the time show. On the other hand, who can blame the residents who turned down the name 'Pest House Lane' for their new home? Myers Road is so much more acceptable!

I have also been very interested to see how some family names have continued in Potton over the years. Now, when I walk around Potton, I feel I know the history behind 'Braybrooks' Drive, 'Chapman' Close, 'Judith' Gardens etc.

'Cave's' Court has been built on the site of the old school, where my eldest daughter started her education, and where her grandmother now resides in what was the back playground!

I have thoroughly enjoyed my journeys back in time via posters, newspaper cuttings, sale bills etc., seeing how people in Potton lived years ago, and I hope to continue these 'journeys' for some time to come.'

Lyndsey Smith

Newsletter No. 6

I have been helping the History Society in a similar way, only my work is with the photographic collection, which contains over two thousand prints. I am going through the files, checking the old entries, and numbering the new ones.

A recently acquired photograph of Mrs. N. Richardson and the Potton Produce Shop, also shows one of Potton's older inhabitants, Mr. J. Munns, with his bag of shopping.

The Corner Shop is still at Moon's Corner, and while visiting Bedford Hospital recently I was very interested to meet Miss Louise Endersby, who once lived there. She proudly talked of the lovely cheese they used to sell. She also told me that she is 108 years old!

If you have any photographs of that shop, or any other, we would be very pleased to borrow them to copy for our records.

Pat. George

<b>FREDK. T. COX</b> Phone 206 Printer, Stationer, Newsagent Agent for Sketchley Cleaning & Dyeing MARKET SQUARE, POTTON	<b>ROSE &amp; CROWN HOTEL</b> Phone 221 Residential, Lunches, Teas, Suppers till 11.30 p.m. MARKET SQUARE, POTTON
<b>"HOWARDS"</b> DRAPERS, MILLINERS, LADIES' & CHILDREN'S OUTFITTERS Join our Popular Drapery Club 2 & 17, MARKET SQUARE, POTTON	

Parish Magazine 1963

MARKET SQUARE BOOKLET - Revision

The first edition of the Research Report, No.1 has sold out. I plan to produce a revised edition in the format of 'The Great Fire of Potton', up-dating our knowledge. If any members have comments or new information to add to the original edition, I would be pleased to receive them in the next few weeks.

P.J.Ibbett