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SPRING ISSUE 2024

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Down Your Way

Amphill

Amphill has some interesting connections, including James Hanratty and Richard Nicolls, who was responsible for naming New York.



A SPRING CANVAS - on the cover

Grand Days Out

County Life visits RHS Chelsea



For five glorious days in May, the RHS returns to Chelsea.

Image © RHS/Matt Pereira

Aspects of County Life

BEDFORD'S SERGEANT WILSON

The great John Le Mesurier, a much loved actor

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Down Your Way • Aspects of County Life • History & Heritage • County Connections • The County Gardener • Wildlife • New Books • Lifestyle • Seasonal Features • Grand Days Out • Great British Traditions • A Picture of England • The Short Story •



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Your Spring Edition

Warmer days, blue skies and prolonged outbursts of glorious sunshine will be very welcome this year following the long drawn-out, and very dull, winter months! Our barbecue summer may not have been as long-lasting last year, but we did at least have a few fine days, which provided an opportunity to get out and explore the delights of our splendid surrounding countryside. Perhaps this year will offer a slight improvement?

In this issue, you'll discover a selection of beautifully illustrated articles, including our regular look at selected towns and villages in our popular series 'Down Your Way', which features Ampthill. Our reader recollections and 'Aspects of County Life' educate, entertain and, no doubt, bring back fond memories, and you'll discover the 'Dad's Army' connection with our county. We regularly publish articles from our extensive back catalogue, and this is encouraged by the regular emails I receive suggesting the importance of giving our new readers an insight into what they have missed over the past twenty-six years.

With spring chasing at our heels, it provides renewed opportunity to venture out and, with so many great events taking place this year, we showcase a selection of the best available. And for readers with a sense of adventure our featured 'Great Escapes' and 'Grand Days Out' articles will take you on a journey of exploration and provide two great away-days! Symonds Yet is the focus of 'Great Escapes' and the magnificence of the RHS Chelsea Flower show features in 'Grand Days Out'.

If you are looking for gifts, 'Serendipity' offers some inspirational ideas. The County Gardener gets us ready to venture out into the garden and the RSPB writes about springtime at their nature reserves in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. Our short story will, as always, capture your imagination while 'A Very British Tradition' and 'A Picture of England' both have a foody theme.

I hope you enjoy your spring edition of *County Life*.

Alan

Pen-ultimate letter 

THANK YOU FOR FEATURING POTTON ...

Dear Editor.

I am writing to congratulate you on the excellent article featured in the winter issue of the *Bedfordshire County Life* magazine about the charming town of Potton in Bedfordshire. As a long-time resident of Potton, I was delighted to see my hometown receive such a thoughtful and well-written portrayal.

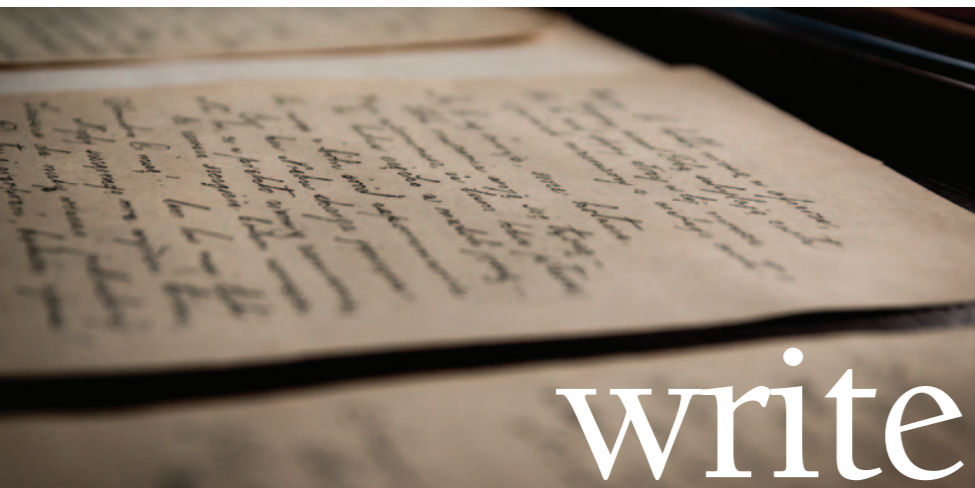
The article perfectly captured the unique character and appeal of Potton, including its history and heritage and the photos accompanying the article were a delightful addition, showcasing the town's beauty and charm.

You took the time to explore the town and get to know its past, and this effort certainly paid off in the quality of the piece. Thank you for featuring Potton in our county magazine and for showcasing the town in such a positive and insightful manner. I am sure that this article will inspire many readers to visit Potton and experience its charms for themselves.

Sincerely

Gary Medlock - Bedfordshire

From the Editor... Potton has a very interesting history which we will explore in future editions.



write back

Write to County Life at ...

email:

editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk

Have your say - make a comment or recommendation. Our 'Pen-ultimate' letter will receive one year's subscription to either our Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire or Hertfordshire edition; redeemable as a gift subscription to a friend if preferred.

Reaction

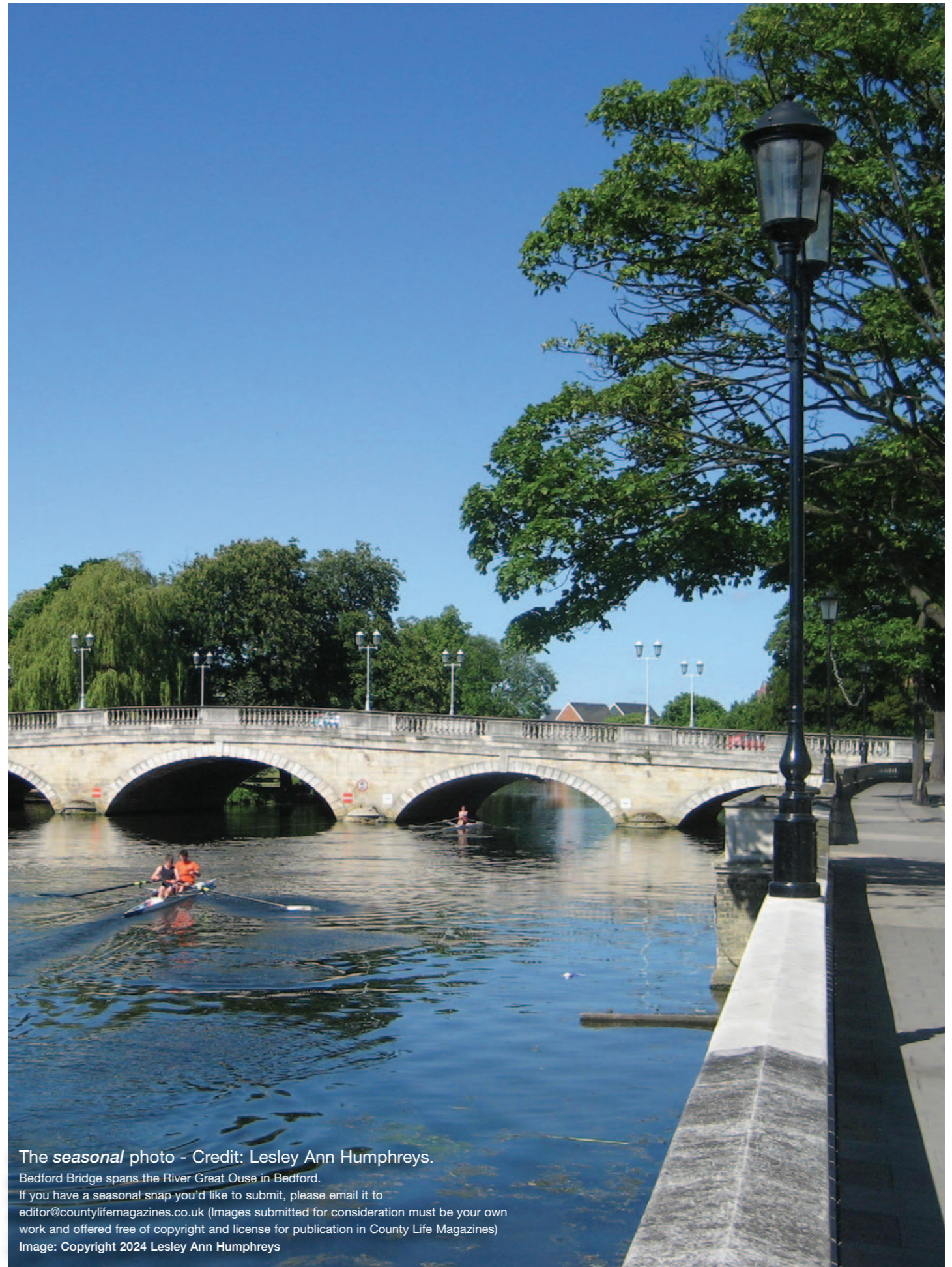
SHORT STORIES ...

Dear Editor.

I do enjoy every aspect of *County Life* but in particular I enjoy reading the short stories, which have given me the inspiration to join a writing group. I am pleased to say that I now write my own short stories and will be submitting a small selection for your consideration.

Keep up the good work.

**Sylvia Spencer.
Tring**



The *seasonal* photo - Credit: Lesley Ann Humphreys.

Bedford Bridge spans the River Great Ouse in Bedford.
If you have a seasonal snap you'd like to submit, please email it to editor@countylifemagazines.co.uk (Images submitted for consideration must be your own work and offered free of copyright and license for publication in County Life Magazines)
Image: Copyright 2024 Lesley Ann Humphreys



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WILDLIFE SCENE

41 • SPRING IS BURSTING OUT ALL OVER!

At last, spring is here and with it comes renewed hope. Winter gradually gives way to warmer and brighter spring weather, and RSPB nature reserves become busier than ever with new life and growth. So, put a spring in your step and take some time out to experience the wonder of wildlife in spring at one of the RSPB nature reserves in our region.

CONTRIBUTORS
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 W&H Peacock - Jess Perrin -
 Tim Sharrock - Russell Sole



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16 ASPECTS OF COUNTY LIFE... BEDFORD'S SERGEANT WILSON

Bedford born John Le Mesurier is one of the most widely remembered comic actors of the 1950s, 60s and 70s; particularly as the somewhat amused Sergeant Wilson in the long-running TV series *Dad's Army*.

John Elton Le Mesurier Halliley was born on 5 April 1912, two weeks before the contralto Kathleen Ferrier. Although his Le Mesurier ancestors were, as the name illustrates, a Norman-French family from the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Alderney, Henry Le Mesurier, John's great grandfather, came to Bedford in the 1830s as second master of Bedford School, whose school song he was to write. John's grandfather, another John, went as a soldier to India, where he married before returning to Bedford.

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Sun, Sea Sand AND SWIMWEAR!

THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS SUDDENLY UPON US

and the Swimwear Showroom at Elouise Lingerie, in Buckden Cambridgeshire, is buzzing with activity. Yet again the fabulous swimwear brands delight and impress with innovation to enhance fit and optimise comfort with all brands focusing on a range of cup sized products.

Anyone who questions the fashion potential of the half metre or less that goes into a swimsuit or bikini underestimates the creative capacity of the leading swimwear brands stocked at Elouise Lingerie.

Spoilt for choice this season, every collection boasts an array of accessories to compliment your swimwear ranging from the simple pareo to stunning kaftans and maxi dresses. And, to complete your beach goddess look, Elouise has a selection of glamorous sunglasses in styles to suit all.

Why not call in to their boutique and enjoy a complimentary swimwear styling session in their relaxing boudoir.



For more information about Elouise Lingerie, or to book an appointment, call on 01480 812740 or visit www.elouiselingerie.co.uk

Volunteers Needed FOR SPRINGTIME WILDLIFE SURVEYS

CHARITY CALLS FOR HELP RECORDING ENDANGERED WILDLIFE IN GARDENS AND ON LOCAL RIVERBANKS

This spring, leading wildlife conservation charity People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is calling for volunteers across the UK to take part in their annual spring surveys in a bid to help endangered wildlife and the habitats they call home.

From March onwards, volunteers are needed to record any wild mammals, such as hedgehogs and foxes, spotted in gardens or other green spaces as part of PTES' Living with Mammals survey.



From April to June, volunteers are asked to visit a local riverbank or waterway in search of elusive water voles for the National Water Vole Monitoring Programme. And, later in spring, volunteers are

needed to health-check Britain's hedgerows for the Great British Hedgerow Survey and record any sightings of spectacular stag beetles as part of the charity's Great Stag Hunt from late May into July.

David Wembridge, Mammal Surveys Coordinator at People's Trust for Endangered Species says: "With blossom on the trees, and bats and hedgehogs emerging from hibernation, spring is a wonderful time to connect with the great outdoors and get involved in conservation."

"Whether it's spotting wildlife in your garden or local park, walking a stretch of waterway or hedgerow, taking part in a survey is a brilliant way to help conservation. Every record - even if you look and don't spot anything - is valuable to understanding how different populations and habitats are changing and how we might protect them. Taking the time to appreciate the natural world on our doorstep, listening and looking, fosters a connection and powers a whole lot of amazing citizen science!"

To take part in any of these surveys or to find out more about PTES, visit ptes.org/surveys

Visitors Are Always Welcome AT DUKEMINSTER COURT, CARE HOME DUNSTABLE

WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN A NATION OF ANIMAL LOVERS.

After all, we were the first country in the world to start an animal welfare charity and recent UK pet population research finds that we keep nearly 40 million pets between us. There's good reason for it too, other than how adorable they are; the health benefits people receive from our animal kingdom friends are wide ranging. Owning or having regular contact with pets and other animals can lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke, reduce stress levels and alleviate feelings of loneliness.

Here at Quantum Care we've been very fortunate to have some excellent partnerships with individuals and organisations that regularly visit our care homes with pets and other animals. Dukeminster Court, our care home in Dunstable, often has visitors from the animal kingdom including, very recently, from Wilson the Wallaby, various colourful and friendly budgies and an Owl to name but a few. These visitors are always warmly welcomed by the residents at the home and some of them build up relationships with them over time, especially with visiting dogs.

These visiting friends from the animal kingdom bring a great deal of joy to the residents within our care homes and add an extra dimension to our already busy activities schedules.

For more information about Dukeminster Court care home and the care services provided, visit www.quantumcare.co.uk or call 01707 393293.



The Secret TO A HAPPY RETIREMENT

THE POSITIVE DIFFERENCE that moving to a retirement living community can make to your quality of life, might just be one of life's best kept secrets.

Homeowners seeking a peaceful yet well-connected lifestyle in the Bedfordshire region can experience the best of suburban retirement living in Kempston's latest retirement community, The Newells situated on Manor Drive.



Ann and her husband Harry have been loving life since they moved to an Adlington community last year: "You don't have any worries here. When you own a house, you become a servant to it. You

have to do all these jobs to keep it sellable and up to scratch, but the days come when you don't want to have to do that sort of thing anymore. It worries you. Here it's like being on holiday every day. I can't get over it. We're having such a wonderful time." Homeowner Margaret continues "I was thinking of the future when we bought here, but actually we're really enjoying the present. The people here are such good company. We have a great community and we all get on very well."



Come and see for yourself... Why not get a real feel for your options? Arrange a private tour or we can book in a spot of complimentary lunch for you in the restaurant. Call 01234 988200 or visit adlington.co.uk/BL to find out more.

Edward Bawden & Me Exhibition AT THE HIGGINS BEDFORD

FROM SATURDAY FEBRUARY 17 TO SUNDAY OCTOBER 13, 2024, some of the biggest names in British art, illustration, ceramics and textiles are coming together in an eclectic exhibition at The Higgins Art Gallery & Museum, Bedford to celebrate the work of printmaker, illustrator, watercolourist and designer Edward Bawden (1903-89), entitled 'Edward Bawden & Me'.

Edward Bawden & Me is curated by Bawden's good friend, the illustrator and printmaker Chris Brown, who invited a diverse group of thirty artists and makers to respond to works by Edward Bawden in The Higgins Bedford collection. The exhibition features an artistic response from each of them, alongside the Bawden work that inspired it. The Higgins Bedford is the home of the Edward Bawden Archive, a collection of over a thousand pieces that Bawden donated to the gallery in the 1980s. Bawden wrote:

"My own wish, would be for all the jigsaw pieces of my life's work to be together... I must say I should feel immensely happy if I could be allowed to leave my remains to Bedford."

The archive housed at The Higgins Bedford contains work Bawden made while he was a student at the Royal College of Art in the 1920s, through to commissions he received in the 1980s. It includes prints, watercolours, ceramics, wallpapers, murals, posters, advertising designs, book illustrations, and even a garden bench.

Chris Brown says, "I think Edward would be amused to see that so many artists, printmakers, designers are paying "homage" to his work. Selecting the group has been enormous fun and the work produced in response to Edwards will reflect his broad interests.

Some of the participants knew him personally, whilst others know him only by his work. What links them all is their obvious admiration for the man and his output. Work gave him great pleasure and the work itself has given and continues to give great pleasure to others." Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture, Councillor Sarah Gallagher, said, "I am delighted to see the vibrant collaboration of renowned British artists and makers in the 'Edward Bawden & Me' exhibition at The Higgins Bedford."

The range of artists promises to make Edward Bawden & Me, a stunning and fascinating exhibition that will celebrate the work of one of Britain's most inventive and influential artists.

The Higgins Bedford can be found on Castle Lane, Bedford, MK40 3XD. It's free to visit and opening hours and further details can be found at www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk/Home.aspx.

Brighten Your Home THIS SPRINGTIME

THE DAYS ARE GETTING LONGER, the sun is shining, and the birds are chirping. How are you making the most of the springtime sun this year?



Shutters offer an effective way to control light, while keeping your home cosy, despite the cool spring temperatures. Enjoy the perfect balance of sunshine and warmth, thanks to versatile window shutters. Enhance the beauty of your home by making a statement with luxurious window shutters and blinds.

For more information about our made-to-measure shutters and blinds, contact your local Shuttercraft experts on 03304 004 144, or visit www.shuttercraft.co.uk

Environmental Charities PUTTING PEAT ON THE MAP

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHARITY THE GREENSAND TRUST

and its collaborative initiative the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership, working with The Wildlife Trust Beds, Cambs and Northants has launched a new project "Putting Peat on the Map" - focussing on improving our understanding of peat along the River Flit in Bedfordshire. It will be one of 13 projects sponsored by the Environment Agency's Lowland Agriculture Peat Water Discovery Pilot looking at England's lowland peat regions which include the Cambridgeshire Fens, Humberhead and Somerset levels.

Historically there were significant wetland areas in Bedfordshire's Flit Valley with large deposits of peat, but only small fragments remain of what were once much larger wetland landscapes - to such an extent that not many people even know we have peat soils in the county. The project will set out to discover where the peat has survived focussing on nature reserves and valley mire habitats along the river. Key sites include Flitwick Moor SSSI, where the peat is critical to the specific habitats and interest.

Jon Balaam, Director of Development at The Greensand Trust and project lead, states: 'It's imperative that action is taken to protect and restore remaining peat in this part of the country, where there is so little of it left. By looking at how we can work together to better understand, manage, and enhance our peat soils, we can deliver carbon emission reductions, improve food security, boost wetland biodiversity and nature's recovery, and contribute towards better protection for communities from flooding and drought.'

The Wildlife Trust Beds, Cambs and Northants works locally across those three counties to stop nature's decline. More information at www.wildlifebcn.org

Autism Charity Receives £1,500 Donation FROM BEDFORDSHIRE HOUSEBUILDER

AUTISM BEDFORDSHIRE HAS RECEIVED A £1,500 DONATION from David Wilson Homes to assist with its work to improve the quality of life of autistic children, young people, adults and their families.



The charity aims to reduce social isolation and improve the prospects for autistic people, reduce stress for parents and carers, and improve awareness, knowledge and understanding about autism in the community.

David Wilson Homes' donation came from The Barratt Foundation, which is designed to support national and local charities, large and small, across the UK to leave a legacy in the communities in which the housebuilder builds new homes.

Sarah Robinson, Fundraising Administrator at Autism Bedfordshire, said: "We were delighted to hear that David Wilson Homes was able to support our vital work.

"The donation will go towards the cost of furnishings and equipment for three new supported living homes for autistic adults in Bromham, Bedfordshire.

To find out more about the work of the charity, visit www.autismbedfordshire.net. For more information on David Wilson Homes developments in Bedfordshire visit www.dwh.co.uk/new-homes/east-of-england/bedfordshire

Amphill

A jewel in Bedfordshire's crown

A neat, concise market town, with interesting and diverse shops and a proud history and heritage

by
Alan Humphreys

Amphill is Saxon in origin and means 'ant-infested hill'. In 1219, the town was granted a charter by Henry III and for many centuries the market was the lifeblood of the town, having been held on a Thursday since 1219.

Amphill occupied a strategic position for trading in the Middle Ages, and its crooked crossroads, which twist off from the intimate and pretty Market Square, give the location a unique topography that has, without doubt, played its part in the preservation of the town centre, despite the pressures and encroachment of the 21st century and nearby redevelopment of the former site of the Amphill

brewery, which, following its closure, saw the erection of the Zonita Cinema building, which was itself demolished and redeveloped to include the new Waitrose store opened in October 2006.

From Market Square, two of the town's former coaching inns can be seen. The White Hart, just off Market Square, is a former principal original coaching inn once known as the Red Hart and still remains in business. The façade dates from around 1730 but the interior is much older.

The affluence of Amphill came about during the 15th century with the arrival of Sir John Cornwall, who made his money and fame in France; his power and influence escalating after his marriage to



PHOTO STORY - ABOVE:

Amphill town centre offers the day tripper, tourist and local inhabitant alike a rich and diverse array of retail shops. A few familiar names have stood the test of time but new life is constantly being added with new businesses complementing the other attractions that pull in shoppers from far and wide.

Photo: copyright 2010 Alan Humphreys

Princess Elizabeth of Lancaster, sister of the King, Henry IV. On his return to England, Sir John purchased land in Amphill, created the park, Great Lodge, and built a castle.

During the 16th century, the Cornwall estates passed into the hands of the Crown. Henry VIII visited the area often with his court. Katherine of Aragon, who was very fond of Amphill, was a prisoner in Amphill Castle

during the court proceedings at Dunstable Priory that led to the annulment of her marriage, after which she was moved to Kimbolton. Amphill Castle was demolished some years later, but the park remained. Only a cross now marks the original site of the castle, with an inscription by Horace Walpole on the base, which commemorates the Queen's imprisonment on the site.

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It was in 1978 that the editor published a feature boasting that anything could be purchased in Ampt Hill, with the exception of a hat - a statement that demonstrates the diversity of traders in the town at that time. In Bedford Street, Butterton's, a ladies', gents' and children's outfitters, once traded, and older residents will recall Peck's, a traditional drapers and furnishings store trading from premises on Market Square - the furniture store actually traded from premises in Bedford Street. Peck's, originally known as Rushbrooke's when it opened in 1873, employed a young Mr Peck, who eventually took on the business. The Bedford Street store - built on the foundations of a medieval inn - is home to the much-visited Ampt Hill Antiques Emporium, and many will recall Richardson's, a quality jeweller, who once traded on Market Square from the colonnaded Market House, which dates from 1780. Cheeseman's, the chemist, has existed as a pharmacy since 1813. Underwood's - another well-known local name - once owned this site, and traded in a variety of goods from wirelesses to bicycles and motorcars.

The Ampt Hill Masonic Centre, built during the early 1860s as a court house, achieved notoriety in 1961 when James Hanratty, accused of the murder of Michael Gregson in a lay-by off the A6 at Clophill, was brought before the magistrates here. Hanratty was sentenced to be hanged, and this was to be the

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Katherine of Aragon's association with Ampt Hill is also recognised at St Andrew's church, with Queen Katherine's window situated in the easternmost window in the south wall. This window, dedicated in February 1984, was designed and made by Christine Boyce of Silsoe and depicts Queen Katherine at prayer on the left-hand panel, with the right-hand panel showing her heraldic devices.

At the crossroads in the centre of the town there is a pump obelisk dated 1784. The Moot Hall also has an

Images Above: Imposing architecture provides ample evidence of Ampt Hill's prosperous past.

Photos: copyright 2010 Alan Humphreys

interesting cupola and clock dated 1852. Another interesting feature on Market Square can be found at No. 11 Church Street. This Georgian-fronted shop boasts a wooden arcaded front and was formerly the plait market. However, it is perhaps best remembered as the business premises of the local newspaper, *The Ampt Hill News*, which closed its doors for the final time in 1984.

Stephen Hearn
Tring Market Auctions

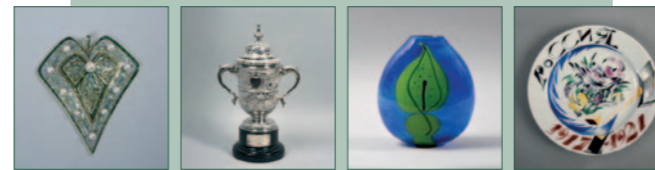
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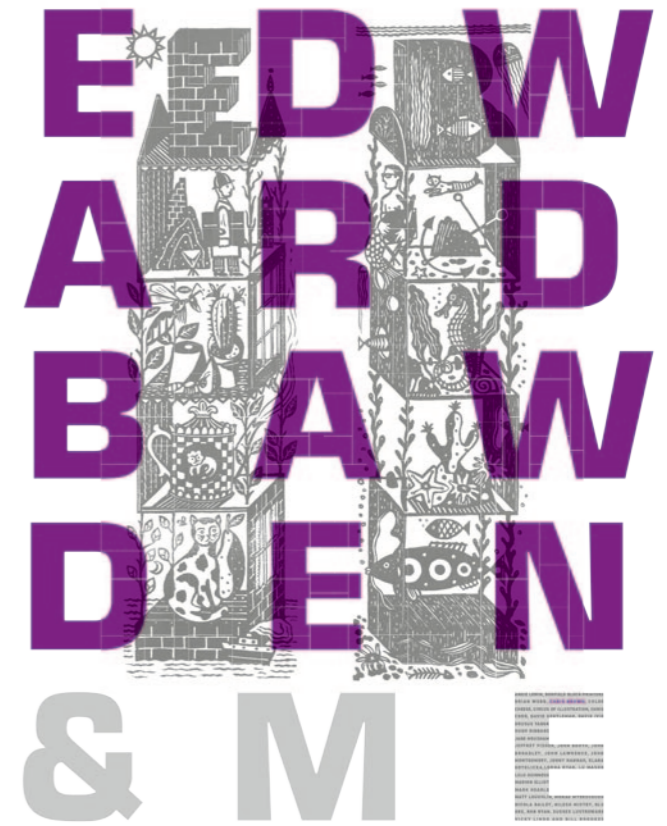
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EDWARD BAWDEN & ME

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last judicial hanging in this country.

Take a look at any early postcards of the town and they show little architectural change since the turn of the century - a unique attribute for this tiny mid-Bedfordshire town, and a great asset for the local traders who continue to serve the local community and those shoppers and tourists who visit the area attracted by the town's pleasant and accessible location and diverse range of trades.

It is perhaps hard to imagine - and probably completely unknown to the many tourists, especially those from the USA and, more importantly, those



Image Top: Situated at the crossroads in the centre of the town is a pump obelisk dated 1784.

Image Above: The iconic White Hart Hotel.

Opposite page: An eclectic architectural style around every corner.

Photos: copyright 2010 Alan Humphreys

resident in New York - that Ampthill's famous son, Richard Nicolls, was responsible not only for naming New York but also for shaping the early history and prosperity of this once very English colony.

Richard Nicolls was born in Ampthill in 1624 at the Great Lodge, originally one of the Ampthill Park buildings along the Woburn Road. Nicolls was the first of a long line of twenty-six British Governors of New York, and when, in 1668, he eventually set sail and returned to England, he left behind the legacy of a vigorous economy and a thriving colony. Back in England, around October 1668,

Colonel Richard Nicolls, as he was then known, journeyed to his birth town of Ampthill, in his beloved county of Bedfordshire. He undoubtedly would have spent some time retracing the paths of his youth around Ampthill and, with his love of horses, would have spent time, once again, riding through beautiful Ampthill Park. He built a house in Church Street and, although demolished many years ago, the site can reasonably be assumed to be where 'The Cloisters' stand today. Nicolls was eventually called - once more - into military service to command a squadron under the Duke of York. During the naval battle at Southwold Bay, on 28 May 1672 he was hit by a glancing blow from a cannonball and fell, fatally wounded. His body was returned to Ampthill, where he was buried at St Andrew's church alongside his parents, Francis Nicolls and Margaret Bruce. Today, a memorial commemorating his life and deeds can be found by the main altar, and the cannonball that took his life forms part of this memorial. The flags of the USA and Great Britain also form part of the memorial and were added during World War II.

In the past, many visitors of note would visit the estate of Mr Wingfield, an eccentric local character, who occupied and enlarged Ampthill House, first constructed in 1829 to provide accommodation for those who came to view his private zoo, which included camels, ostriches and llamas, who would roam the estate. Eventually, the animals were transferred to Whipsnade Zoo. The house has since been demolished.

Today, visitors to Ampthill can enjoy a gentle stroll around the town to encompass the many fine shops and restaurants or take in the extensive park, landscaped by Capability Brown. It was Lord Holland who endowed the avenue of limes known as the Alameda that leads to The Firs (sometimes known as Cooper's Hill). From the 1820s, this was a pine plantation of great beauty and much frequented by locals but, in 1917, the trees were cut down for use as trench props in World War I. Almost opposite the Alameda are the beautiful thatched



'Ossory' Cottages. Lord Ossory, responsible for reorganizing the layout of Market Square during the 1780s and erecting the Katherine Cross, commissioned the building of the cottages for his estate workers during the early 19th century.

The ruins of Houghton House, just off the B530 at the top of Bedford Street, are another popular destination for visitors. This Jacobean mansion, built by Mary, Countess of Pembroke, in about 1615, was dismantled in 1794, and what remains has been a ruin for many years. The original staircase, which was rumoured to be magnificent, was removed and put to use in the Swan Hotel, Bedford.

Article first published in Bedfordshire County Life, issue 49, Summer 2010

Bedford's Sergeant Wilson

John Le Mesurier

Bedford born John Le Mesurier is one of the most widely remembered comic actors of the 1950s, 60s and 70s; particularly as the somewhat amused Sergeant Wilson in the long-running TV series *Dad's Army*.

by
Isobel Murdoch



John Elton Le Mesurier Halliley was born on 5 April 1912, two weeks before the contralto Kathleen Ferrier. Although his Le Mesurier ancestors were, as the name illustrates, a Norman-French family from the Channel Islands of Guernsey and Alderney, Henry Le Mesurier, John's great grandfather, came to Bedford in the 1830s as second master of Bedford School, whose school song he was to write. John's grandfather, another John, went as a soldier to India, where he married before returning to Bedford.

The Halliley links to Bedford were similar. Again, John's paternal grandfather spent his early life in Asia - Ceylon (now Sri

Lanka) in this case - before settling in Bedford in the 1870s, where he became a solicitor in the Mill Street firm Halliley and Stimson. Thus, John's parents, Amy and Elton, were born to successful Bedford families. Upon their marriage, they set up home in Chaucer Road - north-west of the town centre.

The Bedford into which John was born one hundred years ago was in many ways similar to the Bedford we now know. Then, as now, the River Great Ouse commanded the Embankment Gardens, Mill Meadows and the Suspension Bridge (constructed twenty years earlier). The John Bunyan statue stood, as now, on the green outside St Peter's Church, as did the statue of John Howard outside St Paul's Church, and the

Swan Hotel and Castle Mound (site of Bedford's twelfth-century motte and bailey castle) were familiar sights.

Bedford's development during the nineteenth century as a manufacturing centre and river port firmly established the town's prosperity, and an arts scene quickly developed. The Halliley family became central to this, as John's parents supported the Bedford Musical Society and attended plays at the Corn Exchange and Royal County Theatre.

In the Chaucer Road house John was to spend the first year of his life, cared for by a nanny, as was his elder sister, Michelle, born in 1909. There were also two pet dachshunds, Patience and Nipper. But, in 1913, their father's political commitment led him to seek a new job as agent to the MP for Bury St Edmunds, and the Halliley family left Chaucer Road to embark upon a new life in Suffolk. Nevertheless, although John thus left Bedford so early in his life, the family's strong ties to the town were maintained through his grandparents as well as family friends.

John's early years were marked by glimpses of the First World War, as soldiers marched through Bury St Edmunds. The family enjoyed holidays on the Norfolk coast, and John grew to like cricket and tennis. His fascination with showbusiness was awakened by an early pantomime of Robin Hood, by concerts, and, as he grew older, by plays, musicals and films. These were bright interludes in an early life shadowed by schooling he detested in Kent, then Sherborne).

At the age of 18 John became an articled clerk with a Bury St Edmunds firm of solicitors. For three years he endured the work, but in 1933 he decided to throw caution to the wind. John moved to London, where he started at the Fay Compton Studio of Dramatic Art, alongside Alec Guinness. He then began a six-year spell in repertory, acting in a wide variety

of plays from Shakespeare to Noel Coward.

In 1939, while touring in Robert Morley's play *Goodness How Sad*, John met his first wife, June Melville. They married in April 1940, only to lose their new home to a bombing raid. Moreover, John was soon called up for training as an officer in the Royal Armoured Corps, and would spend the remaining years of the war in Ahmednagar, India.

John returned to London in late 1945, eager to revive his growing fame as an actor. But, in these immediate post-war years, he struggled to establish himself, with parts in B movies. June Le Mesurier's alcoholism led to the breakdown of their marriage in 1946, and John subsequently met Hattie Jacques at the Players Theatre, where she was then acting. They married in November 1949, and would have two sons: Robin, born in 1953, and Kim; born in 1956.

As the war years receded and the 1950s ushered in a different era, the new national mood was mirrored by a succession of comedy films in which John, like many fellow actors, was to find fame. Two leading figures in the cinema of these years were John and Roy Boulting, who became acclaimed as directors and producers of many such films. Two of these, *Josephine and Men* and *Private's Progress*, saw John Le Mesurier's first film successes on release in the mid 1950s. In the latter film he played a psychiatrist, alongside Ian Carmichael and Terry Thomas.

In 1956, John co-starred once again with Ian Carmichael in *Brothers in Law*. Television work in these years saw him act such parts as Dr Forrest in *The Railway Children* (1951) and work with Tony Hancock - who became a close friend - on *Hancock's Half Hour*, which transferred from radio to television in 1956.

Then in 1959 came the successful *I'm All Right, Jack*, another comedy film, exploring the growing power of trades

continued on page 18

Bedford's Sergeant Wilson

continued from page 17

unions in an era when this was a cause for controversy. Once more John co-starred with Peter Sellers (who played trades unionist Fred Kite), Terry Scott and Ian Carmichael.

The early 1960s were difficult years for John, overshadowed by the collapse of his marriage to Hattie (caused by her long affair with John Schofield), as well as by illness.

1963 saw John costar in Tony Hancock's film *The Punch and Judy Man*. That year he also played a lawyer in *The Pink Panther*, the first film to establish Peter Sellers' fame as Inspector Clouseau. And this was also the year John met his third wife, Joan Malin, whom he married in March 1966.

Television remained important, from the 1963 drama *The Brimstone Butterfly* to the sitcom *George and the Dragon*, with Sid James and Peggy Mount.

The early years of John's marriage to Joan were marked by her affair with Tony Hancock, which began in the summer of 1966 as Tony struggled with alcoholism. In March 1968, John began filming a new BBC comedy, which was to see his greatest triumph: *Dad's Army*. But these were months of turmoil: in June, Tony Hancock committed suicide.

John's life as Sergeant Wilson thus began in troubled circumstances. Moreover, he himself was unsure whether the comedy would be successful. But from the very first, critical acclaim and good viewing figures proved that this was a new classic.

Set in a fictional version of Bexhill, in east Sussex, *Dad's Army* recreated in vivid and telling style the life of the local Home Guard (which was begun by Anthony Eden in 1940 as fears grew of an invasion on the south coast). Striking a chord with a public for whom the war was still a fairly recent memory, and earning a lasting fame which

endures to this day, the comedy would run for nine years. Whether practising for invasion (in *'Sons of the Sea'*) or playing cricket against the wardens and guest-star Fred Trueman (in *'The Test'*), the cast brought a comic side of the era to life. John Le Mesurier's Arthur Wilson seemed set to remain always second in command to Arthur Lowe's Captain Mainwaring (in *'A. Wilson (Manager)?'*) he finally leaves to manage his own bank, only for the building to be destroyed by a bomb.

Such was the success of *Dad's Army* that a film version was released in 1971, followed later by a stage revue. This was also the year that John won a Best Actor BAFTA for his performance as a defector in the Dennis Potter play *Traitor*.

In 1976, the year before *Dad's Army* concluded, John fell ill with cirrhosis of the liver. He went on acting for the last seven years of his life, with parts in films, television and radio, and a West End run in Noel Coward's *Hay Fever*. But in July 1983 he fell ill once more and, on 15th November, at the age of 71, he died in Ramsgate, Kent, where he and Joan lived during these later years.

Perhaps you have seen the striking unfinished painting *Dickens' Dream*, which depicts Charles Dickens sitting in his chair as images of his characters crowd the study. Picture John Le Mesurier instead, sitting listening to jazz perhaps, during his later life, with a glass in his hand. Before his eyes play images of the many parts, the many characters, he brought to life. *George and the Dragon's* Colonel Maynard, perhaps, in portentous mood; or the shuffling, elusory double agent he played in *Traitor*; and, of course, Sergeant Wilson, debonair and vague as always.

Article first published in Bedfordshire County Life, issue 59, Winter 2012

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All Roads Lead To Rome.

Milestones are remnants of a period when life moved more slowly; advising the voyager of the distance ahead and behind. How very different from the road signs that we use today!

by
Susannah George



Image: Courtesy of and copyright Susannah George

The milestones that remain theseday seem forgotten and overlooked and often deemed a nuisance with regard to highway improvements. I have to admit that it was my godmother who first drew my attention to these icons. They are an aspect of road history that could be forgotten from the landscape and also from our memory. They may seem insignificant to us now but I marvel at seeing them, and treasure the importance that they once had and the need to preserve this part of our heritage.

The Romans first came to Britain in 55 BC and later settled in AD 43. Although notable routes across England already existed during the Iron

Age, the Romans wanted a better linkage of roads. To think that Julius Caesar himself would have used prehistoric track routes, for example, the Icknield Way, is truly fascinating. The first recorded milestones were put in place by the Romans, who defined the centre of Imperial Rome with the 'Golden Milestone'. This monument, probably of gilded bronze, was erected by the Emperor Caesar Augustus near the temple of Saturn in the central Forum of Ancient Rome. All roads were considered to begin from this monument and all distances in the Roman Empire were measured relative to that point. Hence the proverb 'All roads lead to Rome', which is a reference to the Milliarium Aureum as the specific point to which all roads were said to lead.

The Romans measured distance in order to aid timing and efficiency. They laid good metalled roads to move soldiers, supplies and couriers quickly across their empire. They measured distance to aid timing, marking every thousandth double-step with a large cylindrical stone. The Latin for thousand was 'mille' and the distance was 1,618 yards. However, the eventual British Standard Mile was 1,760 yards.

After the Roman military roads of the first century AD, highways developed to meet local community needs and, in 1555, an Act of Parliament made the townships responsible for the upkeep of local roads.

Apart from letting travellers know where they were and how far they had to go, the milestones were used to time mail coaches and walking races. Milestones were paid for by turnpike trusts, public subscription, landed gentry and local authorities. They acted as advertisements for iron foundries, and status symbols for the estate owner, also doubling as boundary markers, memorials and mounting blocks.

Road travel was slow and difficult and it could take up to 16 days to cover the 400 miles from London to Edinburgh. So, groups of local worthies formed 'turnpike trusts' by Acts of Parliament, raising money to improve stretches of road and then charging users tolls to pay for them at the toll gate or bar. From 1767, mileposts were compulsory on all turnpikes, to inform travellers of direction and distances, to help coaches keep to schedule and for charging for changes of horses at the coaching inns. The distances were also used to calculate postal charges before the uniform postal rate was introduced in 1840.

Turnpike roads were superseded by the railways from the 1840s and many trusts were wound up. In 1888, the new county councils were given responsibility for main roads, while minor ones remained the responsibility of the local councils, which had succeeded the townships. The councils also produced their

own designs because many of the stones were illegible. Metal markers became more usual and were often angled to improve visibility. An example of this can be seen in the picture (page 20) of the milestone in Kennett on the Cambridgeshire/Suffolk border on the B1506.

Fractions with Roman digits could be confusing. For example, II ½ could be construed as eleven and a half instead of two and a half. The picture opposite comes from a series of milestones in, which includes the Roman numeral VIII for the number nine.

Wood was an early material used for milestones. Records in East Sussex show that, in 1672, the Flimwell and Hastings Trust commissioned a series of wooden mileposts at 12 shillings each. However, stone was more durable, plentiful and, despite carving costs, reasonably economical.

There used to be little interest in the heritage value of milestones but that appears to have changed. The Milestone Society exists today to identify, record and conserve surviving examples through its regional groups. There have, however, been some misguided attempts at maintaining milestones. A Norfolk resident was keen to care for a county stone near his house and painted it yellow! Another well-meaning attempt at conservation was in Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire, which had its text painted the same colour as a nearby pub's exterior metalwork.

An unusual memorial stone at Newbold-on-Stour, Warwickshire, on the old road from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon, includes this verse:

"6 Miles/To Shakspeare's Town whose Name
Is known throughout the Earth
To Shipstone 4 whose lesser Fame
Boasts no such Poet's Birth".

At the base of the upper stage are Latin lines referring to transience and immortality; testament to the inherent interest in British milestones.

Article first published in Cambridgeshire County Life, issue 76, Spring 2017

WHY WE SAY

What We Say

Have you ever wondered about the origins of 'old sayings'? Well, the small selection below might perhaps serve as an introduction and whet your appetite. Whoever suggested social history was boring?

by
Russell Sole

"IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS."

When most houses had thatched roofs, it was common practice, during colder months, to allow non-domestic animals to shelter under the thatch to keep warm. So, smaller domestic pets - cats and dogs - and other small animals lived in the roof space. When rain fell, this space became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."

"PEASE PORRIDGE HOT, PEASE PORRIDGE COLD ..."

In the old days, when everything was cooked in a large pot over the kitchen range, every day an extra ingredient would be added to the pot. A family diet consisted mostly of vegetables and, on very rare occasions, perhaps a slice of meat. The family would eat the stew for dinner, with any leftovers remaining in the pot overnight. The next day, the process would start over again. Sometimes, the stewpot would have remnants of food that had been in the pot for quite a while. Hence the rhyme: "Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot nine days old."

"MY EARS ARE BURNING."

This is taken to mean that somebody is talking about you. The Romans believed that a tingling in the ear was a signal. The left ear suggested evil intent and the right signified words of praise.

"TO BRING HOME THE BACON AND CHEW THE FAT."

At one time, bacon would traditionally be put on show to impress any visitors as a mark of status because it was a sign of wealth that a man could bring home the bacon. The man of the house would emphasize his status by cutting off a little to share with his guests, who would all sit together and chew the fat.

"THE THRESHOLD."

Although the wealthy had slate floors, these would become slippery during the winter months, and so thresh (straw) was put down to help maintain a steady footing. As the thresh became less absorbent, more thresh was put down until, when the door was opened, the freshly laid thresh would fall through the doorway. The solution was to place a length of wood in the doorway to retain it. Hence, the 'threshold'.

"UPPER CRUST."

Bread was once divided according to status. Workers would receive the bottom (burnt) part of the loaf, and the family of the house enjoyed the middle part. But the best part was reserved for their guests - the upper crust.

"DIRT POOR."

When the floor under our feet used to be made of dirt and only the wealthy had something clean to walk on, the saying "Dirt poor" was adopted.



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The Ghosts of Clare College

Clare College founded in 1326, is the second oldest Cambridge college (after Peterhouse). Originally University Hall, in 1338 it was renamed when Lady Elizabeth de Clare presented generous gifts of land and money. Old Court, laid out in the fourteenth century, was rebuilt on the original foundations between 1638 and 1715.

by
Robert Halliday

Lady Elizabeth De Clare's portrait hangs in the College Hall. In an article entitled 'A Clare ghost', in the *Cambridge Daily News* of 26 September 1930 Dr Godfrey Wilson, the master of the college, was quoted as saying that Lady Elizabeth's ghost was rumoured to haunt the college. However, her portrait, painted long after her death, is probably an imaginary likeness. I am uncertain if there is any record of her appearance, so, if her ghost was seen, how she would be recognised?

A fifteenth-century chronicle written at Ely Cathedral, describes the sighting of a ghost near the college. In 1462, just after Easter, an eleven year old boy was in the street in front of Clare College, when an old man with a long beard, wearing torn clothes, appeared before him. The old man told the boy 'come to see me tomorrow night, and I will tell you something'. The next night the old man appeared and repeated the request. Next night the old man said, 'go now and tell everybody that within these two years there will be such a pestilence and famine and killing of men as no one living has seen before', and then disappeared, never to be seen again.

News of this attracted some attention, and the boy was carefully examined by Dr William Millington, a fellow of Clare (who had been vice-chancellor of the university in 1457 and helped to set up King's and Queen's Colleges). Dr Millington and his colleagues seem to have been impressed by the boy, whose account was not dismissed out of hand.

In 1462 Easter Sunday fell on 18 April, so the boy saw the ghost in the second half of April, or perhaps early in May. This story is unusual in that the ghost spoke, and gave a coherent message: while many people have claimed to see ghosts, conversations are uncommon. The street in front of Clare College was a busy public highway, so it seems strange that only one eleven year old boy saw or heard the ghost. Possibly he experienced what might now be termed a manifestation, only visible or audible to himself. It is hard to imagine that such considerations did not enter Dr Millington's mind on hearing the boy's story, so if Dr Millington believed the boy, the youth must have given an impressive account of the experience.

Perhaps the boy's experiences were believable at the time. In 1453 the 'Hundred Years War'

between England and France had just ended, with the English being humiliatingly driven from France. Since 1455 the 'Wars of the Roses' had been fought between supporters of Henry VI (Lancastrians) and the Dukes of York (Yorkists), and this conflict would continue, intermittently, for another thirty years. At the same time there was a severe economic depression, causing a downturn in living conditions. Thus warnings of pestilence, famine and death would have seemed plausible. However, on many occasions people have claimed to receive warnings from spiritual entities predicting that catastrophes will befall humanity. (An obvious example would be the prophecies in the Old Testament of the Bible.) These sometimes include admonitions that the coming calamity will be a punishment for the sinfulness of humankind, and could be averted if people change their ways. Such predictions are often vague and open to different interpretations.

Written in Latin, the chronicle in which this story appears is now kept in the library of the Archbishop of Canterbury's London residence at Lambeth Palace (*Chronicle And Memoranda Of Ely*, MS 448) and was published in 1880 in a (somewhat erudite) book with the title 'Brief Notes Of Occurrences Under Henry VI and Edward IV' in *Three Fifteenth Century Chronicles*, edited by James Gairdner, (Camden Society, second series, 28).

One of the most amusing ghost stories told about any Cambridge college is the tale of Dr Robert Greene, who was probably the least modest person ever to become a fellow of Clare College. Mansfield Forbes' *History Of Clare College* (1930) and Owen Seaman's collection of college anecdotes, *Paulopostprandials, Only Some Little Stories After Hall* (1883), describe how Dr Greene regarded himself as the most intelligent and accomplished member of the university (above even Isaac Newton, then a fellow of Trinity College). His *Principles Of Natural Philosophy* sought to replace all current scientific ideas with his own beliefs. Although this was subjected to merciless ridicule, he remained convinced of his all-encompassing wisdom. He

devoted fifteen years to preparing a 1,000-page *Principles Of The Philosophy Of The Expansive And Contractive Forces, Or An Enquiry Into The Principles Of The Modern Philosophy*. While he claimed that his *Greenian Philosophy* was superior to all previous intellectual systems, nearly everybody who read the book laughed at its poor quality.

In 1730 Dr Greene's will, (a superlative example of literary bombast, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in August 1783) asked for his skeleton to be displayed in Clare College Library. In return he left Clare College £200 (possibly equivalent to £40,000 in 2020) and property in his hometown of Tamworth in Staffordshire. Dr Greene's relatives cannot have been happy when they heard of this, because they rushed into Clare College, seized his body and hurriedly organised a conventional funeral and burial. The college staff and students (perhaps unsurprisingly) did nothing to stop them. Nevertheless, the college authorities found Dr Greene's offer of £200 and property in Tamworth rather tempting. After (very) great indecision, they finally decided to accept this in 1742. By then nobody knew what had happened to Dr Greene's remains (or was too anxious to find out). As a substitute, another skeleton was displayed in the library. Few people liked seeing it, so it was moved to a cupboard by the Hall Staircase. It disappears from the college records in the nineteenth century. One story holds that departing students took bones as souvenirs of Clare College until nothing was left. Another possibility is that it was destroyed when a fire broke out in the staircase. Whatever happened, it appears that the college authorities made no great effort to preserve it.

Legend says that Dr Greene, upset by the loss of his skeleton, haunts Clare College, hoping to find it. Every Christmas Eve his ghost roams the buildings and grounds, trying to re-gather his bones. Considering their dispersal, this must be a thankless task!

LIFE style... enjoy, relax, indulge

HOMES - GARDENS - PROPERTY
BRITISH TRADITIONS - NATURE NOTES
GRAND DAYS OUT & GREAT ESCAPES
NEW BOOKS - SHORT STORY
A PICTURE OF ENGLAND

- page 27 • Serendipity - Inspirational gifts.
- page 30 • Under The Hammer - Poole Pottery.
- page 34 • Grand Days Out - RHS Chelsea Flower Show.
- page 36 • Great Escapes - Symonds Yat.
- page 38 • The County Gardener - Spring's New Growth.
- page 39 • Nature Notes - Surprise In The Spinney.
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- page 41 • County Wildlife Scen - RSPB - Spring Is Bursting Out All Over.
- page 42 • Cover to Cover - The Book Review pages.
- page 43-47 • It's Your Move - Town and Country Homes and Care Home Living.
- page 48 • The Short Story - A Serious Investment.
- page 50 • A Picture of England - Bakewell.



SERENDIPITY

Serendipity *noun.* the occurrence of an unexpected surprise by chance

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A brief introduction to... The History of Poole Pottery

by
W&H Peacock



A renowned British pottery company with a rich history dating back to the late 19th century. The story of Poole Pottery involves a combination of artistic innovation, economic challenges, and changes in ownership. Today, Poole Pottery remains a cherished name in the world of ceramics, known for its heritage and unique designs. Collectors often seek out vintage pieces from different periods of the company's existence.

Founding Years

The origins of Poole Pottery can be traced back to 1873 when Jesse Carter founded a small pottery on Poole Quay, near to local deposits of Dorset clay. Initially, the pottery produced mostly functional items such as tiles and architectural ceramics. In 1895, Carter's son, Owen Carter, took over the business and began experimenting with more decorative and artistic pottery.

Carter, Stabler & Adams

In 1910, Owen Carter joined forces with Harold Stabler and Phoebe Stabler, forming the company "Carter, Stabler & Adams." The company gained recognition for its innovative designs, especially during the Art Deco period. The company produced much of the ceramic tiling used on London Underground stations built in the 1930s.

Post-War Evolution

After World War II, Poole Pottery experienced continued success and became known for its distinctive "Delphis" range conceived by designers Guy Sydenham and Robert Jefferson and later developed by Jefferson and Tony Morris. Every piece is pretty much unique, with designs created by the decorators themselves.

Characterized by psychedelic, vibrant, abstract patterns with designs inspired by artists such as Mondrian, Warhol, Matisse and Pollock.



The Present

Subsequent ownership changes occurred in the following decades, leading to variations in the pottery's production and style. In the 1990s, Poole Pottery went through various ownership changes, facing financial difficulties at times. The brand underwent a revival in the early 21st century, with a renewed focus on craftsmanship and quality. Poole Pottery continues to produce both traditional and contemporary designs, appealing to collectors and enthusiasts.



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Image credit: IDSystems / Chris Taylor Photography

A modern twist to a 16th century timber-framed home

Advertiser's Announcement

Nestled in a quiet Suffolk village, this incredible timber-framed home has been given a modern twist with the addition of a stunning open-plan kitchen extension.

The main part of the house was originally constructed in the mid-16th Century and sits in large gardens and its own meadow. Over the years the house has been sympathetically altered and extended many times and as such it is one of the few properties of its type not to be listed.

The owners of the house had made tweaks and changes to the garden and house over the years but were keen to add their own mark to the house and create an open plan kitchen and living space that was filled full of natural light.

“Over the past 450 years everyone who has owned the house has made changes to suit their way of living and how they needed the house to be for them and this was our chance to do the same. There is so much history within these walls that we knew whatever we did had to work with the existing structure and complement it.”

The homeowners worked with Leiston based Brooks Architects to come up with a range of options that would allow them to create the open plan space to enlarge the kitchen whilst breaking down the boundaries between inside and out.

“There was no real connection between the house and the garden and we love being outside and using it as a space for entertaining. We wanted that ability to completely open up sliding doors and step outside or

to sit outside and feel like we had almost created another room in the house.”

The most striking element of the design is the large glazed gable with ultra-slim aluminium sliding doors below and the clients opted for IDSystems to supply and install the glazing based on their experience on similar style projects.

“We had full confidence that it was going to work but being able to see examples of period style homes with these types of doors really made the difference. It was hard to visualise the doors when they were installed in really contemporary style builds so it was a huge help that IDSystems were able to show us similar styles of houses with their doors installed in them.”

The finished extension, built by Kerslake Construction, features a number of details that tie the extension back to the design of the house; the pitch of the roof is angled to mirror the main structure whilst the use of timber cladding on the underside of the extension roof is a nod to the internal timber beams.



For more information about IDSystems' bespoke glazing options visit www.idsystems.co.uk, email your architects drawings to info@idsystems.co.uk or call 01603 408804.

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GRAND DAYS OUT



Britain's gardening charity, the Royal Horticultural Society, has a long and interesting history dating from 1804. Founded under the title 'the Horticultural Society of London', by Sir Joseph Banks and John Wedgwood, its aim was to collect plant information and encourage the improvement of horticultural practice. The prototype of the Society's popular flower shows began in the late 1820s, with a series of floral fetes held at the Duke of Devonshire's estate in Chiswick. The rest, as they say, is history.

Image © RHS/Matt Pereira



Image © RHS/Oliver Dixon



Five Days In May

World-renowned, glamorous and quintessentially British, RHS Chelsea is a truly unique and unforgettable day out and, this year, the world's greatest flower show is bursting with horticultural inspiration in a year which promises to be the most sustainable yet!

All the main garden categories are returning in 2024 and include the Show Gardens along Main Avenue, while the Sanctuary and Feature Gardens explore themes through horticulture and the All About Plants area in the Floral Marquee focuses on planting.

For smaller spaces, the Balcony and Container Gardens provide lots of inspiration for renters and urban gardeners. For plant-lovers there's the opportunity to get lost in the Floral Marquee for the day, picking the brains of expert growers and admiring the incredible creations of the floral artists and the Great Pavilion will be overflowing with scent and colour.

Trying to reduce the environmental impact of the RHS Shows has been a priority for many years, and this year's show will see the investment in time and expertise begin to pay off, as garden builds and relocations are focused on green goals. Show manager Gemma Lake explains, "This year we are working closely with all our garden designers to bring the most sustainable gardens we can to the show. They are using eco-techniques, low carbon materials and processes that are not only reducing their impact on the environment, but also reducing our waste at the end of the show. "Every garden has a final relocation post-show where communities around the country will gain from having a beautifully designed space. We are proving

that great design and sustainability go hand in hand and I can't wait to see all the gardens at the show."

For the first time in the history of the world-famous show, a garden will feature at RHS Chelsea 2024 which is made by children. The resulting RHS No Adults Allowed Garden is a joyful journey through a fantastical landscape where children can explore the magic of lush woodland, bountiful meadows and a wetland with heightened colour and oversized bog plants.

Their adventure culminates at the final destination - a natural den, set within a pool of water. Sliding down into the water, this sunken, children-only space, is a sanctuary where they can play, learn, and explore the natural world around them.

Highlighting the importance of access to nature for children, the garden is an immersive experience where they can scramble over boulders, splash around in the natural stream, and dive into jubilant planting.

RHS Director General, Clare Matterson CBE, says: "Children gardening and growing plants is both joyous and good for learning, development, and health and wellbeing. Like our Children's RHS Chelsea Picnic, which will continue in 2024, I hope this garden will be a special experience for all the children involved, which ignites an interest in gardening that will be with them throughout their life. Of course, we're going to have to do some serious negotiating to see if we can get a special pass for adults to be allowed on the garden at the Show!"

The RHS stages an unrivalled series of flower shows throughout the summer, which are a must-see in the gardening calendar. Each with its distinct character,

RHS Flower Shows are known for bringing together new and established talent and for creating sensational displays and gardens. Every show has something for everyone, whatever their gardening level or experience and the RHS Chelsea Flower Show is no exception. For many visitors it is an opportunity to relax and enjoy the surroundings with friends and a chilled glass of fizz. There are lots of bespoke options available to enhance your experience, from luxury dining to hotel packages, for those who want to make a weekend of it. So give yourself or a loved one something to look forward to, with a ticket to RHS Chelsea 2024 and be part of the greatest show in earth.

Photo story.

Top left © RHS/Oliver Dixon: Chelsea Pensioner Billy Knowles lends a hand to transform the grounds of the Royal Hospital 2023.

Main © RHS/Matt Pereira: Vibrant colours, performers and entertainers at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023.

Above right © RHS/Oliver Dixon: The 'Bush Boys' at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2023.



Image © RHS/Oliver Dixon

RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2024 21 - 25 MAY

Show times:

RHS Members' Days
Tuesday - Wednesday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Thursday - Friday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Friday Chelsea Late Event:
5.30 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Saturday 8 a.m. - 5.30 p.m.
(sell off of display begins at 4 p.m.)

**Venue: London Gate
Royal Hospital Road,
Royal Hospital, Chelsea,
London, SW3 4SL**

Symonds Yat

Symonds Yat, in the Forest of Dean, is a place of natural beauty. It has visitor attractions including a maze, built in 1977, to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and the wonderful Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo.

by
Alan Humphreys

Straddling the River Wye Symonds Yat is a popular tourist destination in the Forest of Dean a few miles of the Welsh border. The name is said to come from Robert Symonds, a 17th century sheriff of Herefordshire and “yat” as an old word for a gate or pass.

Divided by the two counties of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire you will discover Symonds Yat East on the Gloucestershire side of the river. A footpath, which leads from the village, ascends to Symonds Yat Rock where a scenic viewpoint, towering 394 feet above the River Wye, casts a watchful eye on the river which twists and wends its way through a large horseshoe bend some five miles long and amongst a deeply wooded gorge in the Carboniferous Limestone which exposes impressive cliff faces.

At nearby ‘King Arthur’s cave’, on the Great Doward, there have been important archaeological discoveries including the remains of a hyena family and sabre-toothed cat bones.

Symonds Yat West, on the Herefordshire side, has visitor attractions which include a maze built in 1977 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. There is also the Wye Valley Butterfly Zoo.

The only connection between the two banks, Symonds Yat East and Symonds Yat West, are two ancient hand pull ferries operated by the ferryman who,

for a small fee, pull people across the river using an overhead rope. The only connection by road is upstream, over Huntsham bridge, but this is a five mile trip. A suspension bridge was built over the river in 1957 by the Forestry Commission yet, despite recent refurbishment it, is only capable of supporting no more than six people at a time

Symonds Yat is especially attractive in the spring and autumn seasons when the tints of the foliage are at their best. However, in the winter months, with the trees capped in snow and the surface of the river frozen, the area provides a unique vista which has to be seen to be appreciated.

The Yat Gorge was once mined for iron ore and the remains of a smelting works are located down stream of the Symonds Yat Rapids, which is a popular location for canoeists. The ironworks at New Weir date from the 1590s and were run by a local family.

Not too far from Symonds Yat, the village of Dymock, in the County of Gloucestershire, has an association with Rupert Brooke who, having spent much some time in the village, joined the literary group known as the ‘Dymock Poets’.

Nell Gwyn, King Charles II’s mistress, also hailed from nearby Hereford but, although Oxford and London may lay claim to her, Nell’s connection with King Charles II also connects her with the county of Suffolk.

Article first published in County Life magazines, Winter 2018

Image: The magnificent splendour of the River Wye, as it cuts a divide between Symonds Yat East and Symonds Yat West - breathtaking views whatever the season. Image copyright 2010 Alan Humphreys





Spring's New Growth

by
Peter Dean

Spring has come early again this year. There are masses of crocus and daffodils already in the garden, which started to bloom in mid-February and indoor hyacinths, having freshened up the winter living room with their fragrant perfume, have now given their best and soon it will be the turn of forsythia to show its vivid yellow petals.

Spring is a fickle time with warm days and some frosty nights. It is the warm days, with rain, that encourages the bulbs and flowers to bloom. But, beware, the possibility of cold nights can easily kill off the flowers and it is this aspect that is especially troublesome for fruit trees as the Autumn fruit crop depends on the set of the pollen on the flowers' female reproductive parts during the spring. Bees too are less active in cool temperatures and, if there is a frost in the morning, they tend not to take pollen from tree to tree. So, we have a double whammy!

On the vegetable plot, come April, the soil will have warmed a little so seeds can be sown directly in rows.

Carrots, parsnips, swede and turnips benefit from spring sowing to give the roots plenty of time to grow.

Early potatoes can also be planted in furrows, to a depth of about 10 inches / 25cms, and then covered.

I raise broad beans under cover using old polystyrene fish boxes filled with compost to press the bean seeds in to a depth of an inch / 2cms. Water and keep warm and they will be up within a fortnight and ready for transplanting outside, before the month of April is out.

Tomato plants can be raised under cover too. These should have several true leaves before transplanting to their final growing positions in the greenhouse. Cucumbers and aubergines require long growing periods, until late summer. And the hotter the better!

If you have a lawn, now is the time to give it a cut and apply weed and feed. This will stimulate growth and kill the moss and grass weeds, like dandelions and daisies. Of course, you don't have to apply selective herbicide if you want the grass weed flowers to grow for the bees.

Annual flower seeds can now be sown under cover in seed trays. The warmth inside a greenhouse or on a

sunny windowsill will soon make the tiny seeds germinate. Prick out the seedlings into individual cells, with roots, when they are a decent size - but remember not to handle the delicate stems and roots. Always hold the seed or true leaves and transplant gently. Hardy annuals can be planted outside in flower beds and pots when they have several true leaves. Half Hardy annuals are best planted outside in mid-May, when the risk of frost has gone. Water and treat them to some liquid feed and you will enjoy a blaze of colour in your beds by summer. Shrub roses should have been pruned by March. Herbaceous perennials, having been cut back over winter, will now show new growth. Leafy plants like hardy Geraniums can be cut back around mid May to encourage new and later flowering. This is called the 'Chelsea chop' as it is done around the time of the Chelsea Flower Show.

Spring is a busy time for the gardener, but think of the reward. Perhaps try some new varieties as there are so many to choose from every year? Then sit back with a cup of tea and watch them grow.

Follow Peter in every edition of *County Life* and plan ahead for each new season!

Surprise in the Spinney

When I acquired it, it was cow-pasture, but I planted a mixture of silver birch, alder, wild cherry, oak and hornbeam. Now, some 40 years later, it is a small spinney, the oak and hornbeam mere infants, the alder and wild cherry nearing maturity, but the silver birch ancient, decrepit and in some cases not merely diseased, but deceased. As a whole, it's a great mixture for wildlife, from fungi to invertebrates, birds and mammals.

By
Tim Sharrock

The typical butterfly in summer is the Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*, thriving in the mottled mixture of shade and sunny spots for which it is well camouflaged. In autumn and winter, this little wood's birch and alder support flocks of seed-eating Goldfinches, Siskins and Redpolls. These were to be expected, but one find at noon on a July day was not.

Black-and-yellow, but too big to be merely a wasp, I assumed that the large insect was a Hornet *Vespa crabro*, the largest of the wasps. But, hang on! It's flying relatively slowly, is not buzzing, and just does not 'look right' to be a Hornet. Luckily, it settled and I could observe it closely. It seemed to have no wings... yet I had seen it flying. It was at least as large as a Hornet and perhaps even larger. It had a yellow head and two prominent yellow spots on the thorax, then black and yellow bands on the abdomen. No wings? Close examination revealed that the wings were not held vertically like most butterflies or spread out horizontally like most moths, but were held tightly close to the body, so almost invisible. Adding to the illusion, the wings were transparent.

Long almost-forgotten memories of a book illustration in *Butterflies and Moths of the Wayside and Woodland*, given to me by my 'Auntie Nan' in

Christmas 1946, suggested to me that it must be a Hornet Moth *Sesia apiformis*, a species that I had never seen. Reference back home to the *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland* confirmed this, the yellow head and two yellow 'shoulder' spots distinguishing it from the very similar Lunar Hornet Moth *S. bembeciformis*.

The Hornet Moth is designated as 'Resident nationally scarce. Locally fairly frequent in the Midlands and southern England, from Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Northamptonshire eastwards and through East Anglia.' Strange, therefore, that I had never come across one in the 77 years since Auntie Nan's gift, so I consulted two moth-obsessed friends and discovered that they had each only ever seen one.

The Hornet Moth and the Lunar Hornet Moth are both members of a rather strange group of moths, the Clearwings or Sesiidae, many of which are wasp-lookalikes, presumably conveying to them some protection from avian and mammalian predators. This benefit is similarly obtained by the Hornet Beetle *Leptura aurulenta* and Hornet Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria*.

The Hornet Moth's caterpillars burrow into and feed on the wood of poplars, which have spread through the spinney now that it is no longer grazed by a herd of cows. This intriguing moth felt like a justified reward to me for the establishment of the wildlife habitat which it had occupied. It certainly made my day.

SPRING 2024 - WILDLIFE PUZZLE: **Question:** Sort these 20 names into five groups of four to complete the names of 20 British birds in five families: Barn, Barred, Blue, Coal, Garden, Great, Green, Little, Marsh, Meadow, Reed, Rock, Sedge, Snowy, Spotted, Tawny, Tree, Water, Willow, Wood. There is only one unique solution.

Answer: Barn, Little, Snowy & Tawny OWLS, Meadow, Rock, Tree & Water PIPITS, Green, Marsh, Spotted & Wood SANDPIPERS, Blue, Coal, Great & Willow TITS, Barred, Garden, Reed & Sedge WARBLERS



Chips & Fish

Fish and chips first appeared in the UK during the 1860s, and the earliest known shops were opened during this period in London by Joseph Malin. The popularity of fish and chips and its prominence in British culture was established by the late 19th century. In the book, *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1883, Charles Dickens even referred to a 'fried fish warehouse'.

By 1910, there were more than 25,000 fish and chip shops across the UK, and, by the 1930s, this rose to more than 35,000. As a young lad, Alfred Hitchcock once lived above his family's fish and chip shop in London.

Such was the popularity of this dish, the British government safeguarded the supply of fish and chips during World War I and World War II to such an extent that it was one of the few foods in the UK not subject to wartime rationing.

In 1928, Harry Ramsden opened his first fish and chip shop. According to the Guinness Book of Records, his shop in Guisley, West Yorkshire, served up 10,000 portions of fish and chips on one day in 1952!

Fish and chips became a standard meal among the working classes in England, and the popular dish was originally served, wrapped up, in old newspapers. Those who can remember still claim that fish and chips tasted better served in newsprint!



Spring Is Bursting Out All Over!

by
RSPB

At last, spring is here and with it comes renewed hope. Winter gradually gives way to warmer and brighter spring weather, and nature reserves become busier than ever with new life and growth.

At Hoddesdon's RSPB Rye Meads in Hertfordshire, birds really start giving their singing voices some welly as the breeding season ramps up, and Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler and Wren compete for the noisiest bird on the reserve from April. Reedbeds become a symphony of singing warblers at this time of year - a real treat to the ears and definitely a spring highlight for visitors to enjoy.

Over at Sandy in Bedfordshire, RSPB The Lodge nature reserve offers a spring spectacle. From mid-April the woodland floor turns into a sea of brilliant Bluebells - their sweet scent attracts bees and hoverflies. Listen to Great-spotted Woodpeckers drumming on tree trunks to attract a mate and stake their territory, and woodland songbirds and warblers arrive for the breeding season.

Move across to Cambridgeshire and you are spoilt for choice for places to visit. Choose from five different nature reserves all offering something a bit special in springtime.

Spring arrives at RSPB Fowlmere in south Cambridgeshire as Blackthorn blossoms in March, Marsh Harriers build nests in April and Grass Snakes emerge to bask in the sunshine in May.

Move north past RSPB Fen Drayton Lakes in the Ouse Valley where if lucky, in April you can watch flocks of Swifts, Swallows and House Martins feeding over the lakes.

Then up to RSPB Ouse Fen near Earith where the spring brings booming Bitterns and nesting terns and gulls on specially created islands.

RSPB Ouse Washes is a great place to observe breeding Snipe, Lapwing, Avocet and Redshank alongside enormous Great White Egrets that make it their home.

The endangered Black-tailed Godwit can be seen displaying as part of its courtship to find a mate during the spring at RSPB Nene Washes near Whittlesey, and several pairs of the UK's tallest bird, the Crane, take up territories at this time of year. Even though fairly elusive, it is worth a trip to RSPB Nene Washes just for the chance of spotting this spectacular bird.

So 'put a spring in your step' and take some time out to experience the wonder of wildlife in spring at our nature reserves.

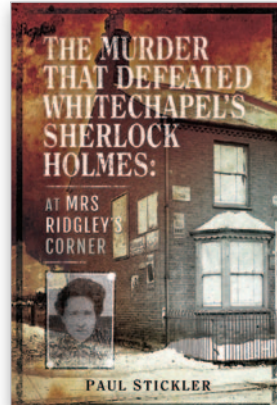
Find your nearest: rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves

Image: Common bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, carpeting woodland floor, RSPB The Lodge Nature Reserve, Bedfordshire, May
Credit: Ben Andrew (RSPB-Images.com)

THE BOOK REVIEW PAGES

Recommended Reading

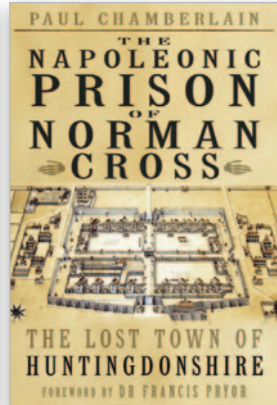
A regular appraisal of interesting books, some by local authors, with a county connection of just a jolly good read.



The Murder That Defeated Whitechapel's Sherlock Holmes

In 1919, when a shopkeeper and her dog were found dead in Hitchin, Hertfordshire with brutal head injuries, there followed an extraordinary catalogue of events and a local police investigation which concluded that both had died as a result of a tragic accident. A second investigation by Scotland Yard led to the arrest of an Irish war veteran, but the outcome was far from conclusive. Written from the perspective of the main characters involved and drawing on original and newly-discovered material, this book exposes the frailties of county policing just after the First World War and how it led to fundamental changes in methods of murder investigations. Offering a unique balance of story-telling and analysis, the book raises a number of unanswered questions. These are dealt with in the final chapter by the author's commentary drawing upon his expertise.

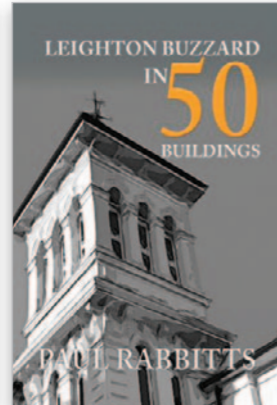
- The Murder That Defeated Whitechapel's Sherlock Holmes
- By Paul Stickler
- Hardback £14.99
- isbn 978-1526733856



The Napoleonic Prison of Norman Cross

Norman Cross was the site of the world's first purpose-built prisoner-of-war camp constructed during the Napoleonic Wars. Opened in 1797, it was more than just a prison: it was a town in itself, with houses, offices, butchers, bakers, a hospital, a school, a market and a banking system. It was an important prison and military establishment in the east of England with a lively community of some 7,000 French inmates. Alongside a comprehensive examination of the prison itself, this detailed and informative book, compiled by a leading expert on the Napoleonic era, explores what life was like for inmates and turnkeys alike - the clothing, food, health, education, punishment and, ultimately, the closure of the depot in 1814.

- The Napoleonic Prison of Norman Cross
- By Paul Chamberlain
- Hardback £14.99
- isbn 978-0750990462



Leighton Buzzard in 50 Buildings

Close to the Chiltern Hills lies the Bedfordshire market town of Leighton Buzzard. Dominating the town is the 190-foot spire of the thirteenth-century All Saints' Church, which has been described as 'the cathedral of South Bedfordshire'. The coming of the Grand Union Canal and railway in the early 1800s established the town further and led to an increase in its population, industry and commerce. Today, Leighton Buzzard is linked to the town of Linslade by a bridge over the River Ouzel. The two communities were unified as a civil parish in 1965 and referred to as Leighton-Linslade. This book explores fifty of the town's most interesting, important and intriguing buildings and structures, from inns to churches and schools to houses. The town boasts many old buildings, each with their own story to tell that, together, make up the fascinating history of Leighton Buzzard.

- Leighton Buzzard in 50 Buildings
- By Paul Rabbitts
- Paperback £14.99
- isbn 978-1445690858



The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire

This fully revised and up-to-date guide to the architecture of Hertfordshire is an eye-opening introduction to the wealth of fine buildings that can be found right on London's doorstep. Hertfordshire is one of the smallest English counties, largely rural in character. Its buildings range from remains of the Roman city of Verulamium to the medieval abbey at St. Albans and the 17th-century Hatfield House. Numerous timber-framed buildings and Georgian houses are found in the small towns whose preservation was aided by the early 20th-century creation of the Garden Cities at Letchworth and Welwyn, as well as Stevenage New Town, built after the Second World War. With expanded entries and new color photography, this is an essential work of reference for visitors and residents alike.

- The Buildings of England - Hertfordshire
- By Dr James Bettley
- Hardback £35.00
- isbn 978-0300223903



Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh

Have you ever stood in an endless queue in a coffee shop, waiting for your lukewarm cup of decorated froth and asked yourself why? Have you ever wandered through the aisles of a home and design store asking yourself why? Why do they want me to decorate my house like a beach hut or Parisian Boudoir; or want me to put up plaques of house rules or toilet rules? Ever been inspired to bake an inevitably awful cake after watching one of the many cooking-made-easy TV shows...and failed horribly? This book is a journey through the maze of modern life, told by someone trying to answer life's great questions including: what can Mindfulness do for me, and what exactly is the attraction of a Chai Latte? To be honest, it's all Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh!

- Tea, Tisane and a Load of Old Tosh
- By John Dixon
- Paperback £7.99
- isbn 978-1788484220



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Harleston is regularly voted as Norfolk's town of the year and is an outstanding town in the Waveney Valley, with an attractive selection of local shops, historic buildings and restaurants.

Launching this spring, Briarswood in Harleston is expected to be a popular development due to its enviable location for visiting the Norfolk Broads, seaside and the city of Norwich, not to mention

the miles of countryside surrounding it. The energy efficient development will offer a varied collection of brand new two-, three- and four-bedroom houses and two- and three- bedroom bungalows, with 203 for open market sale and 151 affordable housing, plus three show homes and two view homes, so that visitors can really get a feel for the quality of the homes and gain inspiration for life at Briarswood.

The charming Georgian market town of Holt needs no introduction, surrounded by beautiful parks and countryside, boasting independent shops and renowned eateries, and its proximity to the coast. Set to launch this summer, but with interest being registered now, Park View offers a varied collection of brand new two-, three- and four-

bedroom energy efficient, high spec homes featuring underfloor heating. The total number of new homes will be 108, and the development is located by Holt Country Park - a 100 acre, Green Flag winning paradise of dog friendly woodland walks.

Lovell also has homes available at Bowlers Green in Hopton-on-Sea, which is just a few minutes' walk from the beautiful beach. An area where it's said that the sun in England rises first at the UK's most easterly point, Hopton-on-Sea is located on the coastline border of Norfolk and Suffolk, and is the perfect location for those who want to live by the sea. Bowlers Green has a range of two-, three- and four-bedroom homes, and two- and three-bedroom bungalows.



Other new Lovell developments in 2024 include at Hunstanton, for seaside living, and King's Lynn.

Energy efficiency, good Wi-Fi connectivity and a 10 year warranty all come as standard with Lovell, and Lovell can assist with a variety of home moving schemes.

For further information, visit lovell.co.uk



Four brand new locations to adore in 2024!

Miles of unspoilt beaches and coast, and acres of green open spaces are just two of the elements which make Norfolk and Suffolk two of the most popular, high value, destinations to make home.

It's not all rural living in these two counties, however. Beautiful villages and market towns thrive, within easy reach of the counties' larger towns and cities. And each village benefits from their own buzzing communities. What's more, there are excellent transport links throughout the region, and easy access to London for those who commute or have friends and family in the area.

With four brand new developments opening this year at: Briarswood in **Harleston**, Park View in **Holt**, Lavender Chase in **Hunstanton** and Florence Fields in **King's Lynn**, there will be a choice of stunning new homes being released from Spring 2024.

If you're thinking of making your next move, or finding your forever home, register your interest now for exclusive sales releases and information.

“ The whole experience of buying from Lovell has been first class. The house build and quality is phenomenal and the attention from each Lovell colleague has been superb! Highly recommended!”

Keith, William's Park, December 2023



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The Unexpected Visitor

by
Jess Perrin

I was playing out front by the five-bar gate when I noticed the old man plodding along St Agnes Road. At first I couldn't be certain that he was old or even that the figure was a man, for between us was a cornfield and the walker was silhouetted against the rising spring sun, beyond needing a key.

My interest in the old man increased when instead of continuing along the road, he turned without pausing or lifting his head into the long cart road that led up to our house, as though familiar with the route.

Visitors to the Old Mill House were rare. It stood on a square plot of about an acre in the middle of a large, flat cornfield and was bounded by a thick hedge to its sides and rear. The house of plain grey bricks and blue slated roof had large adjoining barns extending its frontage. An archway had been formed in the barns to allow the cart road to continue direct into the back garden, where the mill had once stood.

I ran to the house to alert my mother Edie about the old man. Mother's first thought was to hide the wireless and accumulator in the stair cupboard in case it was the licence inspector. But a quick glance out of the front room window told her that this was no official.

"Go and put Floss on her chain," Mother said, not wishing the ancient visitor to be assaulted by our young Labrador with the unrestrained friendliness of her breed.

I chained the dog to her kennel post near the scullery window. She had sensed something was up and whimpered in anticipation on a redundant millstone, one of several that served as a path along the house wall.

As Mother and I arrived out front to await the visitor, my elder sister Joan was standing under the archway. "Shall we play shops?" she called out. In her hand was a basketful of fallen fruit from the orchard, which she hoped to sell for pretend money.

"No. Look! There's someone coming," I replied, pointing down the cart road.

Joan put down her basket and we all stood watching the old man. As he made his way towards us, some object caught his eye. It lay in the cornfield stubble a few feet from the track. He prodded it with his hazel stick. I knew it to be the blooded remains of a young rabbit destroyed by a harvesting machine. I had discovered it the day before. It had looked as though it was asleep but, when I lifted it up I was shocked to find it full of maggots. The old man soon let it be and continued towards us.

He had a sparse frame, transported in dust-covered hobnail boots that grew noisier as they pounded the gravel surface. His rickety, black-trousered legs disappeared under an oversized khaki trench coat tied around the waist with baling string.

"Morning," he said, as he passed through the open gate towards the archway. His coat collar and cuffs were compressed with the greasy blackness of continuous use, as were the peak and edges of his brown cap. He had a wizened, sharp featured face with white stubble. His pinched look and watery blue eyes gave an appearance of being constantly braced against the elements.

"Good morning," Mother replied.

When it became clear that he did not intend to stop, Mother called out, "Where are you going?"

The old man stopped. He pointed at the archway with his stick and said, "I'm going through 'ere, across the back way and over the stile to Hasmead." He claimed it was his right to pass through our house and garden.

To us, it felt like an invasion, but the old man's fragility and innocence of manner was disarming. Mother offered him a mug of tea, but he knew of better refreshment. "Some water from the well would be nice."

Joan went off to fetch the water as our visitor lowered himself on to a wooden crate under the archway. He leaned his ancient body as far back against the wall as its bowed frame would allow, then produced a jack knife and a brown paper bag containing a large chunk of crusty bread and a slab of cheese. When Joan returned with the water, the old man began cutting, gnawing and nibbling his meal and taking regular sips from the white enamel mug.

The scent of freshly harvested wheat was still in the air, which in stronger form accompanied the old man; a smell of the countryside that when smelled years hence would return me to fond memories of the old house.

"I don't suppose much comes through 'ere now," the old man said.

"No," Mother replied. "You're the first unexpected visitor we've had since we moved here in the spring."

The old man said, "That's bin twenty years or more since the old mill was on the go. They took it away when the steam mill started up over at Wood Farm."

"Did you work here at the mill?" Mother asked.

"Man and boy I worked in the fields 'ereabouts. Loaded up the carts with sacks of corn then delivered 'em to the mill."

The old man had few teeth, and as he ate and spoke I was drawn to looking at the randomly spaced brown stubs that were in various stages of decay. With so little to bite with, his habit of sipping water while eating was clearly an important aid to digestion.

He continued, "The mill turned on a post, and we 'ad to turn it so the sails were into the wind. When the wind changed, we'd turn it again".

As he reminisced, Mother was reminded of a photograph found in the corn loft by my father Henry when flipping through a cardboard box full of *Farmer's Weekly* magazines that had been left by previous owners.

"I have something to show you," Mother said. "I won't be long."

June went off with Mother and I was obliged to remain with our visitor, too shy to do anything other than just stand waiting, displaying grubby knees that masked the abrasions and scabs of a hundred exploits, and sock-less feet slotted into black Wellington boots that had been cut off at the ankles, serving as hot summer shoes even after ventilating holes had appeared in the worn soles. My short, home-made flannel trousers were

held in place by braces made from offcuts of the same material. On the rare occasions when we went to church, Mother's conversion of her two children into something presentable was equal to any biblical miracle claimed by the vicar in his sermon.

"What's your name boy?" the old man asked.

"Jimmy," I replied.

"Another Jim, eh. And 'ow old are yer?"

"Eight and a half," I replied, proud to add the fraction.

"My younger brother's name was Jim. 'e's long dead. Got typhoid in the Boer War."

Mother returned alone, leaving June to prepare her fruit stall. "Does this mean anything to you?" she asked, handing the visitor the small black and white photograph. It showed the old wooden post mill, standing above a brick roundhouse. Four massive sails dominated the scene. In the foreground, a woman and a girl stood side by side, posing seriously at the camera. The girl looked the image of the woman, each of them wearing a long dark skirt and a light coloured blouse.

"Well I never," the old man remarked. "That's the old mill alright. And that's Edwin Westrope's wife Alice and their daughter Violet in their Sunday best. 'e was the last miller 'ere. My Jim 'ad a fancy on the girl, but she won't interested."

"Would you like to keep the photograph?" Mother asked.

"You'd best keep it, dear. It wouldn't last long if I 'ad it," he replied.

After his refreshment, the old man said, "I'd best be off." He grasped his stick and pressed it hard on the ground to raise himself.

"Shall we see you on your way back?" Mother asked.

"I'll not be coming this way. I've a lot to see," he replied.

And with the same deliberation as before, the visitor made his way through the archway and into the back garden. He paused at the circular brick stub of the old mill, which rose up a few inches in the long grass. He turned to us with a pained smile, unable to mask the deep nostalgia he was feeling for his younger years, when the keenness for life had made a pleasure out of hard work, and the heavy weight of sacks on his shoulder had been no burden. Climbing carefully over the stile, he went on his way.

I ran over to the stile and jumped up on to its wooden step, then watched the diminishing figure as it tramped over stubble where once much surer feet had trod.

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A PICTURE OF England

Photo: copyright 2024 Lesley Ann Humphreys



Bakewell

Derbyshire is a delightful county and is blessed with such an array of interesting places. Whenever my wife and I visit, top of our list of places to visit is always the delightful town of Bakewell - home of the original Bakewell tart.

The Bakewell tart is a delicious English dessert that originated in the town of Bakewell in Derbyshire. It consists of a shortcrust pastry base, a layer of jam, an almond sponge filling, and a topping of sweet icing and almonds.

The origin of the Bakewell tart is somewhat disputed, but it is said to have been created by accident in the early 19th century. A chef at the Rutland Arms hotel in Bakewell is said to have misheard an order for a Bakewell pudding, and instead created the now-famous tart.

The tart quickly became popular in the town of Bakewell and beyond, and has since become a beloved dessert in British cuisine. The combination of sweet jam, almond-flavored sponge, and crunchy almonds makes for a delightful flavor and texture and has ensured that the humble Bakewell tart has remained a popular dessert in the UK and has even gained popularity in other countries.

In addition to its delicious taste, the Bakewell tart also holds cultural significance in the UK, representing a beloved aspect of the country's culinary heritage.

Whether enjoyed at home or in a quaint English tea shop, the Bakewell tart is a treat that is sure to delight.

Ed



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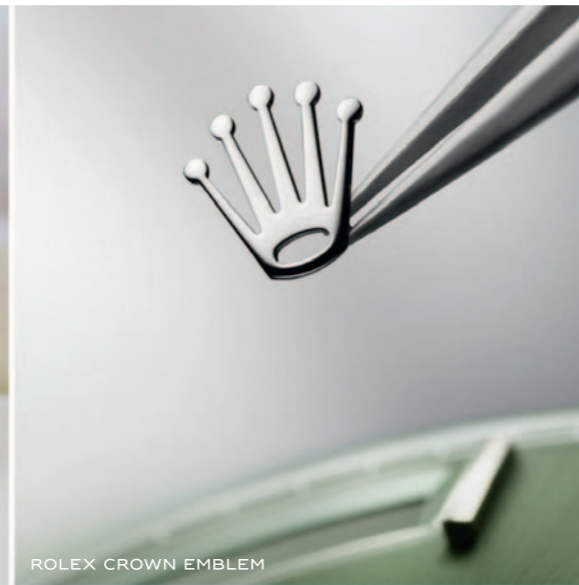
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