

# Buckingham (Part 1)

**I** THOUGHT THAT IN 2013 I would write about some interesting towns near here. First off is a visit to Buckingham, only a short drive away. Maybe already many of you have enjoyed the market on Tuesdays and Saturdays, had coffee amongst the second-hand books inside the National Trust's oldest Buckinghamshire building, the Norman St. John's Chantry, or visited the Tourist Office in the Buckingham Museum?



THE MUSEUM IS TO BE FOUND in Lord Cobham's 1748 castle-style gaol and court house. It was built with the encouragement of Browne Willis, Buckingham's MP and historian, whose name crops up in much of our local 18th century history. The aim was to bring back the Assizes from Aylesbury which had taken over the honour after Buckingham's Great Fire of 1725. The exhibits inside consist of Buckinghamshire's military history, its agricultural heritage, the lives of the

locals and those in Flora Thompson's "Lark Rise to Candleford" (her richer relations, the Timms had a shoe shop in Buckingham), Buckinghamshire lace, prison life and local canal history. In 1801 Buckingham celebrated the arrival of the canal. It was an arm of the Grand Junction Canal leading off from Stony Stratford. The wharf was to the north of the town, bringing much activity to that area.

IF YOU LOOK AT A MAP of Buckingham you will see the River Ouse meanders around the hilly area in the south of the town, a perfect place for a protected fort. Alfred the Great, who created counties and burghs in 886, chose this defensive site as the county town. It was Edward the Elder in 918 who built a fort on castle Hill. The Borough retained its position as County town until 1848. However, its demise began after The Great Fire when one third of the town was destroyed. Many of the towns round here owe their rebuilt lovely symmetrical Georgian houses to the previous disasters caused by raging fires, for example Stony Stratford, Olney and Woburn. Wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs acted as excellent tinder. After the Norman Conquest the second Walter Giffard, Lord of Longueville, was created Earl of Buckingham. His father had provided

thirty ships for the invasion and had been Commander of the Norman army at Hastings. In gratitude, William awarded Giffard 27 Buckinghamshire manors, one third of the county. Included in these was Buckingham where the new lord built a castle, or perhaps fort, on the hill. Catherine of Aragon came in 1513 to Castle House in West Street (not on the site of the old castle). It is said that she taught the local ladies to make "pillow" or "bobbin lace" in the Spanish style whilst staying in Castle House. The house was refaced in the late 17th century; it is a much older house inside. It also gave shelter to Charles I who held a Council of War there. Buckingham was a Royalist town but was to suffer under Cromwell. At the Restoration, Charles II granted a special charter to the town for its summer fair.

IN 1527, during Henry VIII's reign, the Manor of Buckingham and Bourton was granted to William Carey, new and amenable husband of Mary Boleyn. Maybe you have read "The Other Boleyn Girl"? Mary had given birth to Henry VIII's illegitimate son and daughter before she was cast off for her more enticing sister. Elizabeth I was sumptuously entertained in the early Tudor Manor House built close to the original medieval parish church which housed a shrine to St Rumbold (see below).

IF YOU ENTER BUCKINGHAM from the south you will go along the old London

Road which used to go over a ford; there is now a narrow metal footbridge, and up Elm Street to the castle hill. Now you drive over the 1857 stone bridge and probably park your car nearby. From there you may well walk up to the Market Square seeing the old Town Hall on your left, rebuilt in 1780. On its roof is a golden swan weathervane, part of the heraldic crest of Longueville.



ON THE RIGHT is the old coaching inn, the White Hart. Its open passageway for coaches was blocked up in the early 20th century and now a Tuscan porch graces the frontage. The old ostlers' bell still remains on the left of the door. Look down the street, past the one-time Bull Ring to the solid-looking Gaol and then walk down past the Georgian shop fronts and little alleyways with individual shops to the High Street beyond. This particularly attractive area, originally the Cow Fair, is surrounded by half-timbered houses which escaped the fire. The first building on the left is the old Market House, in use when the weekly livestock market was held under the lime trees. Walking along the left

side see the road to the left going to the Buckingham Hospital, designed in a "Jacobean" style by John Oldrich Scott, grandson of the famous George Gilbert Scott. A footpath beyond Wharf House leads to the footings of the long redundant canal.

BACK UP MARKET HILL you will pass 'The Fleece', a reminder of the wool fairs held in June. Then see St John's Chantry Chapel with its lovely Norman entrance of zigzag carving. At the Reformation chantry chapels were closed and the building became the original Royal Latin School. By 1907 the site was too small and the school moved to the Chandos Road area.

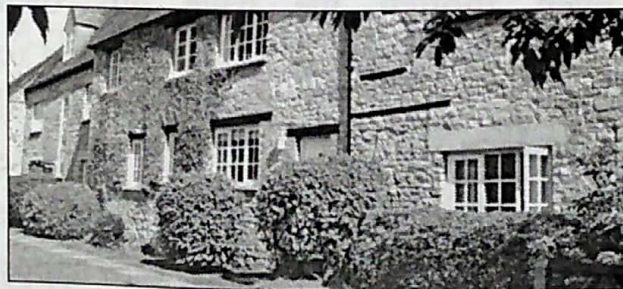
MARKET HILL LEADS into West Street. Passing some attractive Georgian houses you come to Castle House on the right and beyond, the Long Avenue to Stowe. Here are the old barracks of 1802 for the Royal Bucks Militia, built as a protection for Stowe House if revolution came! Returning down West Street, turn right at the round-ended building, once a brewery, into School Lane and Bristle Hill. It was here that paint brushes were made from pigs' bristles. The animals' lives had been spent in Hog Lane, later renamed Elm Street. Now you come to Castle Hill. There is no castle but a splendid Victorian Gothic church which started life as a Georgian Protestant Preaching church in 1780. It was designed by Francis Hiorne who also designed

Stony Stratford's church. Badly built, its foundations didn't go down to the rock so it had to be reinforced by the Gawcott-born George Gilbert Scott who was let loose on Gothicising the whole building in the 1860s.

THERE IS A STORY as to how the original Georgian church ended up here, for the medieval church was built originally to the south of the castle. Go down attractive Church Street which escaped the fire, past the Congregational church of 1855, which is now "The Radcliffe Centre," a well-used and locally appreciated lecture hall for Buckingham University, where musical concerts are regularly held. On the left are the old 15th century Priory House and Trinity House. Walnut Yard is the former vicarage. Walnut orchards used to stretch from here to the river in the days when the nuts were used for dyeing leather in the tannery in Hunter Street. Almost opposite the Tudor Manor House see the old cemetery, the only remains of the ancient church whose massive spire fell down twice, taking with it in 1776, the nave, the chancel and an ancient shrine.

NOTICE ON THE WALL of the Manor House a bit of plaster pargeting representing a bouncing baby. This is supposed to be Buckingham's baby saint, St. Rumbold, whose shrine, attracting pilgrims until the Reformation, was inside the medieval church. The town has two wells dedicated to St. Rumbold,

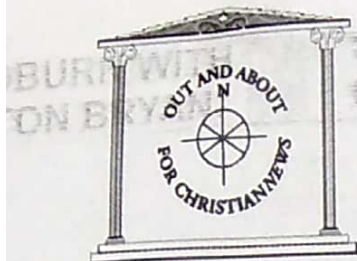
too. The 7th century saint is said to have been born and lived for three days. During his remarkably short baby life he preached, converted many to Christianity and performed miracles. Perhaps the story was intended to say that he was reborn through Christian baptism and died three days later. Who is to say, the story is lost in time and the first time it was recorded was by the Bishop of Worcester in 1070. The baby brought a certain amount of prosperity to the town as people came to drink the well waters and pray at his shrine. Buckingham has not forgotten him and a small memorial is in the old graveyard.



FROM THE GRAVEYARD look down onto charming Hunter Street to see the beautifully restored old houses now part of the University buildings. Years ago those buildings were so dilapidated. Here I must end for this month. If you add the above to next month's article you will be set up for a hugely enjoyable visit to an interesting local town. The weather should be better in March too!



*Ann Leaver*



BURTON  
ON BRAY  
ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC  
CHURCH, ASPLEY HILL

## Buckingham Part II

**L**AST MONTH we left off our tour looking down from the ancient cemetery at the old houses which comprise the first independent university in England. It received its first students in 1976 and its Royal Charter in 1983. There is a pleasant campus of old but well-maintained buildings with grounds going down to the River Ouse. It used to seem expensive to study there but its first degrees take two years' intensive study rather than three, so perhaps in these present times it may well seem good value.

Go back through the churchyard, past the reminder of St. Rumbold and the Tudor Manor House with its twisted chimney. Then head for the Church of St Peter and St. Paul. It was built from 1777 on a new site. The flattened top of Castle Hill used to be an 18th century bowling green. Its owner was Ralph, Lord Verney of Claydon and he gave the site to the new church. Richard, Earl Temple of Stowe, gave £2,000

towards building costs of £7,000. It was a typical one-roomed Georgian Protestant church in the style of Sir Christopher Wren with balconies and a classical barrel-vaulted roof. A tall three-decker pulpit was in prime position. Having climbed ten steps



up, the vicar had a good view of any transgressors. Falling asleep during an interminable sermon was well-nigh impossible. A grand plain-glassed Venetian window

was over the altar and other plain Georgian windows let in plenty of light. In 1822 the first Duke of Buckingham donated a smart heraldic stained glass window with red dragons and white horses to be placed in the window above the altar. It is no longer in the church and was sold in 1920. However, still in the church is the copy painting of Raphael's Transfiguration which initially acted as the reredos in the Georgian church.

Eighty years after its consecration George Gilbert Scott was called in

to repair the foundations before the cracks in the fabric heralded a complete collapse of the building. He buttressed the walls between the windows, poured concrete into the foundations and did lots of alterations to bring the church into the fashionable Gothic Revival style. Up till then the church had never had a porch but Scott made a new entrance and above the door placed statues of St. Paul with his sword and St. Peter with his keys.

The 3rd Duke coughed up £2,000 for a new chancel during the twenty years it took to complete the job. The three-decker pulpit was dispatched to Bow Brickhill church (maybe it is still there) and Gilbert Scott designed a new one. A beautiful brass chandelier, which Brown Willis, the MP and historian gave in the early 18th century, survives from the Georgian church and 15th and 16th century pew ends with poppy heads were incorporated into prayer desks. The old vestment chest of 1690 came from the original church.

Look out for the old chained Latin Bible behind protection glass. It was almost 100 years old when in 1471 an Archdeacon gave it to Buckingham church. Prior to the Reformation all services were of course in Latin. Its later history is interesting. It ended up in Brown Willis' library and was sold by his heirs and disappeared. A Victorian Vicar of Buckingham happened to see it in a Bristol bookshop and bought

the ancient Book. When he died in 1883 his widow gave the Bible back to the church. The story does not end there because one day in 1939 it disappeared. There was consternation all around but the offender must have had second thoughts for it was returned and the whole affair hushed up. The Bible is a real treasure.

There is also a Hanoverian coat of arms. Look for the plaques on a couple of pews commemorating the visits when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the second and third Presidents of America, worshipped here whilst staying at Stowe.

In more modern times Gilbert Scott's grandson designed the rood screen in 1921 and a local artist, Constantina Wood painted a modern triptych recording the legendary life of the child saint, Rumbold. So the church is well worth a look.

Leave the church by walking down Castle Street, and note the sunflower decoration on aesthetic-style coach house walls. The building of about 1875 was designed by Edward Swinfen



Harris, a well-known Stony Stratford architect with a successful London practice.

Castle Street has some attractive Georgian houses with steps up to wide front doors. One is called Trolley Hall, named probably from the word 'trollop' as it was a brothel. There is a wide-fronted three-storey building with A and V above the shop windows. It has nothing to do with Victoria and Albert who actually did come on a visit to Stowe but it is attributed to Albert Vyle who in 1889 opened a small emporium, the Harrods of Buckingham. The business was very successful and it supplied all the wants of the ladies of Buckingham until 1962 when shopping habits had changed.

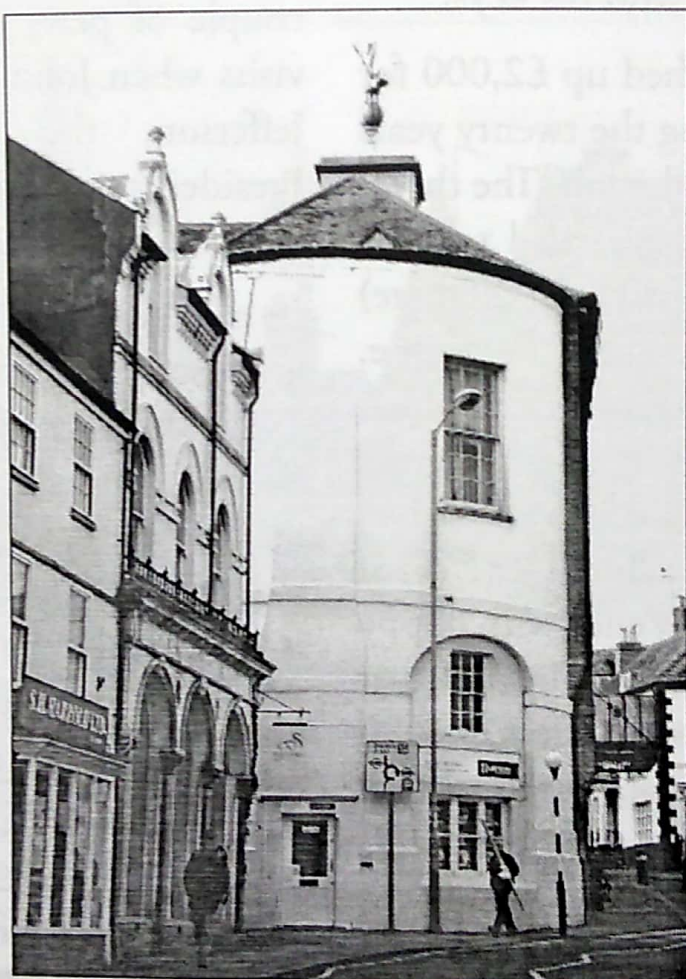
Look out for the old coaching inn, Villiers, originally "The Swan upon the Hoop" in the 1500s. Cromwell stayed there during the Civil War. I don't know when it became 'Villiers' but George Villiers was a favourite of James I and Charles I. He became Duke of Buckingham in 1623, well before the Temple/Grenville

family were given the title. There is a comfortable lounge facing Castle Street for coffee, a rather messy bar which I think is supposed to be fashionably artistic and a good restaurant where they do a good value set lunch. Actually, there are lots of pubs, restaurants, wine bars and little cafes around the town, some hidden in the little passageways.

You will finish your walk by the old Town Hall which used to have open archways, since filled in, for the local market. From there you will see Well Street, in which is the old Georgian Chapel. The congregation has moved to a modern purpose-built ecumenical church nearby.

St. Bernadine's Roman Catholic Church is in Chandos Road. It started life in 1892 as a Franciscan

College to train Friars. With diminishing numbers of postulants it closed in 1968. Most of its redundant buildings in Buckingham are now part of the university. The inside of the church is modern and dedicated to St Bernadino of Siena. He joined the Franciscan order in 1404 and became a great preacher



in Italy. He carried a banner or badge with IHS (the Greek form of Jesus) on it. It was seen as an advertisement for his resounding sermons and as such he is now the patron saint of advertising! Pope Martin V offered him three bishoprics, Siena, Ferrara and Urbino, but each time he refused, preferring to remain a Franciscan itinerant preacher. He was canonised in 1450 and is usually represented holding the badge and sometimes with three mitres at his feet. I have been to a funeral there but cannot recall how he is represented in the church. Perhaps someone can tell me.

Buckingham's M.P. is John Bercow who is also the Speaker of the House of Commons. The press entertains us with reports about his wife! The town actually has a Town Jester and a Town Crier and, recently, a Shrove Tuesday Pancake Race which it shares with a town in the U.S. So, there you have it, an interesting place to visit on our doorstep.



*Ann Leaver*



# CHRISTIAN NEWS

*March 2013*



*Buckingham Town Centre (see 'Out and About' on Page38)*

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