



# The Buckingham Society

*Campaigning for a better Buckingham*

## Newsletter February 2022

### Update from Roger Edwards



Most of you will know that I ceased to chair the Buckingham Society following the AGM last November. I had been in the chair for five years and thought that it was time for somebody else to be given the opportunity to do the job. It is not particularly onerous, and it is in fact a great pleasure to undertake the role. However, so far nobody has come forward to take over and the metaphorical chair sits vacant. So, is there anybody out there who fancies taking on the role? If there is, please let us know or, if there is somebody who thinks that they might be interested but wants a bit more information, then by all means contact me for a chat by ringing 07940277094. I look forward to hearing from you.

### Planning – Carolyn Cumming

#### **Osier Way**

The Strategic Sites Committee planning meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December formally approved the outline application for Osier Way, relying on S106 to cover the ‘missing’ bits of the jigsaw. BTC had expressed all the concerns regarding the lack of detail, the failure to provide a school or a community building, the safety of the proposed crossings on the bypass, sewage problems, etc. VALP’s lack of firm policies in relation to health and education contributes to the evasion of critical infrastructure at outline plan stage, which then has to rely on S106 agreements, making real scrutiny by the community difficult.

#### **Public open space**

There is an increasing tendency by householders to “land grab” pockets of public amenity space. A recent application on Page Hill seeks to remove a garden wall and enclose a piece of the adjacent open space within a timber close board fence. The application is vehemently opposed by the Society and the Town Council. Some developments have a covenant which forestalls the privatisation of public open space, and this should be the norm.

### **Applications Refused**

It is good to report that some very contentious recent applications have been refused on grounds of over development, causing harm to the neighbourhood, failure to provide sufficient amenity space and/or damage to the historic core. These include the proposals for flats at M & Co, new houses between the old police station and 38 Moreton Road and the change of use for a take- away and dry cleaners at 19 Bridge Street.

### **Staffing at Buckinghamshire Council**

There continues to be a shortage of experienced staff in the planning department. Thirty-seven vacancies with 6 senior planning officers still to be recruited. The Cabinet Member for Planning (Gareth Williams) in response to a question from Cllr. Stuchbury implied that their recent recruitment drive was having results.

### **The Buckinghamshire Plan**

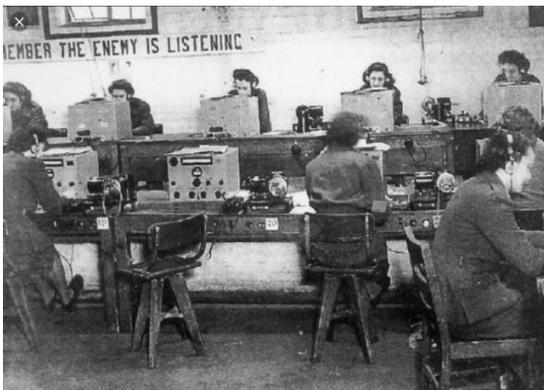
The Society has responded to a questionnaire survey seeking residents' views.

## **SECRETS, SILK AND CYANIDE**

After the November Annual General Meeting, Bill Robins gave a talk on the clandestine agencies hosted in many of the great houses around North Buckinghamshire during the Second World War. They supported lethal conflicts against the German occupation forces across the continent. The picture on the right shows Poundon House, one of the sites.

He summarised the work of some eleven secret organisations operating around North Buckinghamshire between 1939 and 1945 and then focused on the Special Operations Executive (SOE), its wireless stations at Poundon and Grendon Underwood and their vital role in communicating with agents operating undercover to support resistance movements in Europe.

He covered the work of the women of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) in support of SOE and outlined SOE's frequently toxic relationship with its sister agency, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS).



The talk followed the tragic fate of both the French Prosper network and the Dutch SOE network and of two of the women agents operating undercover in France, the gentle wireless operator Noor Inayat Khan and the feisty Violette Szabo. Remarkably, Una Robinson shared with us that the best friend of her favourite aunt was also a doomed SOE agent: Yolande Beekman was held prisoner with Noor and was executed with her at Dachau.

The speaker outlined the brilliant work of the SOE code master, Leo Marks, and fierce leadership by the redoubtable SOE fighter, Pearl Witherington, and her 2000 resistance fighters as they battled to delay the German troops trying to get to the Normandy beaches to fight the allied landings.

Finally, the talk briefly outlined two opposing views of the morality of these subversive operations and closed by summarising the fate of the North Buckinghamshire SOE sites after the War.

## **Buckingham Annual Town Meeting 2022**

We are all invited to Buckingham's Annual Town Meeting to join discussion on practical steps our community can take to help avert the climate crisis. The meeting will be held on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 7.00pm in Buckingham Community Centre, Cornwall's Meadow.

Buckingham Town Council has already declared a Climate Emergency and developed its own Action Plan to drive the organisation toward carbon neutrality by 2030 but will look at how the town's population, organisations and businesses can work together in that aim. This meeting will bring together stakeholders from the community, local Councils, businesses and residents to:

- Update on what has been achieved so far
- Share ideas on how we can all take action to achieve net zero carbon Buckingham

All members of the public are invited to go along. Representatives from our responsible authorities have been invited to answer queries on any other matters relating to Buckingham.

Please RSVP by email to [committeeclerk@buckingham-tc.gov.uk](mailto:committeeclerk@buckingham-tc.gov.uk).

## **Buckingham Great Central – Ian Orton**

Buckingham never featured as an important railway centre during the great age of steam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

All it could claim on the railway front was that it was a stop on the London and North Western Railway's (LNWR) branch from Verney Junction to Banbury, which was originally part of the former Buckinghamshire Railway.

This is not to say that Buckingham couldn't have become a railway centre. A number of projected railways schemes identified Buckingham as a potential destination during the nineteenth century. But these were never constructed and the town remained a railway backwater.

Nonetheless, thanks to the late Peter Denny, an Anglican clergyman, Buckingham has acquired an important place in railway history or, to be more specific, model railway history.

For Buckingham Great Central, the last iteration of a model railway building project that extended over 60 years from the late 1940s to 2009, when the Reverend Denny died, is considered to be one of the finest model railways ever constructed in the UK or elsewhere.

The model railway still exists in a custom-built building in South Yorkshire under the care of Tony Gee, a professional model locomotive constructor.

Set in 1907 the model depicts a very different Buckingham to the one that existed in that year. It is a much bigger town and has a direct railway link to Marylebone, courtesy of the Great Central Railway which had recently opened its London extension from Nottingham.

Buckingham Great Central has a fine four platform terminus station complete with overall roof, based on Chester Northgate, extensive goods facilities, a canal wharf, a gasworks and an engine shed. If it had been built the Buckingham Great Central station would have been located in what is now the Waitrose car park.

On leaving the station the line follows the course of the River Great Ouse through Bourton, which had its own halt. It then deviates southwards along the valley described by the Padbury Brook before proceeding to a junction station at Granborough, the starting point of a branch to Leighton Buzzard. After leaving Granborough Junction the line is assumed to proceed to Calvert where it joins the Great Central mainline to London.



Reverend Denny's Buckingham Great Central is considered to be very important to railway modelling history in a number of respects. The first is that it depicts a complete, albeit fictional, rail system at a specific moment in time. In this instance it is 1907, the year in which the Great Central changed the livery for its passenger vehicles. The second is that it is entirely hand built. Reverend Denny made all the locomotives, track, signals, locomotives, rolling stock, and landscape from scratch. Except for electric motors, gears and wheels he made everything by hand. He had to teach himself a plethora of skills in the process.

Furthermore, Buckingham Great Central is built to a fine scale. It is one of the first model railway layouts to be built in EM scale, a superfine version of the more familiar OO.

A third distinguishing feature is its operating system. Not only does this utilise an early electro-mechanical computer devised and constructed by Reverend Denny, all points and signals are completely synchronised.

Although Buckingham Great Central is a fictionalised layout it does feature a number of real buildings which still exist today. These include a fine model of the White Hart Hotel along

with other Bridge Street buildings. One slight problem here is that they have been miraculously relocated to Leighton Buzzard or, more specifically Linslade!

If you would like to find out more here is the URL for a YouTube video which features Tony Gee, the current custodian of Peter Denny's Buckingham model railway layout. <https://youtu.be/vkyNCXk1jw4>. Or use the QR code below.



## The Canon Jeffrey Bell – Ed Grimsdale

### Father Jeffrey Bell

#### INTRODUCTION (THEME), SIX VARIATIONS and EPILOGUE

##### Introduction

The Reverend Canon Jeffrey Bell died on 18.10.21. He was born in 1937 and his early education was at Yeovil Grammar School. Later, he served his National Service with the RAF in the Middle East during the Suez Campaign.

##### Variation 1 : Jeffrey, the Anglican Cleric.



Vicar of St Jude's, Peterborough (1972-79); Buckingham (1979-93); Rural Dean of Buckingham (1984-88; 1989-90); Vicar of St Mark's, North End, Portsea (1993-2003); Hon. Canon of Portsmouth Cathedral (2000-03); Hon. Assistant Curate of The Bourne and Tilford (2003-13).

##### Variation 2 : Extending St Jude's Church, Westwood Estate, Peterborough

Fittingly for an ex-RAF man, Jeffrey's first Parish was on a former airfield. Its first priest had started the Church of St Jude in a former RAF hut. Later Phase 1 of a new church: a modest building comprising the present hall, Damascus Room, toilets and kitchen was completed by the first incumbent and under the second incumbent, the Rev'd Jeffrey Bell, the church was greatly enlarged in 1977. Phase 2 saw an extension to the hall, corresponding to the 'nave' of the present church and also, the building of

the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, then known as the Chapel of Christ the Servant. Folding screens separated the two parts of the hall.

### Variation 3: The Buckingham Years



Jeffrey's 14 years in Buckingham were important as a settled period during which his three children were growing up. Jeffrey appreciated the parish church's strong musical tradition with its excellent Royal School of Church Music affiliated choir ably guided by Dot and Tony Raven.

Jeffrey's wife, Linda, possessed a lovely contralto voice and soon she was singing in local choirs, such as the Queen's Temple Singers at Stowe School.

Meanwhile, daughter Catherine was developing from a fine RSCM chorister into a typical 'independent' teenager who met and later married Phil Mckee, a local rock drummer.

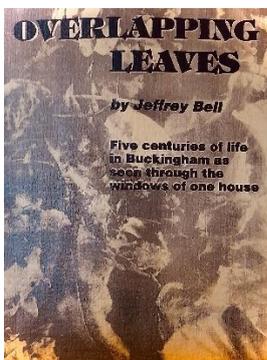
"Jeffrey's Ghost" is a tale told by Michael Tinsley, once upon a time the Deputy Organist at Buckingham Parish Church. Organists love playing fugues but they are frequently frugal folk. One night, Mike slipped into the Parish Church to practise. To save expense, he used only the light above the Organ's keyboard. A slight rustle alerted Mike to a presence. He looked up into his 'Choir' mirror. Gosh, a ghost: all he could make out in the sepulchral gloom was a set of laughing gnashers.

(For those who don't believe in ghosts, Jeffrey William Bell often wore a black opera cloak to 'accessorize' his black cassock.)

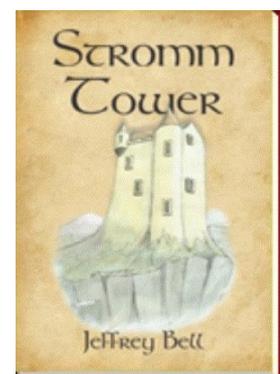
### Variation 4: St. Mark's, Portsea, Portsmouth (1993-2003)

Onwards to the South Coast, and, perhaps a reminder, that Jeffrey's family's roots were in 'Reiver country', those lawless lands on both sides of England's border with Scotland. St Mark's is a rather faceless, introverted yellow brick building with a detached slim-line campanile. During his tenure Father Jeffrey added an extra 'belle': 'Sister' Pennie, the Parish's first female priest.

### Variation 5 (Serioso) : Jeffrey Bell, man of letters.



Whilst in Buckingham, Jeffrey researched, illustrated & published a slim A5 history of the Vicarage and some of its incumbents. He called his book 'Overlapping Leaves'. It's a valuable secondary source for Local



Historians.

Later, he wrote a yarn for children: Stromm Tower.

In 1994, he was awarded the degree of Master of Arts (Hons Causa) in recognition of his work with the University of Buckingham; and he was installed as an Honorary Canon of Portsmouth Cathedral in 2000

### **Variation 6 All Saints, Tilford, (2003 -2011)**

During one of his later talks, Jeffrey focussed on the plight of the dwindling Christian population of the Holy Land. Canon Jeffrey travelled extensively, and he had lived and studied in the Middle East. During his later ministry, he led many pilgrimages to its biblical sites. He warned, "Such is the suffering [amongst Christians in the Holy Land] that quite soon there will be no indigenous Christians left and the Holy Land

will become a biblical theme park with our Holy Sites merely tourist venues."



Tilford is famous for the Tilford Bach Society, and Jeffrey and his wife, Linda, were just the right couple to further its causes. My illustrations shows one Concert given by the Eisenach Ensemble. Can you spot Jeffrey's daughter, Cate who was educated at Buckingham's Latin School plus two of our town's leading musicians: Sue (recorders) and Piers Snell (viol da gamba)?

### **EPILOGUE**

Jeffrey Bell was an effective and committed Anglican Priest for fifty years. He used his talents nurtured by a family ripe with musical and artistic talents to reach out



from his church to enrich communities including our own in Buckingham through adult education and community service. He and his wife, Linda will leave behind three children all involved in the performing arts. Wherever he went Jeffrey endeavoured with great success to enrich the lives of those around him. May he rest in God's peace and repose.

### **Green and open spaces: the arrival of an urban badger – Ian Orton**

Winter is the season associated with tree work and there has been no shortage of activity in this respect in Buckingham. It usually takes some time to establish the full extent of the tree surgeons' activities. If recent activity in Church Street is anything to go by, however, it is very likely that we have lost a number of mature well-loved trees. Most are in private gardens rather than in publicly owned land. A particular case in point is the removal of four mature trees at 1 Church Street. Despite being a Conservation Zone Buckinghamshire Council granted permission for felling to take place, the result of which provides an uninterrupted view of the St Rumbold's field development from the Churchyard. Winter gales have also taken their toll on our treescape.

There has been a lot of tree planting, however, some of which is associated with the Queen's Green Canopy. Earlier in January the University planted an avenue of flowering cherry alongside the path from the Vinson Centre to the Tanlaw Mill along with London plane trees adjacent to the river on the island car park. Around 13 black poplars and over 220 whips encapsulating six native species were planted on 16 January on the Green Heartlands by town councillors and volunteers, some of whom included Buckingham Society members. Our own Udo Dolz contributed four English oaks which he had grown from seed. Buckingham Town Council hopes to organise another tree planting initiative on Lace Hill later in the year.

The picture below shows Udo Dolz, Warren Whyte and Ian Orton planting trees.



On the nature front it seems that our urban deer, fox and otter population has been augmented by at least one badger. One is resident in the Castle Street/Well Street area,

presumably with a sett. This will be very bad news for our urban hedgehogs, another threatened species. There were lots of hedgehog nests in the gardens adjacent to the river, especially in Well Street, Victoria Row and Church Street. But for how much longer?

## Local Bird Observations - Mary Melliush and Jackie Higgins



Yesterday the highlight of our walk was a kingfisher, feeding between the cascade and the bridge. Then we saw the little egret feeding in the same area. There was a wren, possibly two, rooting in the undergrowth near the Tingewick Road bridge.

Before Christmas I had a mistle thrush in my garden. Jackie has regular sightings of a jay and redwings between Newcombe Crescent and the river. We both watched robins display early mating interest in the Old Churchyard on a mild day recently.

I had a blackcap in the garden to begin the year. Later we both saw kestrel and magpie. Then a group of 9 red kites floated above me. Bluetits are showing interest in their previously successful nest box. We are both looking forward to the spring migrants.

## Forthcoming events

May 1<sup>st</sup> – A morning walk around Buckingham in the company of Buckingham's foremost tree expert Michael Hunt. Michael will talk about some of the beautiful trees that we have in our town and answer participant's questions. Numbers will be limited so this will be for members of the Buckingham Society only.

May – The Society will, for the first time since lockdown 2020, be running the annual Trader of the Year competition – public voting will take place during May with the presentation of the trophy to the winner at Celebrate Buckingham Day.

June 2<sup>nd</sup> – Celebrate Buckingham Day will once again be organized by the Town Council and the Buckingham Society will be taking part – venue yet to be decided.

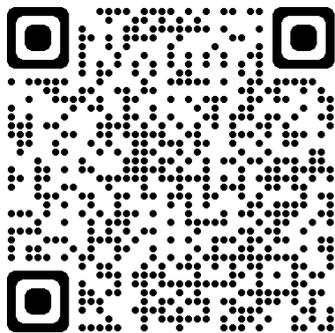
July 14<sup>th</sup> – Annual Lecture and Garden Party – to be held on Thursday July 14<sup>th</sup>. The lecture will begin at 6.30pm and the venue will be the Vinson Auditorium. Speaker to be decided soon.

November 24<sup>th</sup> – Buckingham Society AGM – Lecture Sir George Gilbert Scott and his work in Buckingham by Warren Whyte

## Executive Committee:

Vacant	Chair
David Child	Treasurer, transport, web site and planning
Carolyn Cumming	Planning
Roger Edwards	Activities lead
Ed Grimsdale	Planning and Society Historian
Gill Jones	Membership secretary
Belinda Morley-Fletcher	Secretary
Nigel Morrison	Ent Fest representative
Roger Newall	Planning
Ian Orton	Green and Open Spaces, planning
Anthony Ralph	Planning
Kathy Robins	Newsletter Editor, Planning

## We should like to hear from You



Please give us some feedback - tell us what activities you would like The Buckingham Society to prioritise, any ideas for social events (once they are again allowed) or simply write to us on any Buckingham related matter. If you have any ideas, questions or comments please address them to: [kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk](mailto:kathyrobins@walnutyard.co.uk) Tel: 07834 484762. If you would like to become involved in any of our activities or attend a meeting of the executive committee, just contact us and come along. [www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk](http://www.buckinghamssociety.org.uk)