



# *Bedfordshire People Past and Present*



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This is just a selection of some of the notable people associated with Bedfordshire.

**Bedfordshire Borough and Central Bedfordshire libraries** offer a wealth of resources, for more detailed information see the **Virtual Library**:

[www.bedford.gov.uk](http://www.bedford.gov.uk) or [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

- Click on **Libraries**
- Click on **Local and Family History**
- Click on **People**

The **Local Studies** section at **Bedford Central Library** also holds an archive of newspaper cuttings, biography files, an obituary index, local periodicals and books, including ***A Bedfordshire Bibliography*** by L.R. Conisbee, which has a large biography section.

# *Bedfordshire People Past*

## **Offa (? -796 BC)**

King Offa, regarded as one of the most powerful kings in early Anglo-Saxon England, ruled for 39 years from 757 to his death in 796. It is traditionally believed that he was buried in Bedford, somewhere near Batts Ford.

## **Falkes De Breaute (1180-1225)**

A French soldier and adventurer, Falkes's loyalty to King John was rewarded with a number of titles. The king also gave him Bedford Castle, which Falkes held until 1224 when it was besieged and demolished by King Henry III. Falkes escaped and fled to the continent but died on route from food poisoning.

## **Queen Eleanor (1244-1290)**

The sad death of Queen Eleanor links her to Dunstable. She died in Lincolnshire and King Edward 1<sup>st</sup> – her husband – wanted her to be buried in Westminster, thus the body was taken back to London and passed through Dunstable. The king ordered memorial crosses to be erected at every place the funeral cortege stopped overnight. Twelve crosses were built, Dunstable being one of them. Sadly the cross no longer exists.

In 1985 a modern statue of Queen Eleanor was placed in the town.

## **Lady Margaret Beaufort (1443-1509)**

Born at Bletsoe Castle, Lady Margaret – her mother being the widow of Oliver St John 3<sup>rd</sup> Beauchamp of Bletsoe – was a rich heiress and important landowner due to her family ties.

Lady Margaret's marriage to Edmund Tudor resulted in the birth of a son, Henry Tudor, in 1457 when she was just 13. Henry would go on to become King Henry VII after defeating Richard III at the battle of Bosworth Field.

As well as being the mother of the king, Lady Margaret is also famous for her charitable causes. She opened a free school in Dorset, and in 1502 she established the Lady Margaret Professorship at Cambridge College. Also at Cambridge, Lady Margaret founded St John's College and funded Christ's College with a Royal Charter.

Oxford University also have a hall named after her.

Nearer to Bedford, Margaret Beaufort Middle School in Riseley also carries her name.

Following her death in 1509, Lady Margaret was buried in Westminster Abbey.

## **Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536)**

The regal presence of Henry VIII's wife, Catherine of Aragon, is associated with Bedfordshire via Dunstable's Priory Church. It was here that a committee of bishops met to decide whether Henry could divorce Catherine in favour of his new love Anne Boleyn, a decision that would ultimately lead to a split with the Pope and the creation of the Church of England.

Catherine's links with Bedfordshire are also visible in Ampthill Park where stands Catherine's Cross, a structure erected to commemorate her time at Ampthill Castle in 1533.

## **George Joye (1492-1553)**

A clergyman born in Renhold, Joye is famed for being one of the first people to translate biblical texts into English, including the Psalms and the Old Testament.

## **Sir William Harpur (1497-1574)**

Founder of Bedford's Harpur Trust, as a boy Harpur was sent to London, from Bedford, where he became an apprentice tailor, working his way up to the position of the Merchant Tailor's Company in 1553. Harpur also developed a keen interest in business, which gained him wealth and a Knighthood. As well as these interests Harpur also built Bedford Grammar School.

Harpur married twice, Dame Alice in 1547 – after whom one of the town's girl's schools is named - and Dame Margaret in 1574, with whom he's buried in St Paul's Church, Bedford, where a brass commemorates him as "Knight, alderman, and late Lord Mayor of the City of London".

His statue stands above the doorway of the present Tourist Information Centre on St Paul's Square, housed in the building that was the original Harpur Grammar School until 1892.

## **Gamaliel Ratsey (? -1605)**

A character that passed into local folklore and was the subject of many ballads, Ratsey began his career of villainy as a thief before progressing to a highwayman.

His being hanged in Bedford curtailed his criminal deeds.

## **Dorothy Osborne (1627-1695)**

Writer and diarist Dorothy Osbornes's letters to her lover William Temple between 1652 and 1655, give us a unique snapshot of Bedfordshire life during the 17th century.

Dorothy was born and lived on her father's country estate at Chicksands but it was while travelling through the Isle of Wight that she met and fell in love with Temple. Unfortunately Temple's lack of money and politics (he was a Cromwellian whereas Dorothy's family had Royalist sympathies) made meetings between the two difficult; instead they corresponded by letter for over three years before finally marrying in 1655.

Her letters are characterised by a warmth and wit, but at the same time contain a wealth of social history regarding Chicksands and its environs.

Dorothy's letters have been championed by many diverse individuals including another great lady of letters, Virginia Woolf, who stated in *The Common Reader* regarding the letters – "They make us feel that we have our seat in the depths of Dorothy's mind, at the heart of the pageant which unfolds itself page by page as we read".

## **John Bunyan (1628-1688)**

Born in Elstow, Bunyan is best known as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, yet he also led an eventful life. In 1644, after time spent as a brasier, he joined the Parliamentary Army during the Civil War. Upon leaving the army in 1647 Bunyan began an intense study of the bible – brought about by a spiritual crisis – that led, in 1653, to him joining an Independent Church in Bedford.

Bunyan himself began to preach – and had various treatises published - yet his religious views often ran counter to what was acceptable to the established clergy, a grave mistake that was heightened by the restoration of the monarchy. It was in 1660, while at a meeting

at Lower Samsell in Bedfordshire, that Bunyan was arrested and charged with preaching without a licence.

Bunyan's refusal to give up preaching resulted in him spending the majority of his next twelve years in jail, yet while imprisoned in Bedford he turned his attentions to writing, producing a number of religious works. Upon his release in 1672, Bunyan continued to preach, spreading his unique message throughout Bedfordshire and neighbouring counties but he was arrested and imprisoned again in 1677. It was during this particular period of captivity that Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, completed in 1678; it became an instant success.

Bunyan died in 1688 and was buried in Bunhill Fields in London.

Bedford Central Library is fortunate in having two remarkable collections of Bunyan literature. These are the Frank Mott Harrison Collection – the catalogue of which can be viewed online via the Virtual Library – and the George Ofor Collection. In addition the Local Studies Library holds many 20<sup>th</sup> century editions of Bunyan's works as well as recent biographical and critical studies.

### **Thomas Tompion (1639-1713)**

Born in Ickwell Green, near Northill, Tompion became an apprentice clockmaker in London, where he progressed to become one of the finest clockmakers in the city. So well regarded were his skills that he was commissioned to make the first clocks for the Greenwich Observatory and also to make timepieces for Charles II.

Tompion's fame is further emphasized by his burial in Westminster Abbey.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century church of St Mary in Northill is home to Tompion's famous one-handed clock.

### **Nicholas Rowe (1673-1718)**

Born at Little Barford, Rowe was a renowned playwright, his first play *The Ambitious Stepmother* being produced in 1700. His literary reputation was established with his second play *Tamerlane* and was sealed with his best-known works *Fair Penitent* (1703) and *Jane Shore* (1714).

He was appointed Poet Laureate in 1714 and was buried in Poets Corner in Westminster Abbey with other recipients of the Laureateship.

### **Zachary Grey (1688-1766)**

Man of letters and Rector of Houghton Conquest, Grey, as well as being a skilled editor, wrote a number of books on religious subjects. He also produced a study of Shakespeare that was praised by literary giant Samuel Johnson.

Grey died at Ampthill and was buried at Houghton Conquest Church.

### **John Wesley (1703-1791)**

Clergyman and founder of the Methodist movement, Wesley came to Bedfordshire on 32 occasions to preach and spread his message. It is believed that he was very impressed with the town, writing – "there is no open wickedness of any kind in Bedford, no swearing in the streets and no trade done on a Sunday". How times have changed!

## **John Byng (1704-1757)**

Born in Southill, John Byng joined the Navy in 1718. Byng ascended through the ranks becoming Rear Admiral of the Mediterranean Fleet in 1745, Vice-Admiral in 1747 and Admiral of the Blue in 1756.

His status is of a notable figure, albeit a tragic one. 1756 saw Byng attempt to relieve Minorca from the French Fleet. Mainly due to lack of men, Byng failed and was brought back to England under arrest. Although acquitted of cowardice, Byng was found guilty of neglect of duty and was condemned to death. Clearly a scapegoat to cover the mistakes of his superiors, Byng's execution met with outrage from the public. He is buried in All Saints Church, Southill.

## **Samuel Whitbread (1<sup>st</sup>) (1720-1796)**

Born in Cardington, Whitbread left for London at the age of 14 and became an apprentice at the brewers John Whitman. In 1742 he continued to work in the brewing industry by going into partnership with Thomas Shewell. By 1760 their business had become the second largest brewery in London, and in 1765 – after Whitbread had brought Shewell's share in the business – it became the biggest in London.

Whitbread was elected MP for Bedford in 1768 and remained in the position until 1790. Known for his strong social convictions, Whitbread is noted as being one of the first men to raise the issue of slavery in the House of Commons.

Southill, in Bedfordshire, is a charming estate village dominated by Southill Park, and has been home to the Whitbread family since 1795.

## **John Howard (1726-1790)**

Born in Hackney, John Howard is known as a prison reformer and for his social conscience. Howard inherited a great deal of money after his father's death in 1742, such wealth enabled Howard to travel, and while journeying to Lisbon in 1755, his ship was captured by the French. His period of captivity and the harsh conditions he endured led Howard, upon his release, to champion prison improvement.

Howard moved to Cardington and became High Sheriff of Bedford in 1773, and travelled across England and the continent. His journeying and investigations into numerous prisons resulted in the 1777 book *The State of the Prisons*. The success of this text and Howard's campaigning saw the improvement of many penal institutions following two acts of parliament.

He died in 1790 while on a visit to Russia and is buried in Kherson in the Crimea.

## **Joanna Southcott (1750-1814)**

Associated with Bedfordshire via the Panacea Society, Southcott was a servant who, when blessed with divine inspiration, became a prophetess in London. Her prophecies and letters were placed in a box, the whereabouts of the box are now unknown but the secret is thought to reside with the Panacea Society, based in Bedford.

## **Robert Bloomfield (1766-1823)**

Bloomfield was born in Sussex, yet spent the last twelve years of his life in Shefford. A shoemaker by trade, Bloomfield made his name via a series of poems depicting life in the English countryside – his most famous being *The Farmer's Boy* – and enriched by the pastoral genre with a strain of romanticism.

His legacy in Bedfordshire is apparent in that Robert Bloomfield School in Shefford is named after him. His gravestone may still be seen at All Saints churchyard in Campton.

### **William Henry Smyth (1788-1865)**

Astronomer William Henry Smyth was born in London and, after a career in the navy where he honed his astronomical interests; he retired to Bedford and built an observatory. Smyth was a member of numerous literary and scientific societies including the Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Astronomical Society (of which he was president from 1849-1850).

He moved away from the town and settled in Buckinghamshire where he died in 1865.

### **Joseph Paxton (1801-1865)**

Sir Joseph Paxton was born in Milton Bryan. Primarily an innovative gardener, architect and engineer, Paxton is also renowned for creating “The Crystal Palace”, a vast structure made out of glass that housed the Great Exhibition of 1851. The structure attracted just as much publicity as the exhibition itself, and when the latter ended, Paxton’s building was moved to Sydenham Hill in London where it remained until fire ravaged it in 1936.

Paxton is commemorated at the Church in Milton Bryan with a memorial window.

### **George Witt (1804-1869)**

George Witt was a typical “all rounder” often to be found in the Victorian era. He was a doctor, an eminent scientist and public servant as well as a financier and banker.

Born in 1804, Witt trained in medicine under Dr Keer at Northampton Infirmary and then studied medicine at St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London. Witt began work as House Surgeon at Bedford Hospital in 1828.

He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1834 – his own collection of scientific objects helped to found the Bedford museum. In the same year he became Mayor of Bedford and achieved great popularity – particularly his abolition of toll charges on Bedford Bridge – and was even mentioned in a song:

“From Bedford’s Chief Magistrate, all the next year  
Decisions will emanate brilliant and clear  
For rows and disputes must be pleasingly ended  
When Judgement and Witt are so well blended”

Witt retired from Bedford Hospital in 1849 – receiving a silver medal from the poor as a tribute – and moved to Australia. In Sydney he became a banker and made a fortune before returning to England in 1860, he died four years later.

### **Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882)**

This revolutionary figure visited Bedford in 1864, mainly to visit the Britannia Iron Works due to an interest in the agricultural machinery that were manufactured there. During his visit Garibaldi made a tour of the factory, signed his name in the visitor’s book and planted a tree to mark his appearance in the town.

Garibaldi holds a unique place in Italian history due to his part in the unification and creation of the Kingdom of Italy.

## **Edward Fitzgerald (1809-1883)**

Born in Suffolk, poet and scholar Fitzgerald was a frequent visitor to Bedfordshire, regularly staying at Goldington Hall. He also spent a lot of time in Bletsoe and it is rumoured that he translated the Persian poem *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam* – hailed as Fitzgerald's finest work – at Bletsoe's Falcon Inn.

## **James Wyatt (1816-1878)**

Born in Hemel Hempstead, Wyatt declined to follow in his fathers footsteps as a coach-proprietor and instead became a journalist.

Wyatt gained experience as a correspondent for a number of local and national newspapers before founding his own publication – The Bedford Times – in 1843. He remained both owner and editor of the publication until he sold the business in 1872, when the paper was renamed The Bedfordshire Times and Independent.

Although best known for his role at the newspaper, Wyatt was also a member of numerous societies including the British Association and as a Fellow of the Geological Society.

His love of fossils and other antiquarian pursuits saw Wyatt as the honorary Secretary to the Society of Antiquarians and also Honorary Secretary of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club.

He is buried at Bedford Cemetery.

## **John Priestley Warmoll (1830-1885)**

Born in Norwich, the son of an Anglican Parson, Warmoll converted to Catholicism, studied for the priesthood in Rome and then became a priest in the Northampton diocese. Bishop Amherst of Northampton asked Warmoll to establish a parish in Bedford – a county with only 100 Catholics (a legacy of the Reformation), one priest and one chapel in Shefford.

Warmoll arrived in Bedford on Christmas Eve 1863 with only £2.00 with which to establish his mission. On Christmas Day Warmoll celebrated the first mass in Bedford for over 300 years.

With little or no funds Warmoll resorted to begging letters. He had moved to 48 Offa Street (now Tavistock Street) and created a chapel out of two bedrooms. By September 1864 over 100 people were attending his masses.

Within 18 months of his arriving in Bedford he had collected £400 for his church. In October 1865 he bought a plot of land on what is now Midland Road and built his presbytery and school chapel (where he also taught) with first mass being said there on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1867.

In 1869 building began on a brand new church.

Warmoll's zeal and fundraising finally paid off when on the 30<sup>th</sup> April 1874 the new church of The Holy Child and St Joseph in Midland Road was officially opened by Bishop Amherst.

Children's education was also important to Warmoll, and he built a large school in Priory Street which was completed in 1877 with nearly 300 children attending.

Warmoll was president of the Bedford Literary and Scientific Institute, a forerunner of Bedford Library, and had a keen interest in archaeology, architecture and natural history. He was even known to keep rats, fish and spiders in his small and humble rooms.

Father Warmoll died in 1885 of a seizure.

## **William Hale White (Mark Rutherford) (1831-1891)**

Born in Bedford, White wrote under the name of Mark Rutherford. Educated at Bedford Modern School, he entered the Civil Service in 1854, remaining there until his retirement in 1891.

White indulged his interest in journalism and writing in his fifties, and produced a number of philosophical works, novels and autobiography, some of his best known include *Miriam's Schooling* (1890) and *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane* (1887).

The Mark Rutherford Collection is housed in the Heritage Room at Bedford Central Library.

## **Worthington George Smith (1835-1917)**

Writer Worthington George Smith moved to Dunstable in 1885, and was a First Freeman of the town. An interest in archaeology led him to investigate Bedfordshire's past and resulted in works such as *Dunstable, Its History and Surroundings* (1904) – which remains the only detailed account on the history of the area – and *Man, the Primeval Savage* (1894).

Smith also discovered and translated the Charter granted to Dunstable by King Henry I.

## **Frederick Burnaby (1842-1885)**

Burnaby was born in Bedford in 1842 and attended the town's Grammar School. In joining the Royal Horse Guard in 1859 Burnaby began the life of adventure that he has become famous for. 1875 saw him not only travelling in the Sudan, but also journeying across the Russian Steppes on horseback – a dangerous feat that was the basis of his book *Ride to Khiva*. His later travels – again on horseback – saw Burnaby in Asia Minor and Armenia; these further adventures were also published.

1882 saw Burnaby forsake horses for balloons! He crossed the channel to Normandy making him the first balloonist to do so unaccompanied.

Burnaby was killed at the battle of Abu Klea in the Sudan on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1885.

## **Charles Wells (1842-1914)**

Wells was born in Bedford in 1842, and at the age of 14, joined the frigate Devonshire as a cabin boy. He persevered in his nautical career, becoming a qualified steamship captain in 1868.

In 1876 – after leaving behind the sea at his father-in-law's request – Wells brought an old brew house at Horne Lane and transformed it into a fully-fledged brewery. Its success was such that it is now the largest independently owned, family run brewery in the country, and is the fifth largest in the UK.

The business moved to its current location – Havelock Street – in 1976.

## **W.E. Henley (1849-1903)**

A nineteenth century man of letters, Henley is commemorated with a monument in St John the Baptist churchyard at Cockayne Hatley.

Henley had a leg amputated when he was twelve as a result of tuberculosis and was treated in Edinburgh where he met future literary genius Robert Louis Stevenson, with whom Henley collaborated. Henley was also a friend with *Peter Pan* creator J.M. Barrie. It was Henley's daughter's habit of calling Barrie "fwendy" instead of "friend" that inspired Barrie to call the heroine of his children's classic "Wendy".

Most notable of Henley's own works are the poems *Invictus* and *England My England*.

### **Dan Albone (1860-1906)**

Biggleswade born Albone's early interest in bicycles stood him in good stead for a career that spanned not only the world of cycle manufacturing but also that of inventing.

In 1880, after serving an apprenticeship at T. Course and Son, Albone formed his own cycle business, the Ivel Cycle Works, and his products – particularly their speed and lightweight construction – soon became the make of choice for many notable racing cyclists. His company also led the way in the development of the bicycle for the female rider with innovations such as leather dress guards!

With the general economic depression in 1893, Albone scaled down his activities but still continued to make bicycles and even turned his attention to automobiles, he was also credited with inventing the first practical farm tractor – the Ivel.

### **Walter Sickert (1860-1942)**

The British artist Walter Sickert was a former Bedford resident - he and his family once lived at 4 Windsor Terrace off Goldington Road.

Sickert was born in Germany but came to England in 1868, a scholarship to the prestigious London Slade Art School followed in 1881.

One of the first people to take an interest in Sickert's work was the flamboyant artist James McNeil Whistler. It was through Whistler that Sickert met, and became friends with, French master Degas.

Sickert's work dominated the English avant-garde during 1907-1914; in 1910 he set up a circle of artists known as the Camden Town Group who intended to introduce French artistic ideas of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century centuries into English art.

Sickert was elected to membership of the Royal Academy in 1924 and taught there from 1926. He was also elected president of the British Artist Society in 1928.

He was the subject of two major retrospectives in 1929, and a year before his death in 1941, the latter taking place at the National Gallery in London.

Sickert was, and continues to be, one of the most influential artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During 2006 the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery in Bedford held an exhibition of his work entitled "Walter Sickert and his Circle".

### **Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1886-1959)**

Arctic explorer Cherry-Garrard was born on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 1886 in Lansdowne Road in Bedford.

Oxford educated, Cherry-Garrard heard about explorer Robert Falcon Scott's proposed second expedition to the Antarctic in 1910. He volunteered his services and was enlisted as "assistant zoologist".

Despite his young age of 24 and relative inexperience in the field of exploration, Cherry-Garrard was a popular member of the expedition team. Indeed, he was one of the men chosen for a journey to collect Emperor Penguin's eggs at Cape Crozier in 1911. This was a particularly dangerous trip of 120 miles in darkness – a feat in itself as Cherry-Garrard suffered from myopia.

Upon their successful return, Scott described their trek as "the hardest that has ever been made", and Cherry-Garrard went on to entitle his 1922 memoirs of the expedition *The Worst Journey in the World*. The book remains a classic text and is regarded as one of the greatest true adventure stories ever written.

Sadly, Cherry-Garrard was part of the search party who discovered the body of Scott on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1912 after he had succumbed to the harsh arctic conditions. After his return he enlisted in the army during the First World War and took command of a squadron of armoured cars but was invalided out of the army after two years. Cherry-Garrard enjoyed a number of friendships with other remarkable men such as the writers H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw, fellow explorer George Mallory and military legend T.E. Lawrence but despite this Cherry-Garrard remained haunted by his time in Antarctica and died in London on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1959.

### **Hector Hugh Munro (Saki) (1870-1916)**

Born in Burma but educated at Bedford Grammar School, Munro became famous for his writing under the pen name of Saki. He is regarded as one of the masters of the short story genre, his tales characterized by a ferocious wit. He was killed in action during the First World War.

### **Henry John Sylvester Stannard (1870-1950)**

A Bedfordshire born artist, Stannard is famed for his paintings of cottages and rural scenes, often taking as inspiration the landscapes of Bedford and Flitwick. His work is much prized by collectors.

### **Albert Richardson (1880-1964)**

A renowned architect, Richardson was born in London and began his architectural career at the age of 15. He rose to prominence with a number of important positions such as teaching architecture at Birbeck College, and becoming architect to the Prince of Wales's Cornwall Estate.

He settled in Ampthill in 1919, living at Avenue House, Church Street, where there is now a plaque recording this. Richardson's grandson and biographer Simon Houfe, now a respected local author, inherited the house.

Richardson designed a number of buildings in Bedfordshire, as well as restoring several old ones.

Richardson was knighted in 1956, and is buried in Millbrook churchyard.

### **Joe Clough (1887-1977)**

Clough came to Britain as an immigrant from the West Indies. He settled in London where he became Britain's first black bus driver. Clough later moved to Bedford where he continued to drive buses and also became a taxi driver.

Clough was a much-loved figure in the town and is also the subject of a poem by Abraham Gibson.

### **Dora Carrington (1893-1932)**

Carrington lived in Bedford as a child and attended the High School where her artistic skills were first recognized, skills which saw her joining the prestigious Slade School of Art in 1910. Her fame has mainly arisen via her association with the Bloomsbury Group, particularly the writer Lytton Strachey. It was after the latter's death that she shot herself in 1932.

Her life with Strachey formed the basis of the acclaimed 1995 film *Carrington*.

## **Harold Abrahams (1899-1978)**

Bedford born Abrahams was regarded as one of this country's most accomplished athletes whose exploits were made into a successful film.

Abrahams was part of the British team for the 1924 Olympics where he won the Gold Medal for the 100 metre event and gained a Silver medal as part of the 400 metre relay team.

It was this particular Olympic Games that was the backdrop to the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*, a cinematic masterpiece based on the lives of Abrahams and his teammate Eric Liddell.

Although Abrahams later became a lawyer he still retained an interest in athletics, he was chairman of the British Amateur Athletics Board between 1968 and 1975.

## **Mary Norton (1903-1992)**

Mary Norton was born in London but grew up in Leighton Buzzard. Famous for her children's stories, particularly – much adapted for television and film – *The Borrowers*, published in 1952.

## **Glenn Miller (1904-1944)**

Though born in America, Miller – full name Alton Glenn Miller – had close links with Bedford. Upon joining the US Army Air Force in 1942, Miller's pre-war skills as a trombonist and bandleader were employed in the Air Force where he would entertain the troops and make radio broadcasts – the source of his popularity in Britain. With the blitz raging in London, Miller moved his band to Bedford – where it was safer – and made a series of broadcasts and public performances from the town. A further connection with Bedford is that Miller flew from Twinwoods Farm Airfield, near Milton Ernest on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1944 and was never seen again. He was presumed lost, missing in flight.

## **Christopher Fry (1907-2005)**

Born in Bristol, playwright Fry – real name A.H. Harris – moved to Bedford as a child in 1913 and was educated in the town until 1926. After various acting roles – and a period of service during the war – he began writing plays, his most famous being *The Lady's Not for Burning* (1949). He also wrote the screenplay for the Academy Award winning film classic *Ben Hur*.

## **John Le Mesurier (1912-1983)**

Bedford born actor Le Mesurier is best known for playing the role of Sergeant Wilson in television classic *Dad's Army*, the series ran for 12 series and a film was also made in 1971. Le Mesurier also made appearances with comedy legend Tony Hancock both on television and in film.

Although associated with comedy, Le Mesurier played a number of straight roles, including his award winning portrayal of spy Kim Philby in the Dennis Potter play *Traitor*.

## **Trevor Huddleston (1913-1998)**

Born in Bedford, Archbishop Trevor Huddleston went to South Africa in 1943. He helped found the Anti-Apartheid movement in 1959 – becoming its President in 1981 – with whom he worked for the rest of his life campaigning for the end of racism and political bigotry that was prevalent in the country.

He is commemorated with a bust on Bedford High Street that also bears a dedication from Nelson Mandela who called Huddleston a "pillar of wisdom".

### **Arthur Hailey (1920-2004)**

Luton born novelist Hailey produced 11 books including the bestsellers *Airport* (later made into a film starring Dean Martin), *Hotel* and *Wheels*.

His books were published in 40 countries and sold over 170 million copies.

### **John Fowles (1926-2005)**

A critically acclaimed author, Fowles was a boarder at Bedford School from the ages of 13-18. He became a full time writer in 1963 after a period as a teacher. Some of his novels include *The Collector*, *The Magus*, and – perhaps his most famous – *The French Lieutenant's Woman* – all of which were made into films.

### **Bob Monkhouse (1928-2003)**

Although he lived in Leighton Buzzard Monkhouse originally came from South London and was one of the most celebrated comedy writers and performers on television for over 40 years.

He started off writing and drawing comic strips for such publications as *The Beano* and *The Dandy* before moving on to radio in 1948 where he was the first comedian to be given a BBC contract.

Television work soon followed and Monkhouse gained a reputation as one of the slickest hosts in the medium. His quick fire wit and one-liners being particularly suited for the quiz show format, a genre he made his own.

Monkhouse was also busy working behind the scenes; he wrote jokes for a number of other comedians including American legend Bob Hope.

He was awarded the OBE in 1993 and continued to appear on television until his death at the age of 75.

### **Ronnie Barker (1929-2005)**

Actor and star of British comedy, Barker was born in Bedford in 1929 and moved to Oxford in 1933. Barker started out as a theatre actor but it was as a comedic force on television that he came to be so beloved of the British public. His most popular roles were as the hapless shopkeeper Arkwright in *Open All Hours* and jailbird Stanley Fletcher in *Porridge*. Barker – with comedy partner Ronnie Corbett – also starred in the hugely popular variety show *The Two Ronnies*, which has become a television institution.

Barker retired from show business in 1986 and was awarded the BBC lifetime achievement award in 1988 and an OBE in 1993. He made a few sporadic appearances on television shortly before his death including reuniting with Corbett in 2005.

### **James Hanratty (1936-1962)**

Hanratty's connection with Bedford is due to the notorious 1961 "A6 Murder". The killing of Michael Gregsten and the rape of Valerie Stone took place at Deadman's Hill near Clophill. Hanratty's case was controversial in that – after he was found guilty and hanged – new evidence came to light that cast some doubt on the original findings. The case came to the attention of the appeal court, and in 2002, thanks to advances in forensic science and DNA testing, the guilty verdict was upheld.

## **Frank Branston (1939-2009)**

Frank Branston was Bedford's first directly elected Mayor; he came into the position in 2002 and was the official representative of Bedford at both national and international level. Branston ran his electoral campaign under the title of the independent Better Bedford party, whose policies included improving the litter and graffiti problems in Bedford, and also the problems of town car parking charges.

Journalist, editor, and entrepreneur Branston also contributed to the town by founding, in 1977, the publishing group LSN Media – publishers of *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, and *Luton on Sunday*, as well as many other titles. Branston handed over day-to-day control of the company when he was elected Mayor, finally selling the organization in 2005.

Branston served in the capacity of Mayor until his death on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2009 (aged 70).

## ***Bedfordshire People Present***

### **Terry Waite (1939)**

Born in 1939, Waite – humanitarian, hostage negotiator, and writer – is connected to the town via another famous Bedfordian – John Bunyan. While negotiating the release of western captives held in the Lebanon in 1987, Waite himself was taken hostage and held for 1,763 days, the majority of which he spent in total solitary confinement.

Waite gained inspiration to help him through his ordeal when a Bedford resident sent him a postcard reproducing the stained glass window at the Bunyan Meeting Free Church – an image depicting John Bunyan himself imprisoned.

Since his release in 1991, Waite has continued his charitable work and has made several visits to Bedford in response to the gesture that originally inspired him.

### **Josephine Cox (1940)**

Prolific writer Josephine Cox - who also writes under the name of Jane Brindle – is not only a best-selling novelist, but also holds the accolade of being the third "most borrowed" author from UK libraries. Cox moved to Bedfordshire as a teenager with her mother.

Before becoming a writer Cox was a full time teacher for 12 years and only began writing while ill in hospital. Her first novel *His Fathers Sins* was published in 1987 and was a great success.

Other novels include *Take This Women* (1990) *Cradle of Thorns* (1995) *The Beachcomber* (2000), *Journey* (2005) and *Journey's End* (2006).

### **Paddy Ashdown (1941)**

Born in New Delhi, India, and educated at Bedford School, Ashdown has had a distinguished career both in the armed forces and in the political sphere.

From 1959 to 1972 he served as an officer in the Royal Marine Commandos and in the Special Boat Service (SBS) – an elite regiment similar to the SAS.

Ashdown's political career began when he was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for Yeovil in 1983, finally becoming leader of the Liberal Democrat Party in 1988, leading them in the general elections Of 1992 and 1997.

Ashdown's resignation as leader in 1999 was not the end of his political activities; in 2002 he became High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, a post he held until 2006.

## **Barry Fry (1945)**

Barry Fry is a popular figure in English Football who has seen both sides of the game as player and manager.

Educated at Pearcey Road School, Fry was a Manchester United apprentice under Matt Busby in 1960 and went on to play for a number of teams including Bolton, Leighton Orient, Luton (1974) and three years at Bedford Town. His playing career ended when injury forced his retirement.

Despite this setback Fry remained in football as a manager. He was player/manager of Dunstable Town in 1974, and manager of Bedford town between 1978 and 1979.

One of Fry's major successes as manager was winning the GM Vauxhall Conference as manager of Barnet in 1991, taking the team to Division Two in 1993.

Further management opportunities came with Birmingham City and Peterborough United; Fry managed the latter team for nine years and still remains their chairman.

## **Julia Jarman (1946)**

Julia Jarman, popular author of books for children and teenagers was born in Peterborough and now lives in the Bedfordshire village of Riseley.

Some of her books include *Squonk* (1989), *Crow Haunting* (1996), *Haunting of Nadia* (1997), *Ghost Writer* (2002), the Jessame stories and the Time-Travelling Cat series.

## **Kate Charles (1950)**

Thriller writer Kate Charles was born in the USA but moved to England in 1986. She currently lives in Bedford and despite her American upbringing she has been described by the Oxford Times as "a most English writer".

Charles' books centre around clerical mysteries set in churches and vast cathedrals, a subject matter first explored in 1991's *A Drink of Deadly Wine*.

Other books include *Appointed to Die* (1994), *Cruel Habitations* (2004) and *Evil Intent* (2005)

Charles was also Chairman of The Crime Writers Association.

## **David Renwick (1951)**

"I don't believe it!" These four words – as spoken by the universal grumpy old man Victor Meldrew in television's *One Foot in the Grave* – have become a catchphrase across Britain and were written by Bedfordshire born David Renwick.

Though starting as a journalist for the *Luton News*, Renwick has gone on to be one of this country's best comedy writers. Originally writing with Andrew Marshall for shows such as *The Two Ronnies*, *Not the Nine O'clock News* and Spike Milligan's *There's a Lot of It About*, Renwick began to write on his own in the 1990s, creating the classic sitcom *One Foot in the Grave* and the comedy-drama *Jonathan Creek*. Renwick continues to write for television on a number of projects including adaptations of Agatha Christie's *Poirot* and his series *Love Soup*.

## **John Hegley (1953)**

Poet, musician and broadcaster, John Hegley was brought up in Luton. He first came to public attention with his comedy pop group The Popticians, who recorded a couple of sessions for legendary DJ John Peel.

Hegley has written a number of poetry collections including *Glad to Wear Glasses* (1990), *Beyond Our Kennel* (1998) and *My Dog is a Carrot* (2002). Hegley also presented the

television series *Word of Mouth* and had a two-year run on radio with his *Hearing with Hegley* series.

His links with Luton were honoured when he was awarded an Arts Doctorate from Luton University.

### **Colin Salmon (1962)**

Luton born actor Colin Salmon is a well known face of both stage and screen.

His notable roles include playing Charles Robinson in three of the James Bond films – *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), *The World Is Not Enough* (1999), and *Die Another Day* (2002).

With Pierce Brosnan's retirement from the role of Bond there were rumours that Salmon would be his replacement, but the role ultimately went to Daniel Craig.

Salmon's other film appearances include *Resident Evil* (2002), *Aliens Vs Predator* (2004) and 2005's *Match Point* directed by Woody Allen.

Television has also been an important facet in Salmon's career. His screen debut was *Prime Suspect 2* in 1992 and he has also starred in the ITV *Bad Girls* and Sky One's supernatural drama *Hex*.

Salmon is a keen supporter of Luton Town Football Club.

### **Martin Bayfield (1966)**

Bayfield – born in Bedford- is famous for being a notable rugby union player for such teams as Northamptonshire Saints, Bedford Blues and England (gaining 31 caps).

Bayfield's height of 6ft 10in has made him a formidable sportsman; he made his debut in 1991 and played in numerous tours and Five Nations competitions until injury forced his retirement in 1998.

Since retirement Bayfield has worked as a journalist and an after dinner speaker, as well as appearing in the Harry Potter films as a body double for the giant Hagrid.

### **Matt Skelton (1967)**

Bedford born Skelton is the 2006 British and World Boxing Union (WBU) Heavyweight champion with an impressive professional record of 18 wins and 18 fights, 17 of which were by knockout.

Skelton was late in becoming a boxer – he turned professional at the age of 35 – yet he honed his skills in the ring as a kick boxer, winning the International Kickboxing Federation World Title in 2000, such achievements have stood him in good stead for the transition to the world of boxing.

In 2006 Skelton won the Commonwealth Heavyweight Championship.

### **Toby Litt (1968)**

Contemporary novelist Toby Litt was born in Bedfordshire and in 2003 was nominated as one of the 20 Best of Young British Novelists.

Litt's debut novel *Beatniks: An English Road Movie* was published in 1997 and was set in his hometown of Ampthill. Other novels include *Corpsing* (2000), *Finding Myself* (2004) and *Ghost Story* (2005).

## **Al Murray (1968)**

Educated at Bedford School, Murray – who has been called one of the funniest acts in British Comedy – is most famous for his character The Pub Landlord, who has appeared on stage and screen.

Before finding fame with his loud mouth creation, Murray toured with a number of other comedians including Harry Hill and Frank Skinner, and was nominated for the Perrier Award in 1996, 1997 and 1998 before winning the accolade in 1999.

When not touring with his comedy shows and working on his television series *Time Gentleman Please* – starring The Pub Landlord – Murray can be heard on radio, most recently appearing on Virgin Radio.

## **Tim Foster (1970)**

Tim Foster began rowing while at Bedford Modern School. He competed in both the 1987 and 1988 Junior World Rowing Championships, and became the first British rower to win two consecutive gold medals at two consecutive Junior World Competitions.

As a senior rower Foster won numerous medals in world championships between 1989 and 1999, and also took part in several Olympic Games where he won Bronze in 1996, and Gold in 2000.

Foster retired from competing in 2000, but continues as an international rowing coach and spokesman for the sport.

## **Stephanie Cook (1972)**

Born in Irvine in Scotland, Cook was educated at Bedford High School.

Cook's athletic career took off when she began to run modern pentathlon while studying medicine at Oxford University. Her medical career was put on hold in favour of her chosen sport which saw Cook going on to win Gold in the 2000 Olympic Games, this was the first time that the event of modern pentathlon had been included in the games, thus Cook can be seen as a trailblazer. She also won the world championships in 2001 before retiring in the same year.

Also in 2001 she was awarded an OBE.

## **Matthew Hart (1972)**

Dunstable born dancer and choreographer started tap dancing at 8 and joined the Arts Educational School and nurtured a love of Ballet.

At 15 he won the Cosmopolitan / C&A Dance Award - the youngest person ever to do so. After turning 16 Hart auditioned and was accepted for the Royal Ballet School. He progressed further two years later when he gained First and Third prizes for his choreography in the Ursula Moreton Choreographic Award.

Hart followed this success by joining the Royal Ballet itself in 1991 – becoming a soloist in 1995 – where he choreographed a number of works including *Simple Symphony* (1992), *Fanfare* (1993), and *Peter and the Wolf* (1995).

Hart left the Royal Ballet in 1996 to become involved in contemporary dance and also to work as a freelance choreographer – some of his projects included *Highly Strung* (1997), *Dance Bites* (1998) and *Revenge* (1999) which was created for the Eurovision Dancer of the Year Competition. Most ambitious was 2001's three act work *Mulan* which was premiered with the Hong Kong Ballet and went on to tour China.

2006-2007 saw Hart return to a more traditional Ballet setting as the Prince in the critically acclaimed production of *Swan Lake*.

## **Paula Radcliffe (1973)**

Though born in Cheshire, Radcliffe grew up in Bedfordshire, attending Sharnbrook Upper School, and was a member of Bedford Athletic Club.

A prominent long-distance runner, Radcliffe is the world record holder for the women's marathon, a record she set at the London Marathon in 2003. Further records include the 10, 20, and 30km on roads. Radcliffe is also a gold medallist in both World and European Cross-Country Championships, and a gold medal holder in both Commonwealth (2002) and European (2002) Games.

Radcliffe was awarded an MBE, and the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award in 2002.

## **Faye Tozer (1975)**

Born in Northampton but raised in Dunstable, Faye Tozer gained fame as a member of the band Steps who went on to sell 12 million records and have 18 top ten hits.

The band split in 2001, and Tozer went on to perform a duet with opera singer Russell Watson with the single "Someone Like You", which reached number 10 in the charts in 2002.

Since then Tozer has set about building a career as an actress. She has had starring roles in Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Tell Me On a Sunday", the musicals "Love Shack", "Me and My Girl", and more recently (2007) touring the country in a stage production of Hitchcock's classic "Dial M For Murder".

## **Gail Emms (1977)**

Emms began playing badminton at the age of four and has achieved international success in doubles tournaments. She first played for England in 1995 and has represented the country in the sport ever since.

Her successes have been in the doubles and mixed doubles, winning gold at the 2004 European Championships and silver in the 2004 Olympic Games. The 2006 Commonwealth Games saw Emms win three medals – Bronze in the woman's doubles, Silver in the team event and Gold in the mixed doubles.

Emms, born in Bedford and educated at Dame Alice Harpur School, is ranked number one in mixed doubles (2006).

## **Andy Johnson (1981)**

Footballer Andy Johnson was born in Bedford and played for Crystal Palace before transferring to Everton in 2006.

It was Bedford's own Barry Fry – then managing Birmingham City – who gave Johnson his big break by signing him for his team in 1997.

He remained at Birmingham City for five years before transferring to Crystal Palace in 2002. While with the team, Johnson became the top scorer in the First Division during the 2003/2004 season – scoring 32 goals. During the 2004/2005 season he was the top goal scorer in the Premiership.

Johnson played for England in February 2005, replacing Wayne Rooney in a match against the Netherlands.

Johnson's transfer to Everton for £8.6 million sees him returning to the top ranks of English Football.

## **Monty Panesar (1982)**

Luton born cricketer Madhusudhan “Monty” Singh Panesar is the first Sikh to represent a nation other than India in test cricket.

Panesar cut his teeth playing cricket while at Stopsley High School – having played for a number of teams including Luton Indians and Dunstable Town – which led to him being selected for the England Under-19 team, debuting in 2001 at the age of 19.

Moving from Stopsley High School to Bedford Modern School on a sports scholarship, Panesar pursued an academic career alongside his cricket, culminating in his graduation from Loughborough University in 2005 with a degree in Computer Science.

His international cricketing debut came in 2006 with a tour in India.

Regarded as one of the major new talents, former England spinner John Emburey has remarked that Panesar is “one of the best spinners we have had for 25 or 30 years”.

Panesar plays test cricket for England and County Cricket for Northamptonshire.

## **Alastair Cook (1984)**

Born in Gloucester, it was while a pupil at Bedford School – under the tutelage of former England International Derek Randall – that Cook began his cricketing career.

Cook was captain of England’s Under-19 Team during the 2004 Under-19 World Cup.

He is the only England player to score three test centuries before turning 22, and his England debut in India during 2006 saw him becoming the 16<sup>th</sup> player in test cricket history to hit a century on his debut.

The Cricket Writers Club named Cook the Young Cricketer of the Year in August 2005; he was also named Professional Cricketers Association Young Player of the Year 2005. In September 2006 he was again awarded the Young Player of the Year for that season.

Cook currently plays for Essex County Cricket Club and England.

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