



Blunham Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF **BLUNHAM PARISH COUNCIL**



PARISH COUNCIL REPORT

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Merry Christmas

Wishing all Blunham residents a Christmas that is full of peace and joy and a Happy New Year.

In this issue we look to update residents about the forthcoming major roadworks taking place at the Black Cat Roundabout as well as sharing with you the results of a recent archaeological dig.

From National Highways

National Highways are improving journeys between Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge with a new 10-mile dual carriageway between Black Cat roundabout and Caxton Gibbet. The scheme will include junction improvements at Black Cat, Cambridge Road and Caxton Gibbet as well as a new link at Eltisley.

The scheme will bring communities together, support long term local and regional economic growth and replace the last remaining stretch of single carriageway between the M1 at Milton Keynes and the east coast port of Felixstowe. Construction is due to commence January 2023, and last for approximately 3.5 years with a budget of circa £810-£950 million.

The A428 runs west-east from the northeast corner of Bedfordshire into South Cambridgeshire. It connects Bedford and St Neots with Cambridge; and together with the A421 and A14, it forms part of the strategic route linking the East of England with the south Midlands.

Much of the new route will be separate from the existing A428 and will pass primarily through undeveloped arable farmland, within the boundaries of five local authorities.



Quicker and more reliable journeys

The new dual carriageway will cut congestion by putting the right traffic on the right roads, creating a reliable route that will meet the future traffic needs of the region. Lorries and those on long-distance journeys will use the new dual carriageway, creating more reliable journeys for those travelling locally on the existing A428, both by car and on public transport. Free-flowing junctions (at Black Cat, for example) will also help to create a less congested and more reliable route.

We will cut journey times by more than a third at peak times, saving commuters up to an hour and half on their weekly commute, as well as removing traffic from local roads and getting it on the strategic road network.

Making the network safer*

Improves road safety by separating local and long-distance traffic, reducing congestion and the potential for accidents. Over 600 accidents are predicted to be prevented over a 60-year period. It will also reduce dangerous rat-running on local roads and through villages.

Supporting the smooth flow of traffic*

The scheme will reduce congestion on the route, with 85% of all incidents to be cleared within one hour.

Helping cyclists, walkers, horse riders and other vulnerable users

The scheme includes safe crossing points for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and reconnections for disrupted rights of way. The scheme will be providing approximately 5.2 miles (8.4 km) of new shared unsegregated footway/cycleway.

Encouraging economic growth*

The scheme will provide a vital link between Milton Keynes and Cambridge, which has been identified by the government as a region of growth. The new dual carriageway will increase capacity, reliability and safety on the road network, encouraging investors and visitors to the area and making jobs in these cities more accessible. Alongside the new A14, it forms part of the key route to the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich and unlocks the delivery of new housing growth in the area, which supports the commitment of the National Infrastructure Commission to build over a million new homes in the OxCam corridor by 2050.

Delivery of better environmental outcomes*

Noise will be reduced or maintained at current level for the majority of properties affected by the scheme. There will be a beneficial impact on air quality - fewer vehicles waiting in traffic reduces vehicle emissions and engine noise. Air quality will improve for cyclists on the existing A428 due to reduced congestion.

We are committed to improving existing levels of biodiversity where possible and leaving a positive legacy by providing new landscape planting, mammal underpasses, flood compensation and wildlife areas.

Achieving real efficiency*

Efficiencies are achieved where we have identified ways of working that result in savings in both time and costs when compared to how we had historically undertaken tasks/activities. Examples include energy and future maintenance savings through the adoption of LED road lighting systems as well as adopting rigid/concrete central reserve barriers

Keeping the network in good condition*

The route will be of new construction, designed with full consideration of operation and maintenance.

For more information and updates please follow the following webpage <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/a428-black-cat-to-caxton-gibbet/>



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Archaeological Dig

A report on a recent archaeological dig which took place in Blunham – reproduced with the kind permission of Thames Valley Archaeological Services.

Victorian Brick Kiln at Blunham

TVAS East Midlands have just finished their excavation at land between 19 and 73, The Hill, Blunham, Bedfordshire.

The archaeological potential of the site had been highlighted from both an initial desktop study and evaluation. The site lay on the fringes of the historic (medieval) village. Blunham clearly has late Saxon origins and is first mentioned in Domesday Book (1086) as Blunham. The village contained two manors. The parish church, dedicated to SS James and Edmund has elements dating from the 12th century. The archaeological evaluation identified very few deposits of archaeological interest apart from areas of post-medieval quarrying recorded along with a post-medieval ditch which also recorded on historic maps. However, one zone contained structural remains of a probable brickworks which is not recorded on historic maps.

On the opening up of the excavation area elements of a brick kiln were recorded in the centre of site. This was surrounded by large in-filled quarry pits and a series of drainage systems; these likely connected to the brickworks. A mortar mixing pit was also recorded and an area of hard standing; made of brick and tile waste, which was likely built as an area to load the carts to take the newly fired bricks, tiles and mortar away to be sold.

The brick kiln building excavated was likely to have been a circular Downdraught kiln. The brick walls of the structure had been so badly robbed after the kiln went out of use that no walls were left surviving; only the foundations. These comprised fragments of brick and tile waste together with iron slag lumps.

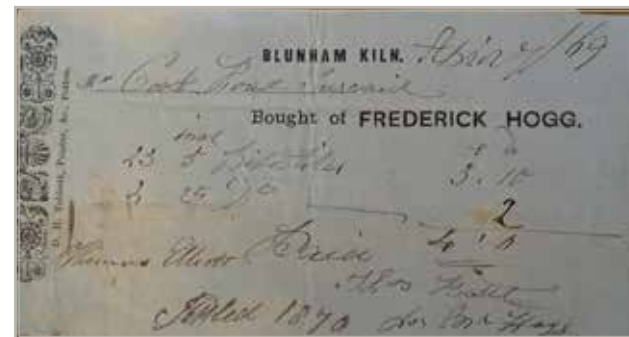
Within this circular structure a sunken chamber was recorded. This had been constructed in a rectangular cut into the natural geology. The walls of the chamber; made of brick; were then built along

the edges of this cut. The chamber was then floored by ceramic tiles which overlay a series of ceramic pipes which likely at one time were used to carry hot gases away from the kiln to a likely chimney. Unfortunately no substantial evidence of a chimney was recorded on site.

Surrounding this lower chamber, located at a higher level; were the remains of other areas of tiled floor. These tiled areas likely represent the only surviving remains of other chambers of the kiln where stacks of unfired 'Green' bricks would have been placed to be fired.

The sunken chamber was rebuilt during the life time of the kiln. A layer of brick, tile and slag rubble was dumped over the original tiled floor and a new tiled floor was constructed and the outer walls of the original chamber appear to have been heightened.

Documentary evidence; a bill head dating to 1869; has been located which may give insight to the kiln and owner of the brickworks. The bill is titled Blunham Kiln and Bought of Frederick Hogg; and is for the sale of a quantity of tile. Fredrick Hogg is thus the owner of the brickworks at this date. Further research shows that Fredrick Hogg was a successful business man who lived at Girtford House, Girtford. This was a small hamlet just outside the town of Sandy which after 1910 was incorporated into the expanding Sandy. Hogg was a man of means owning numerous properties and land and likely made his money as a wine and spirit



merchant. Later by 1867 Merville's Directory of Sandy lists him as a brick and tile maker and manager. He died in 1878 and all his property went to his illegitimate son Fredrick Safford.

East West Rail – Cllr Neville

Back in September 2022 East West Rail (EWR) was earmarked by the government as a scheme it was keen to accelerate.

Blunham Parish Council are part of the ongoing consultation process being undertaken by EWR with interested parties. The most recent event took place on 8th November with representatives from a number of local councils including a representative from the Parish Council.

EWR is still considering options for the route between Bedford and Cambridge which will take a completely new route via Sandy/St Neots and Cambourne.

The Parish Council will provide further information regarding the exact route chosen in due course.

HISTORICAL NOTES

PHYLLIS WILLMOTT

Black stockings filled with goodies

MY MOTHER was born in 1892 in the front downstairs bedroom of an ancient thatched cottage in which many generations of agricultural families must have been born, lived out their lives and died. The cottage (which is no longer there) was in the centre of the Bedfordshire village of Blunham. Opposite stood – and still stands – the ancient church, surrounded by green grass and old tombstones. Along one side of its enclosing wall was the lane which led, under an avenue of lime trees, to the banks of the Ivel.

It was a setting that could not have changed much since Bunyan had applied on behalf of a villager he knew for a licence to preach there in the 17th century. The villager was named John Wright and Bunyan had earlier spent time with him in Bedford jail.

My mother's parents were not natives of Blunham, or even Bedfordshire. The couple had met and married in London where she was a nursery maid and he a plate-layer on the railways. Their union produced 11 children, of whom my mother was the last but one. By the time she was born in the Blunham cottage her older brothers and sisters had already left home, which not only eased the sleeping arrangements (there was only one upstairs bedroom), but of course meant fewer mouths to feed.

It was partly for this reason, but also because her father had regular and secure employment on the railways, that my mother could look back on what was for the times a relatively affluent childhood. Not sufficiently affluent, however, to be above joining in the gleaning with the other villagers after the harvest. In my mother's earliest years, some of the flour from the gleaning was used to make bread for the family, which was baked twice a week in the "second oven" of the village bakery. The kitchen range installed between the inglenooks of the oak-beamed fireplace was used for week-day dinners: boiled steak and kidney pudding with mashed potatoes and "greens", pork and onion suet roll, "duck-a-nothing" (baked chopped pork, rice and herbs) or "Bedfordshire clangers". And always a pudding – baked rice, or more often bread and butter pudding or boiled treacle pudding – to follow.

It was a heavy diet in which little food came from outside the village, although as the century drew to a close some new foods – such as tinned salmon, treacle and Quaker Oats – appeared. Bananas were a rare treat brought by the brothers from London; lemons were "never seen in the house", and oranges were a once-a-year Christmas luxury.

One Christmas held a particularly vivid memory for my mother. From an early age she had suffered from bad earache and on Christmas Eve she was crying bitterly with the pain. It was late and her mother brought her downstairs, for her sisters Bertha and Florrie were trying to sleep in the children's bedroom upstairs. Everything was quiet until there was the noise of a cart rumbling by in the dark outside. "Listen!" said my grandmother to her sobbing daughter. "I do believe that could be Father Christmas!" Magically, this must have charmed away the pain, for the next my mother knew was waking in the morning to find her black stocking hanging at the end of the bed, filled with the orange, nuts, sweets and small presents smuggled into the cottage by the older children in preceding weeks.

Sadly, not everyone in those days could hope for black stockings filled with goodies. Poverty was as common to the lot of agricultural labourers in Bedfordshire as in most other rural areas. My mother remembered that when the new potatoes came in from her father's allotment her mother would cook a large potful to put out on her doorstep for the less fortunate village children. In the winter she would fill her baking tins with jacket potatoes. From other accounts, it seems that this sort of help was not at all uncommon.

Phyllis Willmott is the author of 'From Rural East Anglia to Suburban London' (Institute of Contemporary Studies £9.50)

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