

WW1 and the inter-war years

1914 – 1939

Your Country needs you

When war was declared in 1914, Shillington's vicar, the Reverend Postgate, Mr C.B. Harmsworth (the Liberal Luton MP), Captain Lucas from Shillington Manor and many local people attended a recruitment meeting on the village green. Some made speeches and there was a rousing verse of the National Anthem. Many men signed up the following day and served with either the Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire Regiments.

A fillip for farming



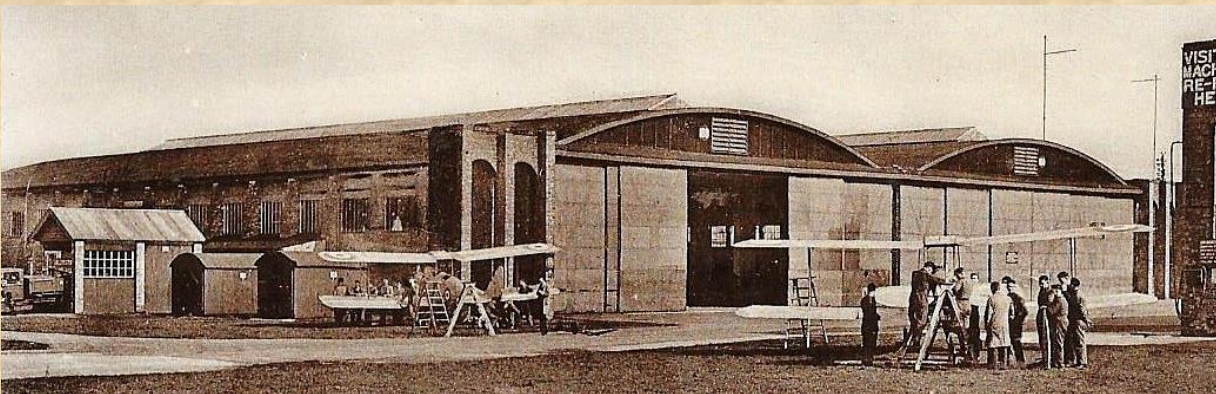
After languishing for 30 years, farming received a boost from the Government in 1916 when it encouraged more home production of food and guaranteed the price of wheat.

Farmers responded by ploughing up previously abandoned land and invested in new machinery. The binder cut crops and tied bundles into sheaves which eliminated the gruelling use of scythes and binding of sheaves with straw 'rope'.

The photograph shows one passing previously-stocked sheaves on its way to cut a crop near Apsleybury Wood in the 1920s.

Henlow airfield

Flying was still in its infancy, but a small private airfield had opened off the road towards Henlow before the first world war. In 1917, the newly-formed RAF built three hangars there for repairing damaged military aircraft and maintenance. Forty airmen were stationed there by August 1918. The war ended later that year on 11 November, but use of the site continued.



Two Tiger Moths at Henlow c. 1934 [Henlow - UK Airfield Guide](#)

We shall remember them

After four brutal years of fighting, Great Britain emerged on the winning side of the war. Sadly, 29 of the men who had signed up so eagerly never returned to Shillington, all killed in active service.

Those who perished were-

Christopher Allen, 4th Middlesex Regt

Alfred Ansell, 1st Beds Regt

Harry Ansell, 1st Beds Regt

John Brewer, 6th Beds Regt

Albert B. Ashton, Royal Fusiliers

Frederick Cole, London Rifle Brigade

Joseph Denton, RFA

Frank Gudgin, R.A.S.C.

William S. Grundon, 2nd Beds Regt

Bertram Hyde, 7th Beds Regt

Robert Ingram, 2nd Beds Regt

Lewis B. Jenkins, RFA

Charles Jepps, 2nd Royal Berks

Bertram Albert Larman, 6th Border Regt

Frederick Arthur Pearce, 1st Beds Regt

Percy J. Pestell, 6th Beds Regt

Frank Prutton, Australian I.F.

Ernest B. Tingey, 8th Beds Regt

William Tingey, 1st Middlesex Regt

Ernest Twydell, 4th Beds Regt

Frank Samuel Twydell, 4th Beds Regt

Horace Weeden, 6th Beds Regt

William West, 11th Essex Regt

Leslie Willmer, 4th E. Yorks, Regt

Frank C. Wilson, 18th Lancs Fusiliers (listed as Cyril Frank Wilson on church plaque)

Herbert S. Womwell, 9th Norfolk Regt



Most are commemorated on the war memorial opened on 22 August 1922 by Mr M G Townley MP and dedicated by Canon Postgate.

At least three more Shillington men died. The plaque in the church also mentions George Henry Swain and John Richards. Horace Rainbow had lived in Chibley Farm cottages but moved to London and died fighting with the Grenadier Guards.

Another tragedy

Noah Day was a gunner during the war and suffered nasty injuries when shells exploded close to him, killing horses in his care. He survived and returned to live with his wife in Higham Cottages but suffered from nightmares. He had a particularly terrifying dream on 4 September 1921 but went off to work the following day. He was driving a traction engine pulling a heavy threshing machine on a hill when a mechanical fault occurred. The engine ran away, turned over and threw Day into the road. He died from his injuries. The coroner found that he had done all he could to prevent an accident and his employer's insurance company paid his widow £100 compensation.

Chilids' play

Children were still expected to help around the house and earn money when the opportunity arose.

Between the chores, they had time to play and these girls were pictured playing Ring-a-roses in the 1920s.



Getting on the farming ladder

The 1919 Land Settlement (Facilities) Act provided for councils to create smallholdings for ex-servicemen. Bedfordshire County Council bought Clawders Hill, Upton End and Archers Farms and rented out the land in smaller units.



The photograph shows George Jepps with three of his bullocks at Upton End Farm.

Despite promises to the contrary, the Government withdrew support for farmers soon after the war ended. Many were tenants who struggled to pay the rent and gained a reputation for being slow to pay wages and bills.

Some packed up and less productive land was abandoned which provided a boon for wildlife. Hawthorn bushes sprang up where birds dropped seeds and wildflowers grew.

Sheltered areas among the bushes attracted insects, butterflies and songbirds including nightingales.

Other farmers survived and were able to acquire their first tractors including John Mott of Clifton House Farm, shown on his Fordson in 1938.



Development opportunity

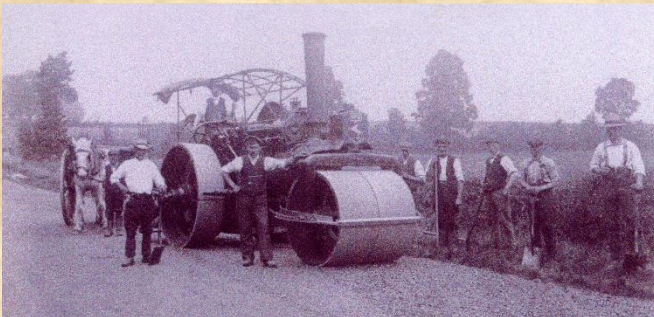
Land values plunged and builders bought some for houses. Many in the lower part of Bury Rd, for instance, were erected in the late 1920s. In 1928, the first council houses for rent (pictured) were built at 2 - 28, High Rd.

Homes from this period had large gardens and many of the new owners bought a few fruit trees from Laxton's nursery in Bedford.

Many of their tasty eating apple varieties, Superb and Lord Lambourne can still be seen growing in the gardens of older houses.



A new era of travel begins

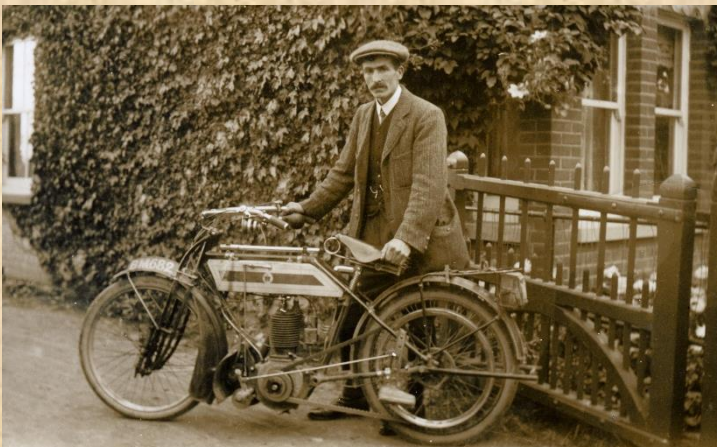


From the 1920s, roads were improved with large stones used to consolidate the existing surface and chippings and tar spread on top. Several passes with a steam roller left a hard-wearing, sealed and level surface. This gang are working in Stondon Rd near the entrance to Rosehill Farm.

Bicycles became more reliable, comfortable and affordable. They were handy to get around locally and gave some the opportunity to work many miles away from home. Cis Furr is pictured with her bicycle in the 1920s.

Motorbikes were more expensive but quicker and sometimes fitted with a sidecar for one or two passengers.

Fred Devereux is pictured outside his home at Bellevue Villas in Bury Rd in the 1920s with his and Harold Kitchener from Moorhen Farm had a powerful Norton.



The first doctor in the village, Dr Kilham Roberts of Windmill Lodge, had a motorcycle and a chauffeur-driven car. Harold Wilson who lived in the thatched cottage near the village green drove a big Humber. Another early car stopped in High Road in 1924 alongside a horse-drawn waggon with Frank Ansell at the reins.



You wait for one....

Fred Devereux was also among the first to own a lorry. Like those with pony and traps before him, he was badgered by people wanting lifts into Luton and Hitchin and he fitted his lorry with seats and a tarpaulin roof.

Soon, buses were being purpose-built and operators began regular services into local towns where jobs in house building and industry were available. In Luton, Vauxhall and Commer as well SKF and others that fabricated components. George Kent's, which had supplied munitions during the war, grew to have 5,000 employees making industrial equipment.

Luton's hat makers needed more staff and Hitchin's businesses were expanding fast. Some Shillington women worked at an embroiderers in Ickleford and glove-makers in Meppershall. Businesses began to make deliveries by van including Palmer's butchers from Hanscombe End Farm who had this one in the 1930s.



One of the first bus services was run by Bill Twydell from the Bedford Arms pub which stood where Bedford Close is now. He called his bus the Favourite and he took labourers to Welwyn to dig a cutting for the Great North Road. His brother-in-law, Robert Fisher of Gravenhurst, set up a service to Luton with his, the Sunbeam.



Neville Jenkins from Hillfoot End with financial help from George Ansell got in on the act with the Perseverance (pictured), which provided competition for the Sunbeam on the Luton run.

Mrs West from Apsley End also owned a bus- the Reliance- with tragic consequences. When passenger numbers fell short of expectations, she threw herself down a well. She was rescued but hung herself soon afterwards.

In 1938, Birch Brothers whose garage was in Henlow Camp took over many of these services.

The bus belonging to Charlie Taylor, landlord at the Crown, took workers as far as Barnet for a while. Later, he would supply the increasing demand for school buses and introduced day excursions with the Norfolk coast being a popular destination. The business, continued to operate from Meppershall as Taylors Reliance Coaches with its two shades of pink coaches into the early 2000s.

Take your pick

In 1930, there were still many shops in the village including 4 bakeries. Some allowed residents to take their Sunday dinners there for cooking.

Frank Ingrey was the baker at 42, Church St in 1898 and the picture shows his grandson, Reg, in the bakehouse in the 1960s.



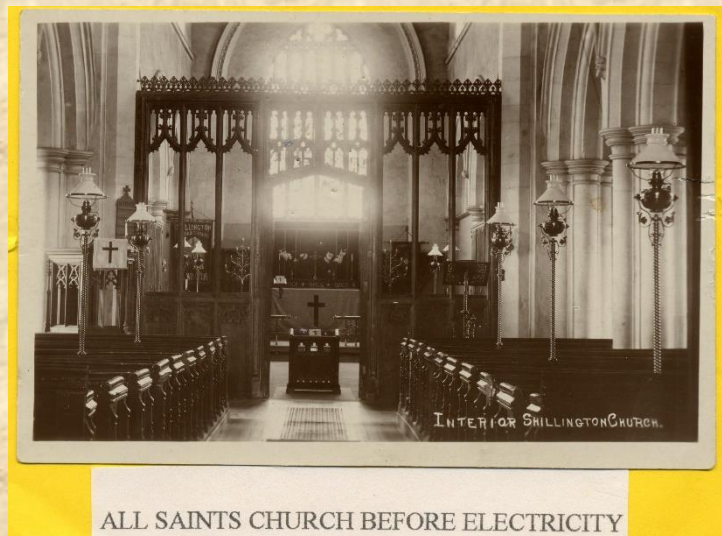
Other shops included 2 butchers, a pork butcher, 5 other shops selling general groceries or sweets such as Prutton's in Hillfoot Road (pictured below on a postcard), 2 blacksmiths, a saddler and 2 snobs (boot repairers). There were still 7 pubs in Shillington and the Live and Let Live in Pegsdon.



Let there be light

Candles provided light in most homes until the 1920s when paraffin lights became popular, but they were smelly and left a dark patch on the ceiling above.

Electricity reached Shillington in the mid-1930s but the supply was fragile at first. Each house was restricted to one light in each room and just two sockets in total. It was 1946 when electric lighting was installed in All Saints (pictured before it was connected) and St Margaret's in Higham Gobion.



Water works

Everyone had fetched their water from wells for centuries but some at the top of Church St ran dry in hot summers. The most reliable was at Bottom Turn located between what are now nos 55 and 55A, High Rd. Piped water came to Shillington in the early 1930s and standpipes were installed at intervals around the village. It took decades for every house to be connected. Toilets were in outbuildings with a wooden seat and bucket below to collect the waste. People were less concerned about privacy in those days and some toilets accommodated two or more people. The contents of the buckets were buried under part of the garden to rot down and the area left for three years before vegetables were grown there. Later, the waste was collected and taken away for disposal.

RAF Henlow

RAF Henlow became the home of the School of Aeronautical Engineering in 1924 and Ralph Dawes from Shillington (pictured below in 1937 when he joined the Territorial Army) remembered hearing the band playing during the 7am parades.

Operations expanded and between 1933 and 1935, new barracks, offices, an officers' mess and the hospital were erected and Garden City style housing was provided for married staff. The base generated plenty of freight traffic on the railway and the station was renamed Henlow Camp in 1933.

The Camp made an impact on the surrounding area and staff supported the nearby greyhound racing stadium. Built in 1927 it is one of the oldest in the country but with interest in going to the dogs waning the track closed soon after planning permission for housing was granted in 2021.

The Bird in Hand pub and hotel at the roundabout attracted trade from the base and passing motorists- a classic example of a 1930s roadhouse.

