

Post-war Shillington (part 1)

Condemned!

No houses in Shillington had been bombed but those without an indoor toilet were considered unfit for habitation.

Some were modernised by adding bathroom extensions, but others were pulled down including Marshalls Row (where Marshalls Avenue is now and shown in the photo).



Homes fit for heroes

Building new homes took time as materials were in short supply and even bread, available throughout the war, was rationed in 1946.



Council house building resumed in that year when Amptill Rural District Council constructed 48 - 70, Hanscombe End Rd. More followed in Hillfoot Rd (painted white and nicknamed White City), Greenfields, Bryants Close, High Rd (85-91 or Parkside, pictured) and in Hitchin Rd, Pegsdon. Several included bungalows for the elderly.

With many new bathrooms and the economy growing fast, demand for water grew. An additional well increased capacity at Meppershall Hoo water works and a new water tower was built on high ground to supply local homes by gravity, opening officially in 1952.

Be cautious?

Remembering how their fathers had been let down when Government support was withdrawn after the first world war, some farmers were reluctant to borrow money for new equipment.

The picture shows Tom Jepps driving the tractor and George Jepps on their old binder cutting a crop at Marquis Hill, with two fascinated boys following them.

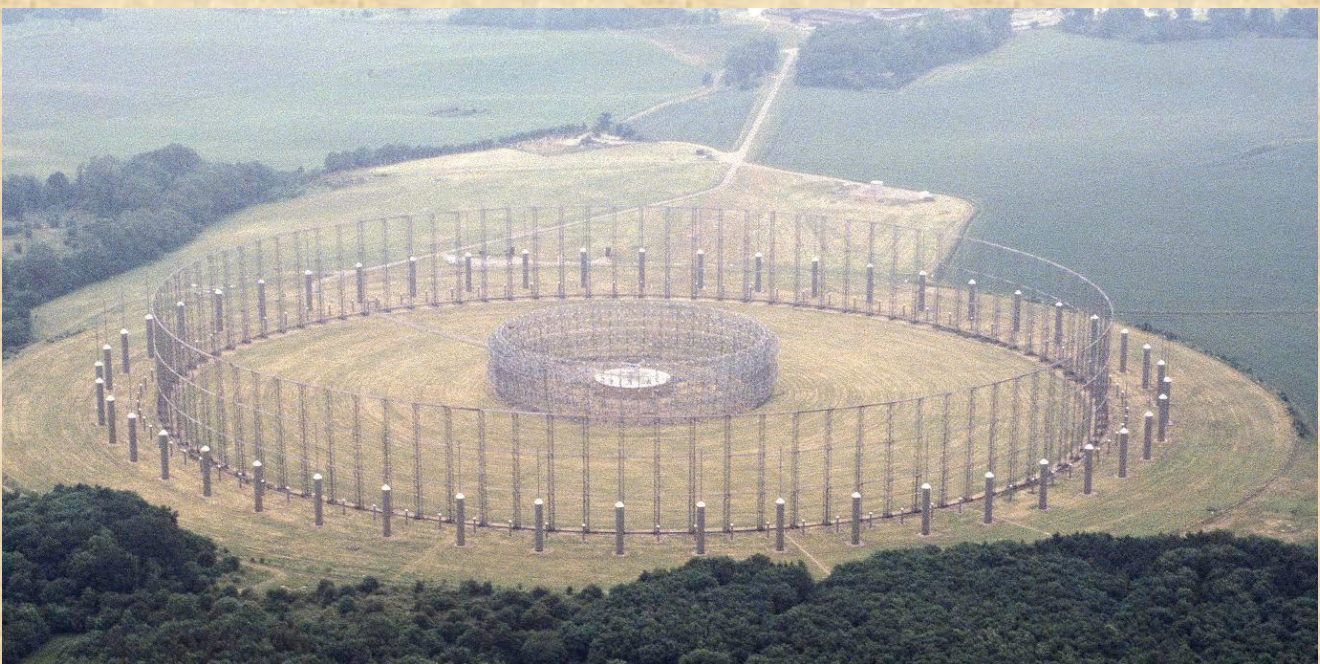


Confounding expectations, the government decided to continue supporting farmers and many modernised by replacing older machinery and buildings. Fewer full-time staff were needed and productivity rose but wages remained low compared to those of factory workers.

To earn extra money for cars and white goods, some men with other jobs helped part-time on farms during busy periods and women picked potatoes, Brussels sprouts and peas.

The Cold War

As boys turned into men, they could expect to be called up to do National Service for two or three years and conscription would remain in place until 1960. Although the war was over, tension between the west and Russia rose. Anyone passing through Shillington churchyard in 1947 would have notice a huge metal structure appearing on the hill at Chicksands. Locals called it the 'Elephant cage' but it was a receiver to eavesdrop on Russian intelligence. It became redundant later and was dismantled in 1996.



The 'Elephant Cage' at Chicksands. Photo from Memories of Chicksands Facebook group

Look on the bright side

Overall though, these were optimistic times and the spirit of the age was epitomised by the Festival of Britain held in 1951 to celebrate British industry and innovation. Bedfordshire County Council provided all its villages with special signs. Shillington's stood on the village green until a speeding car demolished it and its replacement is very different, featuring a slogan: Shillington- where all the ends meet.

Cars in, buses out

Cars became more affordable and many owners gave lifts to workmates. Bus services to and from Luton and Hitchin were reduced as demand fell. The Hitchin to Bedford railway serving Henlow Camp also lost custom after the war. Passenger services ceased in 1961 but freight use continued until 1969 when the line closed.

In your spare time

Following the end of the war, social life thrived with many clubs and frequent activities. For many old folks, the highlight of the year was the Women's Institute Christmas party, pictured taking place in 1950.



Photography became popular and 16 enthusiasts from the village founded Shillington Camera Club in 1960. It gained a formidable reputation and attracted members from afar. Since 2009, it has met in Barton.

Kicking a ball around

There were enough players for two football clubs after the war. Shillington Athletic's pitch was behind the houses at 85 - 103 High Rd (Parkside) and Shillington Rangers used Oscar's Meadow behind what is now Woodmer Close.

Both fields were grazed and uneven and a decision was made to get a dedicated playing field. Money remaining in the wartime 'comfort fund' was put in the kitty and a committee worked hard to raise more. Eventually, there was enough to purchase nearly 2 hectares (4.5 acres) of land at the top of Greenfields.

The area sloped with one corner three metres (10 feet) higher than the opposite one. Two big American bulldozers used on wartime construction projects came in to level the area and land drains were installed to remove excess water from the clay soil. The playing field opened in 1954 and football and cricket teams used it regularly with the former taking precedence when their seasons



overlapped.

The clubhouse opened in 1956. From the 1970s, raising teams became more difficult as demands on people's time mounted. The cricket team folded in the 1980s and fewer footballers were available to play regularly.



A ladies football team raised money for charity during the 1950s and played as far afield as Wing in Buckinghamshire.

The goggle box

The BBC had been broadcasting television programmes since 1932 but few people watched as sets were expensive. In 1956, a second channel began broadcasting and many people bought their first TVs as cheaper and more compact models with larger screens reached the market. Picture quality could be poor but improved in 1965 when a transmitter on Sandy Heath began to operate. Mass production made many goods cheaper and they were advertised heavily on the new channel to eager buyers. Shopping for clothing, furniture and domestic appliances became a regular activity on Saturdays.

More pubs close

Many publicans took on other jobs in the 50s, 60s and 70s leaving their wives in charge at lunchtime. When the men returned, they took over for the evening session. Accountants were paying more attention to the way breweries ran their businesses and their tenants were expected to pay more rent. Pubs with low turnovers were no longer considered viable and the Red Sign Post and the Swan (whose religious landlord had not opened on Sundays) both shut in 1959. The Marquis of Granby followed in 1966.



The decline in manual work and the need to quench the thirst it induced coupled with other forms of leisure led to custom for the pubs declining.

Despite its enduring popularity at the heart of the village, the Five Bells (pictured) closed in 1985 and, like the others, became a private home after extensive renovation.

From the 1980s, country pubs without food sales became increasingly unviable as their regulars declined in number

and aged. The Bedford Arms would be demolished in 1992 and houses in Bedford Close now occupy the site. The popularity of pétanque brought extra trade to some pubs including the Noah's Ark but it closed later and became a private home in 2018. Two pairs of homes occupy the site of the car park and once busy pétanque court.

Good news

Mains drainage came to Shillington in 1961 when the sewage works were built near Church Pannell. The photograph shows the sewer being installed in High Rd near Apsley Arch. The sewage works also take waste from Lower Stondon which is piped beneath the fields. A cast iron vent pipe near Bryants Close prevents gases building up in the system.

The last of the utilities- gas- came to Shillington in 1987.

More new homes

From the early 1960s, speculative developers built new homes for sale in Shillington. The first were in Hanscombe End Rd with prices starting at £1,100.

A new estate of houses and bungalows came to Hillside Close and Churchview Avenue in 1968 - 9 (pictured).

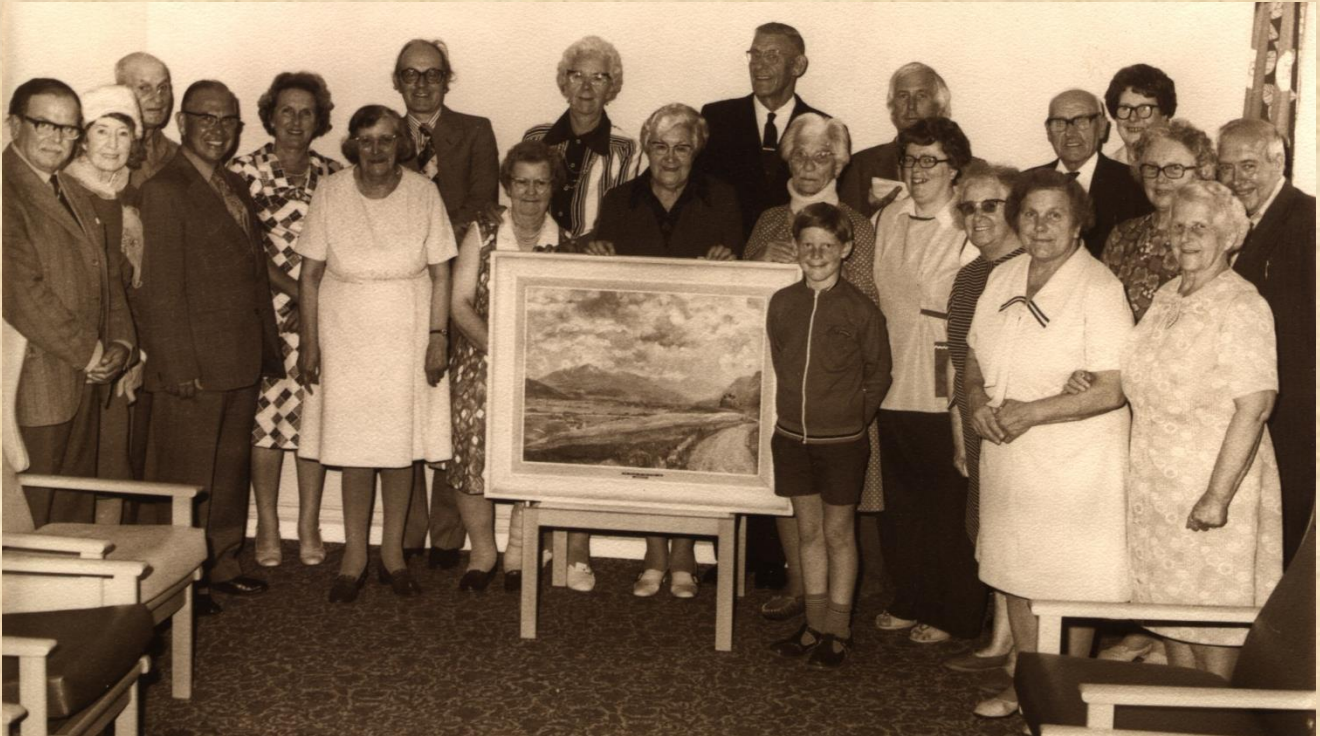
Teachers and pilots for Court Lines based at Luton Airport were among the early purchasers, bringing new blood into the village.

Additional council housing came to Woodmer Close in the late sixties and flats and bungalows for the elderly were constructed in Marshalls Close in the 1970s.

Some of the Old Rectory land was sold to developers for houses (Vicarage Close) and Mid Beds District Council built 11 bungalows for the elderly.



Bedfordshire County Council constructed a block of flats for the elderly (Scyttels Court) and a bungalow for an onsite warden who organised activities. The residents were very happy living there and the picture shows them receiving a painting donated for their common room.



The provision of better housing and less smoking raised life expectancy to 79 for men and 83 for women. By 2019, the average person enjoyed around 26 extra years of life compared with their predecessors a century earlier. After the abolition of Bedfordshire County Council in 2009, Aragon Housing Association took over Scyttels Court. Claiming that old people preferred to live in their own homes and that its many different floor levels made modernising it unviable, they closed it down in 2011 to the astonishment of many. Rather than replacing it, they used the site for 'affordable' homes instead.

At last- a new school!

Bedfordshire County Council built a new Junior School in Greenfields in the late 60s but the infants remained at the old school with its outdoor bucket toilets until 1972. They might have been there longer but for a concerted campaign by angry parents who persistence got another classroom built. Many country children had never learned to swim and the Parent Teacher Association raised funds for a swimming pool which was installed that same year.

Here are the dinner ladies and playground supervisors who worked at the school in 1978.

