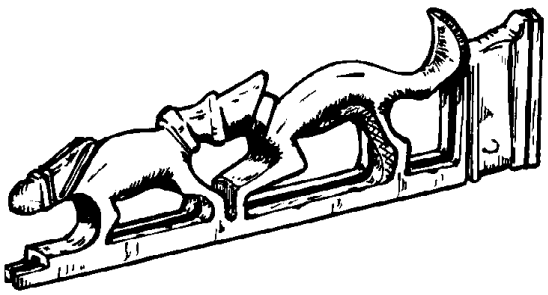
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

A Photographic Survey of Iron Gates & Railings in Ampthill carried out in 1993 and updated in 2015.

Kevan J. Fadden FSA

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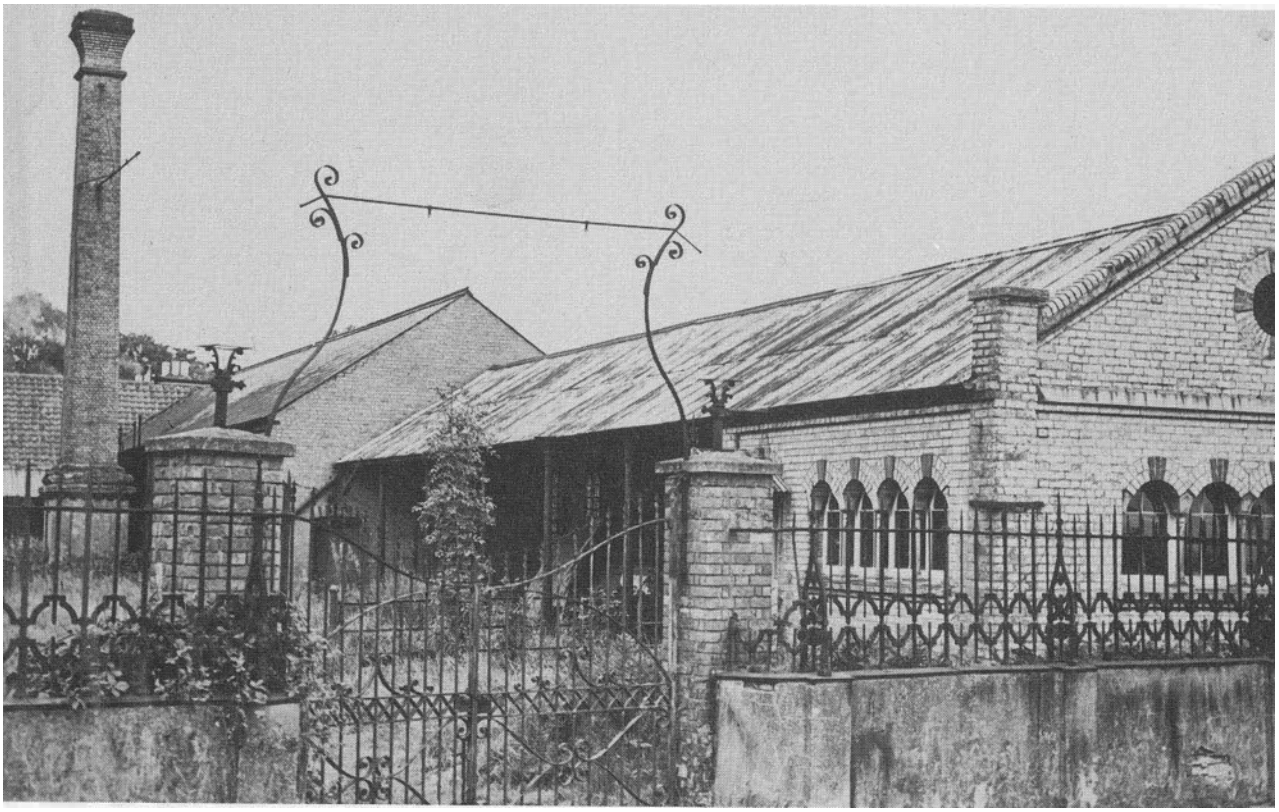
A Survey of Iron Gates & Railings in Ampthill

In 1993, the Ampthill & District Archaeological & Local History Society put on a photographic exhibition in Ampthill town centre featuring the gates, railings and decorative iron work in the town. This report is intended to record the 1993 exhibition with some updates and additions for 2015. It is a record of features we tend to take for granted and will hopefully help to ensure they are preserved in the future from the constant threat of corrosion and misguided modernisation. Most of the items photographed in the early nineties are still in place and in good condition. Since 1993 one set of railings lost during the war has been completely replaced and at least two sets have been expertly repaired after being knocked down by cars.

Prior to WWII there was a wealth of railings around the houses and gardens of Ampthill, many dating from the Georgian period, all contributing to the elegance and completeness of the town. In the dark days of 1941, the Urban District Council was charged by the Ministry of Supply to survey all the iron railings as they proposed to requisition them for their iron content considered to be essential for war requirements. Some exemptions were allowed for safety, historical and architectural reasons, there was some controversy but eighteen months later a decision was made listing those that fulfilled the criteria, the rest were rapidly cut down and sent to storage. Sadly in common with the rest of the country considerable quantities of those collected were never used, various reasons have been given but if as I suspect large quantities of mixed quality iron was presented too quickly the logistics of sorting and cutting to manageable size would have been too great. It is reported that considerable quantities were dumped in the sea. Ampthill Urban alone contributed 17 tons of iron.

While taking photographs of the surviving gates and railings it soon became clear that other metal work in the town was of interest, and so were added to the collection. Grave surrounds for instance show different designs in cast iron décor and redundant Inn sign brackets on buildings of historic interest indicate their earlier use.

Several references are made to “Pregnant penguins”. This was the name given by Professor Richardson RA to modern concrete lamp standards erected in the town by the Urban Council in 1957. The professor lived in the town and was a fierce campaigner to preserve its beauty, his views were soon picked up by the national press and was was supported by a number of prominent architects of the day. Their protests were ignored and the ill matched posts were spread around the town. Fortunately over 50 years later, the council removed them and replaced them with more sympathetic versions.



Ampthill Foundry, originally the Sand Road Ironworks in Oliver Street, built c. 1870 by William Whitehouse and later sold to Alfred Hetley. Some of the iron work in the town can be directly attributed to this foundry. They produced cast iron and good quality wrought iron, witness the gates and railings, in this turn of the century picture.



Original cast iron directions to the foundry in Oliver Street on Wilmington Lodge's Garden Wall.



Fine wrought iron balustrade to the steps at Park House about 1710. The blacksmith Jasper Grimes worked for Lord Ashburnham.



Details of the left and right balustrade at Park House.





Wrought iron screen at Gates House, Church Street, thought to have originated at Park House.





Details of the screen showing the fine detail of the workmanship. Probably from the same workshop as the Park House balustrades.



Early 20th century post card of the Alameda gates, given by Lord Holland c.1827. They were removed on the orders of The Duke of Bedford and are now at the St. Peter's Green entrance to Bedford School.



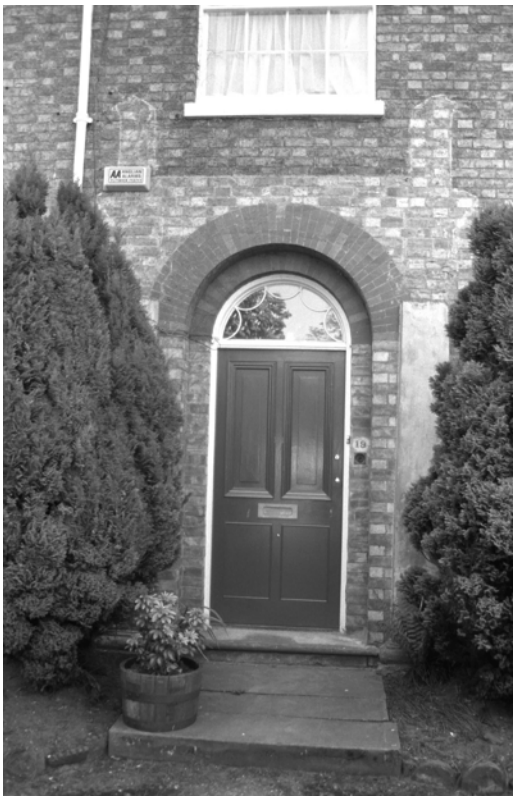
Wrought Iron Gates to Bedford School.



The best example of a set of late Regency railings and gate in the town is at Wilmington Lodge, Dunstable Street. Very fine Greek Revival designs of 1825.



Gate at Wilmington Lodge, showing the fine casting detail.



Doorway to Wilmington Lodge, the discoloured bricks show the location of a balcony which had a very ornate rail. Remembered by the author when a child.



Fine set of railings at 97 Dunstable Street in 1997, rails to the right hand of door knocked down by a vehicle in 2014.



Same view in 2014, section of fence sympathetically replaced. Note left hand finial missing in 1997 was also replaced. An excellent example of good workmanship.



Ornate hanger for the Kings Head sign above 1-3 Woburn Street, formally one of Amp-thill's coaching inns. Lower part of a "Pregnant penguin" street lamp in the foreground.



Similar hanger still in use at the Prince of Wales Inn in Bedford Street.



The centre of the town from Dunstable Street, the clock house is a Victorian structure with a Georgian cupola above which adorned a much earlier Moot House. The cupola is believed to have originated on a stable block at Park House - now demolished.



Victorian sign still preserved at 1 Bedford Street.



Weather vane over the clock house, the arrow is a modern replacement as the original was stolen. The thief scaled scaffoldings during renovations.



Georgian boot scraper at 1 Bedford Street.



Cast iron railings at 1 Chandos Road, a rare Victorian survival signed “A Hetley Ampthill”. Hetley took over the foundry in the mid 1880’s.



Well preserved, quality casting.



Detail of cast-in manufacturers name.



Church Square looking North, Dynever House on the West side of the square and Brandreth House on the East were stripped of their railings in WWII.



Lamp on west tower.



Wrought iron handle on church door.



Wrought iron cross over the lychgate.

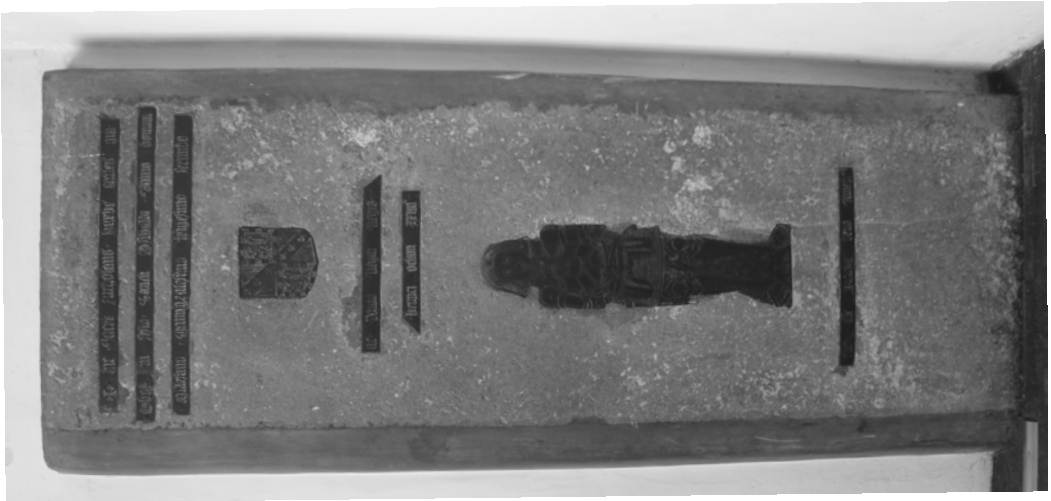


The Royal Arms of George III on the gallery, cast iron from John Howard, Bedford iron founders in 1848, it was at least 32 years out of date when purchased. It has been suggested the casting is identical to the Royal Arms on the Royal Yacht Britannia (photo below), it is very close but there are differences e.g. the small lion's tail and the mantling (drapery tied to the helmet).





To the North side of the alter, a Memorial to Colonel Richard Nichols, born in the Great Lodge (Park House) in 1625. He led an interesting life and is remembered for naming New York after James, Duke of York later James II. He was killed at the battle of Sole Bay (Southwold) in 1672 serving the Duke. The cannon ball that killed him is set in the monument.



Brass memorial on an alter tomb slab for Nicholas Harvey, knight, died 1532 in Ampthill while in attendance to King Henry VIII. It stands by the east wall of the north aisle wall His tomb was under the "Cornwall window" near by.



Finial on the cupola of the Chapter House, the building was added to the church in 1976, the finial originated on the Amp-thill foundry building. Note the fine detail in the leaves.



North of the Chapter House, the railed in grave of Thomas Gostelow died 1827. Recent inspection showed the rails on the point of collapse.



In the ancient grave yard to the North of the church, a memorial to Elizabeth Austin died 1838.



Grave of Georgina Coleman and her husband Edward, died 1899 & 1917 respectively. As Edward Hetley married Annie Coleman in 1885 the decorative iron work was probably cast in Ampthill Foundry.







A selection of grave surrounds and finials in Ampthill Church Yard. All cast iron and of same period.



Similar iron work on graves in the Old Methodist Burial Ground, Park Hill 1880.



New railings on Brandreth House replacing those taken for salvage during WWII.

Railing detail showing modern but sympathetic craftsmanship.





Portland Stone portico to Avenue House possibly sculptured by Garrard 1819, a fine setting for the railings below with classical urn finials.







Unusual railings serving as a hand rail as well as a surround for numbers 3&4 Chapel lane. The finials and posts are handsomely decorated.



Detail of finials



Wingfield Club in Church Street, the railings decorated by fine early Georgian urns 1742.







No. 3 Woburn Street, photo taken by Mr. John Saunders in 1969. The attractive Georgian lamp was knocked off the wall soon after the picture was taken by the ladder on a fire engine. Note the chimney on the lamp.



Redundant lamp bracket at 11 Church Street 1993.



Photograph 2015 showing the bracket reused when the ".Pregnant penguins"were replaced.



Good quality railings at 1 Chapel Lane.



Attractive railings and gate at 105 Dunstable Street. Photo taken 2015. View not in the original exhibition.



A swinging jib arm for hoisting heavy flour sacks etc. for storage prior to retail sales on the ground floor in Mosses General Stores, now redundant for Fratelli's Italian Restaurant in Dunstable Street.



Several shops in the town have iron supports for upper floors, necessary when the buildings were adapted for retail shop frontage. They add to the décor and ambience of the shops. This is Deacon's Family butchers in Bedford Street 2015.

Credits and sources.

All modern photographs were taken by the author unless otherwise stated.

Photographs of the Foundry and Alameda gates by courtesy of the late Andrew Underwood.

Home Rule for Ampthill Andrew Underwood 1974.

Ampthill - a Goodly Heritage Andrew Underwood 1976.

"Sir Albert Richardson THE PROFESSOR". Simon Houfe 1980 ISBN o 900804 26 2.