

## Digital Editions

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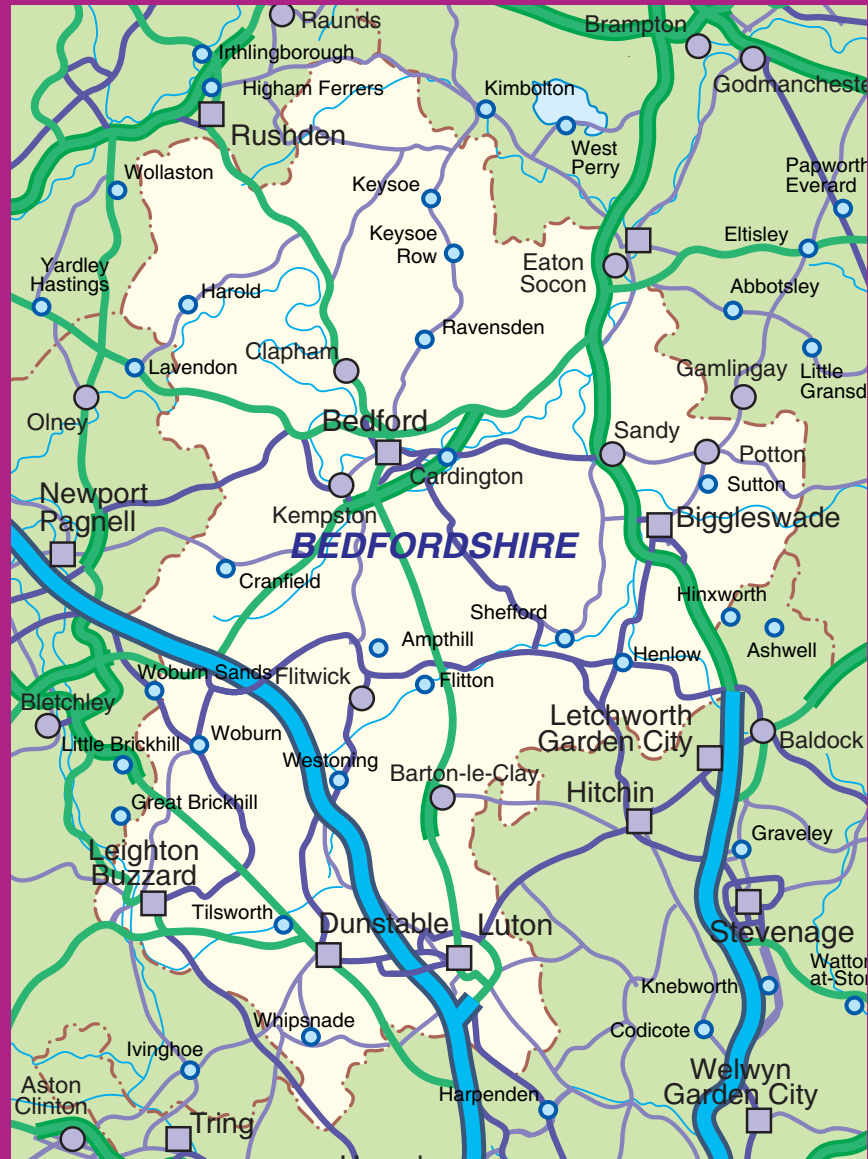
## *Guide to Rural England*

# BEDFORDSHIRE



WHERE TO GO | WHAT TO SEE | WHAT TO DO  
WHERE TO STAY | WHERE TO EAT | WHERE TO BUY  
Fully illustrated with detailed directions and maps

## LOCATOR MAP



## Bedfordshire

It may be the third smallest county in England, after Rutland and the Isle of Wight, but Bedfordshire offers multifarious delights. It's a county of picturesque villages and historic houses, mills and farms, woodland and nature reserves, great views from the Chilterns escarpment and with well-established walking and cycle routes. In the Bedfordshire heartlands are to be found two of England's leading animal attractions, Woburn Safari Park and Whipsnade Wildlife Park.

The Great Ouse and the Grand Union Canal, once commercial arteries, are finding a new role as leisure attractions, with miles of scenic walks or leisurely cruises to be enjoyed. The south of the county is dominated by the towns of Luton and Dunstable, while the central region of Bedfordshire is an area of ancient settlements and a rich diversity of places to





see. Here is perhaps the most impressive dovecote in the country, with nests for 1500 birds, while just outside Sandy is the headquarters of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. At nearby Cardington, the skyline is dominated by the huge hangars where the R100 and R101 airships were built. Houghton House at Houghton Conquest is widely believed to have been the inspiration for the House Beautiful in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Bunyan was born in the village of Elstow, a little way south of Bedford, and many of the places most closely associated with the writer can be visited, in both the town and the village. Bedford, the county capital, offers a blend of history and modern amenity, all set against the backdrop of the River Great Ouse, which passes through the town and many pleasant villages on its journey across the county.

## Towns and Villages

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## Luton

-  Luton Hoo  Luton Museum and Art Gallery
-  Stockwood Craft Museum  Someries Castle

The largest town in Bedfordshire and perhaps best known for Luton Airport, Vauxhall cars – and, for those with long memories of radio days, the Luton Girls Choir. This large choir, with girls aged between 12 and 23, was for many years one of the most popular in the country, with frequent live and radio performances. The choir was disbanded in 1976, but the recordings are still in demand. Although the town has expanded rapidly from a market town in the early 19th century to a major industrial centre by the mid 20th century, it still boasts more than 100 listed buildings and three Conservation Areas. Luton first began to prosper in the 17th century on the strength of its straw plaiting and straw hat-making industries. These activities are amongst those featured at the **Luton Museum and Art Gallery**, housed within a delightful Victorian mansion in Wardown Park, a traditional town park with tennis and bowls. The park was opened to the public in the early years of the reign of Edward VII, but not the house, which was first a restaurant and then, during the First World War, a military hospital. It was not until 1931 that the town's museum and art gallery, originally housed in the library, moved here. As well as featuring a re-creation of a Victorian shop and pub, the museum is also home to a range of collections covering the hat trade (including the Women's Hat Industry Collection of more than 600 hats – viewing



Luton Hoo

by appointment), costume, jewellery, straw-plaiting, fine arts, local history, archaeology and childhood. As lace-making was one of the two main cottage industries in Bedfordshire, visitors will not be surprised to learn that the museum also has the largest collection of lace anywhere in the country outside London.

Visitors can also take a step back in time by seeking out **Stockwood Craft Museum and Gardens**. Occupying a Georgian stable block, the museum has a collection of Bedfordshire craft and rural items enhanced by frequent craft demonstrations. The walled garden is equally impressive and the Period Garden includes knot, medieval, Victorian, cottage, Dutch and Italian sections. The Hamilton Finlay Sculpture Garden showcases six pieces of sculpture by the internationally renowned artist Ian Hamilton Finlay in a lovely natural setting. The Mossman Collection of over 60 horse-drawn vehicles, the largest of its kind on public display in Britain, is also housed here. The story of transport comes into the 20th century in the Transport Gallery, whose exhibits include bicycles, vintage cars and a model of the Luton tram system. Replicas of some of the vehicles on display have happened in, including *Ben Hur* and *Out of Africa*.

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## Around Luton

## SLIP END



1 mile S of Luton on the B4540

-  Woodside Animal Farm

**Woodside Animal Farm** is home to more than 200 different breeds and there are hundreds of animals and birds to see and feed. The farm's many attractions include a walk-through monkey house, red squirrel enclosure, alpaca family, fabulous flamingos and hand-reared racoons. There are indoor and outdoor picnic and play areas, crazy golf, pony and tractor rides, a bouncy castle, farm shop, craft shop and coffee shop.

## WHIPSNADE

5 miles SW of Luton off B489

-  Whipsnade Tree Cathedral  Wild Animal Park

This small village with a charming, simple church is surrounded by common land on which stands **Whipsnade Tree Cathedral** (see panel below). After the First World War, a

## Whipsnade Tree Cathedral

*Whipsnade Tree Cathedral Trustees,  
c/o Chapel Farm, Whipsnade,  
Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 2LL  
Tel: 01582 872406  
website: [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)*



Situated on the edge of Whipsnade Village Green the **Tree Cathedral** combines a range of different varieties of trees and shrubs laid out to the plan of a cathedral. There is a nave, transepts, chancel, cloisters and four chapels and an outer cloister walk enclosing a wide area with a dew pond as its focal point

Owned by the National Trust the Tree Cathedral is managed by trustees and cared for and maintained by volunteers. The planting continues in order to maintain the principle features for future generations.

There is an annual inter-denominational service held each year in June. There is a small car park signposted from the B4540 in Whipsnade.



local landowner, Edmund Kell Blyth, planted a variety of trees that have grown into the shape of a medieval cathedral, with a nave, transepts, cloisters and chapels, and trees for the walls. Designed 'in a spirit of faith, hope and reconciliation' as a memorial to friends of Blyth killed in the war, it's a curiously moving place. The tree Cathedral was acquired by the National Trust in 1960.

To the south of the village can be seen the white silhouette of a lion cut into the green hillside, which is reminiscent of the much older White Horse at Uffington. A magnificent landmark, the lion also advertises the whereabouts of **Whipsnade Wild Animal Park**, the country home of the Zoological Society of London. Whipsnade first opened its doors in 1931, attracting over 26,000 visitors on the first Monday, and in the years since, it has grown and developed and continues to provide fun and education for thousands of visitors each year. There are 2500 animals on show in the park's 600 acres, and behind the scenes Whipsnade is at the forefront of wild animal welfare and conservation, specialising in the breeding of endangered species such as cheetahs, rhinos and the scimitar-horned oryx. There are daily demonstrations – penguin feeding, sea lions, free-flying birds – and other attractions



Dunstable Downs

include a railway safari, Discovery Centre, Children's Farm and Adventure Playground. Feeding time for the animals is always a popular occasion, while humans who feel peckish can make tracks for the Café on the Lake or (in summer) the Lookout Café, or graze on ice cream and snacks from the many refreshment kiosks in the park.

### DUNSTABLE

*2 miles W of Luton on the A505*

Church of St Peter Dunstable Downs

Dunstable is a bustling town that grew up at the junction of two ancient roads, Icknield Way and Watling Street, and was an important centre in Roman Britain, when it was known as Durocobrivae. The town's finest building is undoubtedly the **Priory Church of St Peter**, all that remains of a Priory founded by Henry I in 1131; only the nave actually dates from that time. It was at the Priory that Archbishop Cranmer's court sat in 1533 to annul the marriage of Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon.

On the B4541 Dunstable-Whipsnade road, **Dunstable Downs** commands some of the finest views over the Vale of Aylesbury and along the Chiltern Ridge. Designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, it has much to attract the visitor, including the Chilterns Gateway Centre with interpretive displays and gifts, circular walks and a picnic area; it's a popular spot with hang-gliders and kite-flyers, and a refreshment kiosk is open all year round. South of Dunstable Downs, at the junction of the B4541 and B4540, Whipsnade Heath is a small area of woodland containing fungi and some unusual plants.

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### TOTTERNHOE

*6 miles W of Luton off the A505*

Totternhoe Knolls

This attractive village is situated below **Totternhoe Knolls**, a steeply sloped spur of chalk that is now a nature reserve known nationally for its orchids and its butterflies. On the top of the spur are the remains of a motte and bailey castle dating from Norman times, with commanding views of the surrounding countryside.

### BILLINGTON

*8 miles W of Luton on the A4146*

Mead Open Farm

**Mead Open Farm** is home to a variety of traditional and rare farm animals and offers a particularly wide range of attractions for children, including an indoor play barn, activity house, sandpit, indoor pets corner and ride-on toys. There's also a tearoom and shop, and a number of daily activities and weekly events. Farm Attraction of the Year 2009.

### LEIGHTON BUZZARD

*9 miles W of Luton on A505*

All Saints Church

Greensand Ridge Walk

The town's interesting name tells a lot about its history: Leighton is Old English and refers to a centre for market gardening, whilst the Buzzard is a reference not to the bird of prey, but to a local clergyman, Theobald de Busar, the town's first Prebendary. The town's past prosperity as a market centre is reflected in the grandeur of

its fine Market Cross, a 15th-century pentagonal structure with an open base and statues under vaulted openings all topped off by pinnacles. The market is still held here every Tuesday and Saturday.

The spire of **All Saints Church** is over 190 feet high and is a local landmark. This big ironstone church dates from 1277 and contains a number of endearing features in the form of graffiti left by the medieval stonemasons: one shows a man and a woman quarrelling over whether to boil or bake a simnel cake. Seriously damaged by fire in 1985, the church has been carefully restored to its medieval glory; the painstaking work included re-gilding the roof, which is particularly fine, with carved figures of angels. One of its chief treasures is a 13th-century oak eagle lectern.

Leighton Buzzard and its neighbour Linslade are on the Grand Union Canal and visitors can take leisurely boat trips along this once busy commercial waterway on the *Leighton Lady*.

Historic forms of transport seem to be the town's speciality, as visitors can also take a steam train journey on the **Leighton Buzzard**



Leighton Buzzard Railway

## Leighton Buzzard Railway

Page's Park Station, Billington Road,  
Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 4TN  
Tel: 01525 373888 Fax: 01525 377814  
website: [www.buzzardrail.co.uk](http://www.buzzardrail.co.uk)

One of England's premier narrow gauge heritage railways, **Leighton Buzzard Railway** was established in 1919 to carry sand from the quarries, which had opened up to supply the demand for sand during the First World War, in the north of the town through to the town's railway sidings and canal wharf. Built using war surplus materials and equipment, the line, since 1968, has carried a passenger service, mostly steam hauled, from Page's Park to Stonehenge Works in the countryside near the village of Heath and Reach.

Operated by volunteers of the Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway Society, the trains pass through a modern housing estate before emerging into rolling countryside with views of the Chiltern Hills in the distance. The railway is now the home of the largest collection of narrow gauge locomotives in Britain and, of the 50 here, some 12 are steam driven. The oldest engine dates from 1877 whilst the newest is a diesel locomotive built especially for the line in 1999. The return journey takes just over an hour and the railway operates on Sundays and Bank Holiday weekends between March and October.



**Railway** (see panel above), one of England's premier narrow gauge operations. It was established in 1919 to move sand from the quarries opened up to supply sand during the First World War. From the late 1960s the quarries used road transport, but the railway was saved as a heritage line. It has the largest collection of narrow gauge locomotives in Britain. The 70-minute journey takes in bends, gradients and level crossings – something to delight at every turn. Call 01525 373888 for timetable details. The town lies at one end of the **Greensand Ridge Walk**, which extends across Bedfordshire to finish some 40 miles away at Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire. The name Greensand comes from the geology of the area, a belt of greensand that stretches from Leighton Buzzard up to Sandy and beyond. The walk passes many attractions, including the Grand Union Canal, Stockgrove Country

Park, Woburn Abbey, Ampthill Park and Houghton House.

## Ampthill

Ampthill Park Alameda

This historic town, situated on a rise and with fine views over the surrounding countryside, was a great favourite with Henry VIII. It was here that Katherine of Aragon stayed during the divorce proceedings conducted by Henry's court at Dunstable. At that time there was also a castle here, built by Sir John Cornwall for his bride, the sister of Henry IV. On the site now stands Katherine's Cross, erected in 1773, which bears the arms of Castile and Aragon. On land given to his family by Charles II, the 1st Lord Ashburnham built the castle's replacement, **Ampthill Park**, in 1694. The house was

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enlarged a century later and the 300-acre park was landscaped by the ubiquitous Capability Brown. Ampthill Park is famous for its old oak trees, and visitors can also enjoy the views from the Greensand Ridge Walk, which runs through the grounds. An attractive feature of the town is the **Alameda** (Spanish for a public walk), an avenue of lime trees 700 yards long, presented to the town in 1827 by Lord and Lady Holland. Ampthill also boasts some fine Georgian and early 19th-century buildings, especially in Church Street, Tudor almshouses and the large Church of St Andrew, which has a noble west tower. Inside can be found some 15th century brasses and a 17th-century monument to Colonel Richard Nicholls that includes the cannon ball that killed him during the Battle of Sole Bay in 1672. Nicholls, who was born and lived most of his life in Ampthill, served the Stuart Kings and was commander of the force that defeated the Dutch at New Amsterdam. He re-named it New York in honour of the Duke of York, later James II.



Ampthill Park House

This is one of the largest sepulchral chapels attached to an English church.

## SILSOE

3 miles SE of Ampthill off A6

Wrest Park

Although the manor of Wrest has been held by the de Grey family since the late 13th century, the house standing today dates from the 1830s. Built for the 1st Earl de Grey from the designs of a French architect, it follows faithfully the style of a French chateau of the previous century. The real glory of **Wrest Park** is the gardens, which extend over 90 acres. They are a living history of English gardening from 1700 to 1850 and are the work of Charles Bridgeman, with later adaptations by Capability Brown. The layout remains basically formal, with a full range of garden appointments in the grand manner – a Chinese bridge, an orangery, an artificial lake, a classical temple, and a rustic ruin.

Two buildings of particular interest are the Baroque Banqueting House, designed by Thomas Archer, which forms a focus of the view from the house across the lake, and the Bowling Green House, dating from about 1740 and said to have been designed by Batty

## Around Ampthill

### FLITTON

2 miles SE of Ampthill off the A507

de Grey Mausoleum

Next to the 15th-century church is the cruciform **de Grey Mausoleum**, a series of rooms containing a remarkable collection of sculpted tombs and monuments to the de Grey family of Wrest Park from 1615 to 1899.



Langley, who was best known as a writer of architectural books for country builders, but built little himself. Immediately beside the house is an intricate French-style garden, with an orangery by the French architect Cléphané, flowerbeds, statues and fountains. The village of Silsoe itself boasts more than 130 listed buildings.

### TODDINGTON

5 miles S of Ampthill on A5120

#### Toddington Manor

Situated on a hill above the River Flitt, this village is often overlooked, particularly by those travelling the nearby M1 who think only of the service station of the same name. However, the village is an attractive place, with cottages and elegant houses grouped around the village green. Unfortunately, all that remains of **Toddington Manor** is a small oblong building with a hipped roof, which is believed to be the Elizabethan kitchen of the large quadrangular house that was built here around 1570. Toddington is a place that makes much of its folklore and is host to Morris dancers in the summer, and mummers who tour the village providing traditional entertainment at Christmas. Local legend has it that a witch lives under Conger Hill – which is actually a motte that would, at one time, have had a castle on top.

### RIDGMONT

4 miles W of Ampthill on the A507

Part of the Woburn Estate, this is a typical estate village where the owners of the land (in this case the Bedford family) provided the houses and other buildings. Here the workers lived in gabled, red brick houses. The church, designed by George Gilbert Scott, was also built at the expense of the estate.

### WOBURN

6 miles W of Ampthill on the A4012

#### Woburn Abbey Wild Animal Kingdom

#### Aspley Woods

First recorded as a Saxon hamlet in the 10th century, and again mentioned in the Domesday Book, Woburn grew into a small market town after the founding of the Cistercian Abbey here in 1145. All but destroyed by fire in 1720, this pretty village has retained many of the pleasant Georgian houses that were built subsequently, and the attractive shop fronts give the place a cheerful air. Situated at a major crossroads, between London and the north, and Cambridge and Oxford, Woburn also saw prosperity during the stagecoach era and by 1851 had 32 inns.

**Woburn Abbey** (see panel opposite), ancestral home of the Dukes of Bedford, is renowned for its art treasures, its Humphry Repton deer park and its antiques centre. The estate was given to the 1st Earl of Bedford in the will of Henry VIII, but the original building was partially destroyed by fire, and the present stately home dates mainly from the 1700s. Its extraordinary stock of treasures includes paintings by Van Dyck, Gainsborough, Reynolds and the famous Armada portrait of Elizabeth I by George Gower. The Venetian Room showcases 21 views of Venice by Canaletto, while other rooms display outstanding collections of English and French furniture, porcelain and antique statuary. Another attraction on site is the Woburn Abbey Antiques Centre with more than 50 dealers housed in a reconstruction of city streets of bygone days that includes genuine 18th-century shop facades rescued from demolition.

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## Woburn Abbey

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website: [www.woburnabbey.co.uk](http://www.woburnabbey.co.uk)

Built on the site of a Cistercian monastery founded in 1145 by Hugh de Bolebec, **Woburn Abbey** was given to the 1st Earl of Bedford in the will of Henry VIII and has been the home of the Dukes of Bedford for over 400 years. The original building was partially destroyed by fire and the present stately home dates mainly from the 18th century. Woburn Abbey houses one of the most impressive and important private art and furniture collections on view to the public.

Over 70 dealers are housed under one roof in a reconstruction of city streets in bygone days, with genuine 18th century shop façades that were rescued from demolition many years ago. Another attraction within the estate boundaries is the deer park, which, like the private gardens, was landscaped by Humphry Repton for the 6th Duke. Visitors to this marvellous place will also find gift shops, a pottery and a coffee shop.



A short distance north of the abbey is the **Wild Animal Kingdom and Leisure Park**, home to a vast range of animals including eland, zebra, hippos, rhinos, lions, tigers, elephants and sea lions. Visitors can combine the thrill of the Safari Drive with the fun of the Wide World Leisure Area, meet the animals in Animal Encounters, Australian Walkabout and Rainbow Landing, and attend the many demonstrations, keeper talks and feeding times. Children can let off steam in the indoor and outdoor playgrounds, travel on the Swan Boats and take a ride on the railway train. All the attractions are included in the entrance price.

There are fine views of Woburn Abbey and of Milton Keynes from **Aspley Woods**, one of the largest areas of woodland in Bedfordshire, set between Woburn and Woburn Sands. The woods offer peace, tranquillity and miles of tracks for walking.

### MARSTON MORETAINE

3 miles NW of Ampthill off the A421.

#### Forest Centre

**The Marston Vale Forest Centre and Country Park** offers a splendid day out in the countryside for all the family. The 600 acres of wetland and woodland are home to a wide variety of wildlife, and the park provides excellent walking and cycling; bikes can be hired from the Forest Centre, which also has an interactive Discover the Forest exhibition, café bar, art gallery, gift shop, free parking and children's play area.

## Biggleswade

Set on the banks of the River Ivel, which was once navigable through to the sea, Biggleswade was an important stop on the Great North Road stagecoach routes and

## CAMBRIDGE COINS & JEWELLERY

52 High Street, Biggleswade,  
Bedfordshire SG18 0LJ  
Tel: 01767 600300  
e-mail: [shop@cambridgecoins.co.uk](mailto:shop@cambridgecoins.co.uk)  
website: [www.cambridgecoins.co.uk](http://www.cambridgecoins.co.uk)

Whilst wandering along the high street in Biggleswade, you may well come across an interesting specialist shop dealing with collectables. Dave Allen the owner of **Cambridge Coins & Jewellery** at number 52 high street, will welcome you and doubtless offer you a complimentary cup of tea or coffee, whilst you visit the shop.

The sort of collectables they have include items that we all remember: old coins, banknotes, postcards, cigarette cards - as well as military medals. Even if you are not a collector of such items we are sure that you will benefit from a visit to reminisce and perhaps be tempted by one of the 'yesteryear' gifts available.

And ... if you are a collector, well, you will certainly be delighted at the items of stock available. You will have to go a long way to find another shop like this, so, if you are in the area, go to Biggleswade and see Dave at **Cambridge Coins & Jewellery** in the high street.



several old inns have survived from that period. The town also has another link with transport, it was the home of Dan Albone (1860–1906), the inventor of the modern bicycle. He produced a number of variants, including a tandem and a ladies cycle with a low crossbar and a skirt guard, but is best known for his racing cycle, which in 1888 set speed and endurance records with the intrepid CP Mills in the saddle. Dan Albone's inventiveness was not confined to bicycles, he also developed the Ivel Agricultural Tractor, the forerunner of the modern tractor.

## Around Biggleswade

### SHEFFORD

5 miles SW of Biggleswade on the A507

The small town of Shefford grew up, as the name suggests, around a sheep ford across the

Rivers Hitt and Flitt and enjoyed a brief status as an inland port on the Ivel Navigation. This waterway was built primarily to bring coal from Kings Lynn by way of the River Ouse. In North Bridge Street a wall plaque marks the house of the pastoral poet Robert Bloomfield, a poor farm labourer and shoemaker who found fame when he published *The Farmer's Boy* in 1800. The poet, who died, as he had lived, in extreme poverty, is buried in the churchyard at nearby Campton, Shefford's mother church. Shefford is also the starting point of the 21-mile-long cycle route, the Jubilee Way, a circular route that passes through undulating landscape and picturesque villages.

### LOWER STONDON

6 miles S of Biggleswade off the A600

Transport Museum

Lower Stondon attracts visitors from near and far to its renowned **Transport Museum and**

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**Garden Centre.** The museum, on the A600 next to Mount Pleasant golf course, contains a marvellous collection of several hundred exhibits covering all forms of transport – from motorcycles to cars, fire engines, buses, a Flying Flea and a Saro Skeeter helicopter – and covers the period from the early 1900s to the recent past. The centrepiece of the collection is a full size replica of Captain Cook's barque, *Endeavour*, in which he undertook one of his most important journeys in 1768. The replica was built using the original plans. Guided tours of the museum are available and there's a café selling light refreshments.

### SANDY

3 miles N of Biggleswade on A1

Sandy Lodge The Roman Sandy Story

The sandy soil that gave the town its name helped it rise to fame as a market gardening centre in the 16th century. The 14th-century Church of St Swithun contains an interesting statue of Captain Sir William Peel, third son of Sir Robert Peel, famous Prime Minister and founder of the Police Force, who was one of the first recipients of the Victoria Cross for heroic action in the Crimean War. The **Roman Sandy Story**, housed in the Town Council offices, tells the story of the Romans in the area, based largely on excavations carried out in the 1980s and 1990s. Call 01767 681491 for opening times.

A little way southeast of the town, at **Sandy Lodge**, is the national headquarters of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and a nature reserve set in over 350 acres of open heath and woodland. As well as offering a great deal to those interested in birds, the formal



Sandy Lodge

gardens surrounding the mansion house are a delight. They were first created in the 1870s and restored in the 1930s by Sir Malcolm Stewart and are well worth visiting in their own right. Also on the site is a wildlife garden.

### COCKAYNE HATLEY

5 miles NW of Biggleswade off the B1040/B1042

Church of St John

The interior of the **Church of St John** is filled with an amazing array of medieval woodwork, carvings and stained glass. In the churchyard is the tomb of the Henley family, including the one-legged poet William Henley. He was a friend of Robert Louis Stevenson and was reputedly the inspiration for the character of Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*. He was also a friend of JM Barrie and it is said that Henley's daughter Margaret was the inspiration for his Wendy in *Peter Pan*.

### BLUNHAM

5 miles N of Biggleswade off the A1

This quiet rural village was the home of the poet John Donne while he was rector here from 1622 until his death in 1632, a post he held while also Dean of St Paul's in London. While he was convalescing here after a serious illness




in 1623, he wrote *Devotions*, which contains the immortal lines, "No man is an island, entire of itself ... And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee". Donne divided his time between London and Blunham, where he stayed in the house opposite the parish church. Inside can be seen some fine Norman work, interesting bosses and the chalice Donne presented to the church in 1626.

Another building of interest is the Old Vicarage, constructed of startling yellow and orange bricks in 1874.

### MOGGERHANGER

3 miles NW of Biggleswade off the A603



 Moggerhanger Park


Grade I-listed **Moggerhanger Park** was designed by Sir John Soane, architect of the Bank of England, and is set amidst 33 acres of gardens and parkland originally landscaped

by Humphry Repton. Guided tours of this fine Georgian house are available daily during the summer months; the restaurant and tearooms are open all year round.

### OLD WARDEN

3 miles W of Biggleswade off B658

 Shuttleworth Collection  Swiss Garden

 Bird of Prey Conservation Centre

This charming village of thatched cottages along a single street has developed its unique character as a result of the influence of two local families. In the early 18th century, Sir Samuel Ongley, a London merchant, ship-owner, and former director of the South Sea Company, bought this country seat for himself and his family, who stayed here for more than 200 years. In 1776, Robert Henley Ongley was awarded an Irish peerage for his services to Parliament, and it was his grandson, also called Robert, who created Old

### THE GUINEA

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e-mail: [info@theguineaupub.co.uk](mailto:info@theguineaupub.co.uk)  
website: [www.theguineaupub.co.uk](http://www.theguineaupub.co.uk)

If you are looking to sample the very finest in English homemade pub food then a visit to **The Guinea** in Moggerhanger is definitely recommended. The restaurant has a lovely atmosphere in which to dine and relax in front of a beautiful Inglenook fireplace.

The food served is delicious and the menu is filled with plenty of traditional favourites, which is why people love dining here. There is a good selection of real ales from the well stocked bar, which has a fine range of wines, lagers, spirits and soft drinks. On warmer days drinks can be enjoyed in the large garden area. A friendly welcome awaits you at The Guinea and special offers are offered to pensioners of a lunch time. As well as the Pensioners Lunch, a popular curry night is also held. Ring for details.

Traditional pub games can be played here and there is a weekly quiz night that is well attended by locals and visitors. Private function facilities are available here. Ring for details.



Warden as it is seen today. Taking the original estate cottages, and building new ones, Sir Robert developed this rustic village and embellished the 12th-century church with some interesting Belgian woodwork. The church also contains some magnificent memorials to the Ongley family.

However, Sir Robert's most famous piece of work is the **Swiss Garden** (see panel below), laid out in the early 19th century. Within its 10 acres are ornate bridges, winding ponds, a breathtaking fernery and a number of tiny follies. In season, the early bulbs, primroses, rhododendrons and the old-fashioned roses make wonderful displays.

In 1872, his fortune depleted by the extensive building and remodelling programme, Sir Robert sold the estate to Joseph Shuttleworth. A partner in a firm of iron founders, it was Joseph who led the way to the development of the steam traction engine, and also built the Jacobean-style mansion house that can still be seen today. Another attraction on the estate is the **Bird of Prey Conservation Centre** where 300 birds of various species are on public display. In



Swiss Cottage, Old Warden

addition to training and flying birds of prey from around the world, the centre is firmly committed to conservation and education, working with schools to create displays and informative workshops; it also has an Adopt a Bird Scheme. Regular flying demonstration times are 11.30am for the Owl Experience, 1.30pm for Birds of the World and 3pm for Out of Africa, featuring vultures, secretary birds, eagles, owls and falcons. The centre also includes a children's adventure playground, a picnic site, a restaurant and a gift shop.

Also at Old Warden is the famous **Shuttleworth Collection** of historic aircraft. In 1923, the 23-year-old Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth, who had inherited the estate,

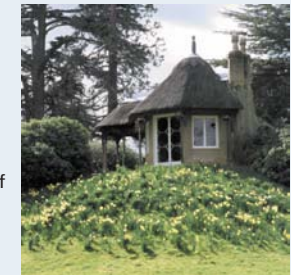
### The Swiss Garden

Old Warden Park, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 9ER

Tel: 01767 627666

website: [www.theswissgarden.co.uk](http://www.theswissgarden.co.uk)

The **Swiss Garden** is set in 10 acres where visitors can wander among splendid shrubs and rare trees, at the centre of which is the Swiss Cottage. It brings together tiny follies, ornate bridges and winding ponds. Visitors can discover the breathtaking fernery and grotto, or lose themselves on the serpentine walks. In season the early bulbs and primroses, the rhododendrons and the old-fashioned roses make wonderful displays. Old Warden is a place of many other attractions, notably the Shuttleworth Collection. The Swiss Garden is licensed to hold civil wedding ceremonies. The Garden is open from 10am to 6pm on Sundays and from 1pm to 6pm every other day from March to September. Also open Sundays (and New Years Day) in January, February and October from 10am to 4pm.





bought his first aircraft, a de Havilland Moth. Over the years he added further planes to his collection. At the outbreak of the Second World War he naturally joined the RAF, but was sadly killed in a flying accident in 1940. After the war his mother put his collection on display and over the years other aircraft have been added. Housed in eight hangars, the collection now comprises some 40 airworthy craft, dating from 1909 (a Blériot) to 1955. Throughout the year there are a number of flying days when these grand old planes take to the skies. Many of them have been featured in films including *Reach for the Sky*, *The Battle of Britain* and *Pearl Harbour*. The planes are complemented by a number of vintage cars, motorcycles and bicycles.

A short drive north of Old Warden are two delightful villages, Ickwell and Northill. The former, which has a Maypole standing permanently on the green, is the birthplace of the great clockmaker Thomas Tompion. The 14th-century Church of St Mary, which dominates the village of Northill, is noted for some fine 17th-century glass and a one-handed clock built, it is thought, by Tompion's father. Some of the clocks could run for a year without rewinding; the Tompions also made barometers and sundials, including pieces for King William III.

## STEWARTBY

10 miles W of Biggleswade off the A421

Stewartby takes its name from Sir Malcolm Stewart, founder of the London Brick Company. He had the village built in 1926 to house employees at the nearby brickworks, which were thought to be the largest in the world and at their peak turned out 650 million bricks a year. The kiln took over a year to reheat after it was closed during the Second World War.



Houghton House

## HOUGHTON CONQUEST

9 miles W of Biggleswade off the B530

### Houghton House

That this village is home to Bedfordshire's largest parish church seems fitting, as Houghton Conquest also has links with the county's most famous son, John Bunyan. On a hilltop a little way south of the village stands **Houghton House**, reputedly the inspiration for the House Beautiful in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Built in 1615 for Mary, Countess of Pembroke, the house was visited by Bunyan in his days as an itinerant tinker. The property later came into the hands of the Dukes of Bedford, one of whom had it partially demolished, and the ruins are now in the care of English Heritage.

## Bedford

 Church of St Peter de Merton	 Castle Mound
 Church of St Paul	 RCA Gallery
 Bunyan Museum	 Bedford Museum
 Priory Country Park	 Cecil Higgins Gallery
 Bunyan Meeting Free Church	 Glenn Miller

This lively cosmopolitan town owes its origins and development to the River Great Ouse, which remains one of the most important and



attractive features of the town. Bedford was already a thriving market place before the Norman Conquest, and a market is still held on Wednesday and Saturday each week. There's also a farmer's market once a month and, in the summer months, a gourmet and speciality food market on Thursdays, and a flower and garden market on Fridays.

The town's oldest visible structure is **Castle Mound**, all that remains of a fortress built here shortly after the Battle of Hastings but destroyed in 1224. A timber-framed building has been constructed on top of the mound, which commands a spectacular view over the River Great Ouse.

The **Church of St Peter de Merton**, Saxon in origin, boasts a fine Norman south doorway that was not actually intended for this building but was brought here from the Church of St Peter in Dunstable. St Peter's is not Bedford's main church: that is **St Paul's Church** in the centre of St Paul's Square, a mainly 14th and 15th-century building, with some interesting monuments and brasses, and a stone pulpit from which John Wesley preached in 1758. Outside the church is a statue of one of the best-known sons of Bedford, John Howard, an 18th-century nonconformist landowner who denounced the appalling conditions in jails and prison ships. His name lives on in the Howard League for Penal Reform.

Bedford's most famous son, John Bunyan, was born just south of the town, in Elstow, but lived – and was twice imprisoned – in Bedford in the 1660s and 1670s. The son of a tinsmith, Bunyan followed the same trade as his father and so was able to travel the countryside more than most people of that time. In the 1650s, Bunyan met John Gifford, the then pastor of the Independent Congregation, which held its meetings at

St John's Church. It was their lengthy discussions that led to Bunyan's conversion and he was baptised shortly afterwards by Gifford in a backwater that leads off the Great Ouse. In 1660, Bunyan was arrested for preaching without a licence. He was to spend 12 years in jail, time he put to good use by writing *Grace Abounding*, his spiritual autobiography. But it was during a second imprisonment, in 1676, that he began writing his most famous work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This inspired allegory of the way to salvation still entrances even non-believers with the beauty and simplicity of its language. Following his release from prison in 1672, Bunyan was elected pastor of the Independent Congregation.

The **Bunyan Meeting Free Church** was constructed in 1849 on the site of the converted barn where Bunyan used to preach. The magnificent bronze doors, with illustrations from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, were given to the church by the Duke of Bedford in 1676. Adjacent to the church is the **Bunyan Museum**, which graphically tells the story of the man as well as the times through which he lived. Among the many displays are the jug in which his daughter Mary brought him soup while in prison, his chair, his tinker's anvil, and the violin and flute that he made in prison. Call: 01767 627666.

Another tribute to Bunyan is **Bunyan's Statue**, which was presented to the town in 1874 by the Duke of Bedford. Made of bronze, the statue is the work of Sir JE Boehm; around the pedestal of the nine-foot figure, which weighs more than three tons, are three bronze panels depicting scenes from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Beside the river and running through the heart of the town are the Bedford



Priory Country Park, Bedford

Embankment Gardens, which provide a year-round display of plants. Close by is the **Priory Country Park**, an area of 206 acres with a diverse habitat, which represents the flood meadows, reed beds and woodland that once surrounded the town. In Park Road North, Hill Rise Wildlife Area is a site for nature conservation specialising in butterflies, amphibians and small mammals.

For an insight into the history of the town

and surrounding area, the **Bedford Museum** is well worth a visit. Among the many interesting displays is a piece of wall that shows the construction of the wattle walls that were an essential building technique in the 14th century.

Housed within the unlikely combination of a Victorian mansion and an adjoining modern gallery, the **Cecil Higgins Art Gallery** (see panel below) was started in 1949 by a wealthy Bedford brewery family. Its treasures include an internationally renowned collection of watercolours, prints, and drawings, as well as some fine glass, ceramics and furniture. The permanent display includes works by Turner, Gainsborough, Picasso and Matisse, and a needle panel entitled Bunyan's Dream. This was designed by Edward Bawden in 1977 to commemorate the tercentenary of the publication of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the 350th anniversary of John Bunyan's birth and the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The gallery contains a major archive of Bawden, notably his linocuts

## Cecil Higgins Art Gallery

Castle Lane, Bedford,  
Bedfordshire MK40 3RP  
Tel: 01234 211222 Fax: 01234 327149  
website: [www.cecilhigginsartgallery.org](http://www.cecilhigginsartgallery.org)

The **Cecil Higgins Art Gallery** is situated in pleasant gardens leading down to the river embankment and is a recreation of an 1880s home, with superb examples of 19th century decorative arts. Room settings include items from the Handley-Read collection and the famous Gothic bedroom containing works by William Burges.

In an adjoining gallery are housed renowned collections of watercolours, prints and drawings (exhibitions changed regularly – ring for details), and there are also ceramics, glass and the Thomas Lester Cerac Collection.

A self-service coffee bar is on hand for refreshments and the gallery shop sells a range of souvenirs. Tours can be arranged for groups if booked in advance and there is a programme of lunchtime lectures & demonstrations (call for details).



and lithographs. Other contemporary work can be seen at the **RCA Gallery**, which showcases the visual arts, including film, photography and animation.

A building with more modern connections is the Corn Exchange in St Paul's Square, from where Colonel **Glenn Miller** frequently broadcast during the Second World War. A bust of the bandleader who gave the world *In the Mood* and *Moonlight Serenade* stands outside the Exchange, and in 1994 a plaque was unveiled on the 50th anniversary of his mysterious disappearance over the English Channel, after setting off in foggy weather in a single-engineered Noorduyn 'Norseman' C-64 aircraft. East of Bedford, Clapham Twinwood Control Tower is the last place where Miller was seen alive. A small museum is open at weekends and Bank Holidays in the summer, and the Glenn Miller Festival of swing, jazz and jive is held annually on August Bank Holiday.

## Around Bedford

### ELSTOW

1 mile S of Bedford off the A6

🏛️ Abbey Church 🏛️ Moot Hall

John Bunyan connections are everywhere in the picturesque village of Elstow. The cottage where he was born in 1628 no longer stands, but its site is marked by a stone erected in Festival of Britain Year, 1951. The **Abbey Church of St Helena and St Mary** has two renowned stained glass windows, one depicting scenes from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the other scenes from the Holy War. Here, too, are the font where Bunyan was christened in 1628 and the Communion Table used when he attended service. Bunyan's mother, father and sister are buried in the churchyard. The church

also tells the story of the ill-fated R101 airship (see under Cardington), and there's a handsome memorial in the churchyard.

Elstow's notable buildings include a charming row of Tudor cottages and **Moot Hall**, which was built in the 15th century. It served as a place for hearing disputes and as a store for equipment for the village fair. Restored by Bedfordshire County Council, it is now a museum depicting life in 17th-century England with particular reference to Bunyan.

### CARDINGTON

1 mile E of Bedford off the A603

🏛️ Hangars

The Whitbread brewing family is closely connected with Cardington. The first Samuel Whitbread was born in the village in 1720, and it was another Whitbread, also Samuel, who restored the church and endowed the red-brick almshouses of 1787 overlooking the green. Samuel and his son, also Samuel, are buried in the churchyard in a large table tomb designed by Albert Richardson.

Cardington is best known for the two giant **Hangars** that dominate the skyline. Built in 1917 and 1927 to construct and house the airships that were once thought to be the future of flying, they are best known as the birthplace of the R100 and the R101. The R101 first took



St Mary's Church, Cardington



off from Cardington in October 1929 with 54 people on board for a five-hour flight over the southeast. The passengers enjoyed a four-course lunch in the luxurious dining saloon and were amazed at the airship's quietness – they could hear the sounds of traffic and trains below. In July 1930, the R101 started her maiden flight across the Atlantic and tied up in Montreal after an uneventful flight of 77 hours. In October of that year the world's biggest airship left the hangars at Cardington for her first trip to India. Disaster struck not long into the journey when the R101 crashed into a hillside near Beauvais in France. Forty-four people, including the Air Secretary Lord Thomson of Cardington, died in the crash, which was believed to have been caused at least in part by lashing rain that made the ship dip suddenly. The Church of St Mary contains memorials to both Samuel Whitbreads, and in the churchyard extension is the tomb of all those who perished in the R101 disaster, and the ragged flag recovered from the flames of the R101 airship.

### WILDEN

4 miles NE of Bedford off the A421

 Wild Britain

**Wild Britain** has quickly become one of the county's leading family attractions. It stands in 10 acres of land untouched by modern farming practices and specially selected by its founder Andrew Green. Some 60 varieties of wildflowers flourish here, an irresistible attraction for 60 species of butterfly. It is also home to terrapins and tortoises, rabbits, rodents, cockroaches and tarantulas. The Wondrous World exhibit displays the variety of life found in rain forests. Other attractions include an adventure playground, tearoom and gift shop, along with Moley Mine, where kids can don a hard hat and scramble, clamber and

crawl through a tunnel to track down Moley the Mole.

### STEVINGTON

4 miles NW of Bedford off A428

 Post Mill


This is a typical English village with a church that was here at the time of the Domesday survey, a village cross decorated with capitals and a large finial, and a Holy Well that attracted visitors in the Middle Ages. It is claimed that it never freezes or dries up.

However, the most important building in the village is the **Post Mill**, the only one of the county's 12 remaining windmills that still retains its sails. Dating from the 1770s, the mill continued to operate commercially until 1936, having been rebuilt in 1921.

Extensively restored in the 1950s, it is in full working order today. Though milling was an important part of village life here for many years, lace-making, too, was a thriving industry and mat makers also settled here, taking advantage of the rushes growing on the banks of the nearby River Ouse.

### BROMHAM

2 miles W of Bedford off A428

 Bromham Mill

This quiet residential village has a splendid



Bromham Church

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ancient bridge with no fewer than 26 arches. Close to the river is a watermill that dates back to the 17th century. Now fully restored and in working order, **Bromham Mill** is also home to displays of natural history, a gallery with regularly changing exhibitions of contemporary craftwork and fine art, and a tearoom overlooking the river where, if you're lucky, you can watch kingfishers diving from the bank.

### HARROLD

7 miles NW of Bedford off the A428

 Harrold-Odell Country Park

A typical country village with an old bridge and causeway, an octagonal market house and an old circular lock-up that was last used in the 19th century. Close by is the **Harrold-Odell Country Park**, which covers 144 acres of landscaped lakes, river banks and water meadows that are home to a wealth of plant, animal and bird life (more than 160 species of birds have been spotted). The park was created as a result of excavating aggregates for the building of Milton Keynes.



Harrold-Odell Country Park

### HINWICK

10 miles NW of Bedford off the A6

Built between 1709 and 1714, Hinwick House is a charming Queen Anne building that is still home to the descendants of the Orlebar family for whom it was constructed. Occasionally open to visitors, this delightful brownstone house, with details picked out in lighter coloured stone, has a particularly pleasing entrance hall and an interesting collection of furniture and paintings. Its 37 acres of grounds are a popular location for weddings, parties, events and location shots. Call 01933 356686.

Close by, on the Bedfordshire/Northamptonshire border, is Santa Pod raceway, established in 1966 on a disused Second World War USAF base as Europe's first permanent drag racing venue. Call 01234 782828 for meeting details.

### YILDEN

10 miles N of Bedford off the A6

A village on the River Til, guarded by the earthworks of a long ruined castle. Mentioned in the Domesday Book, only an oblong motte, two large baileys and stone foundations remain of Yilden Castle, which is reputed to have been built on the site of the battle between the Romans and the Iceni in which the warrior queen Boadicea (Boudicca) was killed. One Christmas Day John Bunyan came to the village to preach in the church, as a result of which the incumbent vicar, William Bell, was removed from his post for allowing Bunyan this freedom.