

The BBC in Bedford during World War II

Notes from David Fowler, Bedford Town Guides Association

1941

- AT START OF WAR, BBC EVACUATED TO BRISTOL, DUE TO BLITZ BRISTOL HAD PROBLEMS
- BEDFORD, LED BY MAYOR DUDENEY, WAS KEEN TO ACCEPT BBC DESPITE THE TOWN BEING PRETTY FULL– BILLETING & RATIONS A MAJOR PROBLEM
- JULY 1941 SPECIAL TRAIN (INC A RESTAURANT CAR!!) LEFT BRISTOL BRINGING ABOUT 400 MUSCIANS, STAFF & ENGINEERS TO BEDFORD
- BUT SIR ADRIAN BOULT - "*I MISSED THE FUN AS I MADE THE JOURNEY ON A PUSH-BIKE*" STOPPING FOR LUNCH IN AYLESBURY - A DISTANCE OF SOME 125 MILES, NO MEAN FEAT FOR A DISTINGUISHED CONDUCTOR IN HIS EARLY FIFTIES.

No 52 BUSHMEAD AVENUE

- CAVENDISH PRIVATE HOTEL WAS HQ OF MUSIC PRODUCTION (THEATRE ORCHESTRA) & RELIGIOUS DEPARTMENTS

No 54 BUSHMEAD AVENUE

- KINGSLEY PRIVATE HOTEL WAS HQ OF MUSIC DEPARTMENT (SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA)

10 ROTHSAY PLACE

- BECAME MUSIC LIBRARY & HAD EXTENSIVE STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS TO THE GROUND FLOOR TO COPE WITH WEIGHT OF SHEET MUSIC
- ONE OF THE FIRST HOUSES IN THE TOWN TO HAVE ELECTRICITY

52 DE PARYS AVENUE

- WAS A BBC CLUB, SUPPLYING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES FOR ITS STAFF & HOSTEL FOR VISITING ARTISTS. THIS & OTHER HOUSES IN THE AVENUE AND IMMEDIATE AREA BECAME VENUES FOR THE CLUB'S VARIOUS ACTIVITIES

SEVEN STUDIOS USED AROUND BEDFORD:-

STUDIO 1

- BEDFORD CORN EXCHANGE, MANY RECORDINGS AND LIVE BROADCASTS WERE MADE HERE
- HQ OF BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, CONDUCTOR SIR ADRIAN BOULT, BROADCAST CONCERTS
- MANY FAMOUS CONDUCTORS – JOHN BARBIROLI, MALCOLM SARGENT, THOMAS BEECHAM, STANFORD ROBINSON
- PERFORMERS – YEHUDI MENUHIN, HENRY HOLST, DAME MYRA HESS, RAWICZ & LANDAUER. ANN ZIEGLER & WEBSTER BOOTH, BENJAMIN BRITTEN, PETER PEARS, CONSTANCE SHACKLOCK

- HENRY WOOD BROADCAST CONCERTS (HIS LAST CONCERT AGE 75 FROM BEDFORD JULY 1944, DIED THREE WEEKS LATER)
- BEVERLEY SISTERS DID AUDITION FOR GLEN MILLER
- MANY OTHERS INC VERA LYNN & ANNE SHELTON
- ORGAN FREQUENTLY USED IN BROADCASTS
- ALSO HAD A FORCES CLUB & CANTEEN

STUDIO 2

- ST PAULS MISSION HALL, HQ OF THE THEATRE ORCHESTRA - ST LOYES/ALLHALLOWS (PHOTO 1959, CHRISTIE ALMHOUSES IN FRONT, DEMOLISHED EARLY 60's)

STUDIO 3

- BUNYAN MEETING SUNDAY SCHOOL, CASTLE LANE WITH MAIN CONTROL CENTRE ADJACENT
- TAKING A SECTION OF THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, OR A MILITARY BAND & A SMALLER STUDIO FOR TALKS AND RECITALS
- WAS ALSO USED IN 1939 TO ALLOCATE EVACUEES
- BOMB SHELTER & FIRST AID POST, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS WERE STORED UNDERNEATH TO AVOID BOMB DAMAGE,

STUDIO 4

- NOW CALLED BEDFORD GALLERY WAS WHERE THE BBC SINGERS PRINCIPALLY BROADCAST
- HAD BEEN CASTLE BILLIARD HALL WITH TABLE TENNIS IN BASEMENT
- BOMB SHELTER

STUDIO 5

- CO-PARTNERS HALL, HAVELOCK STREET, QUEENS PARK, ORIGINALLY THE GAS WORKS SOCIAL CLUB, DEMOLISHED IN 2003

STUDIO 6 (right)

- TRINITY CHAPEL IN ST PAUL'S CHURCH USED BY RELIGIOUS DEPARTMENT FOR THE DAILY SERVICE FROM "SOMEWHERE IN BRITAIN"
- IT WAS SHIELDED FROM THE REST OF THE CHURCH BY VELVET CURTAINS
- THE PEOPLE OF THE TOWN WERE SHOCKED TO SEE THE SINGERS SMOKING IN-BETWEEN HYMNS. SERVICE OF PRAYER BROADCAST SEPTEMBER 1941, BOTH ARCHBISHOPS WERE PRESENT.



- BOYS FROM BMS OCCASIONALLY ACCOMPANIED THE BBC SINGERS

STUDIO 7

- BEDFORD SCHOOL GREAT HALL
- SIR ADRIAN BOULT SAID ACOUSTICALLY ONE OF THE FINEST BROADCASTING STUDIOS IN WHICH THE BBC HAD EVER PLAYED
- ORCHESTRAS PLAYED MOST FREQUENTLY,
- 1942 CONCERT PROGRAMME
- IN 1944 PROMS TRANSFERRED TO BEDFORD (DUE TO V1 FLYING BOMB MENACE) - ALSO FOR 1945 SEASON
- SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA COMMERCIAL RECORDS MADE HERE
- 1942 CONCERT PROGRAMME

BBC WARTIME

- EVERYONE LISTENED TO THE RADIO – MAJOR PART OF LIFE
- WESTERN BROTHERS CABARET ACT– SECOND COUSINS – KENNETH LIVED AT 59 DE PARYS AVE & LATER ON THE EMBANKMENT
- ABOUT 8,000 BROADCASTS FROM “SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND” MADE OVER FOUR YEARS
- BBC WAS USED TO TRANSMIT SECRET CODED MESSAGES
- LEFT IN JULY/AUGUST 1945

GLEN MILLER

- LT COL DAVID NIVEN (AS DEPUTY TO US DIRECTOR OF BROADCASTING) OVERSAW BBC & AEF BROADCASTS & ORIGINALLY RECOMMENDED BEDFORD AS HQ FOR GLEN MILLER (PHOTO 13/7/44) BUT MAKES NO MENTION OF GLEN MILLER OR BEDFORD IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY
- PETER USTINOV WAS NIVEN’S BATMAN
- GLEN MILLER FLEW TO UK 18 JUNE 1944 (BAND CAME BY *QUEEN ELIZABETH* TO GOUROCK 28 JUNE) HE & BAND TO BEDFORD ON 2 JULY (V1 HIT LONDON BILLET AFTER THEY LEFT!)
- Nos 42 - 44 ASHBURNHAM ROAD WAS MAIN BILLET FOR ENTIRE 60 ENLISTED MEN OF GLEN MILLERS BAND
- GLEN MILLER BILLETED @ AMERICAN RED CROSS OFFICERS CLUB, GOLDINGTON ROAD, ON SITE OF ST PETER’S CARPARK. OPENED BY US AMBASSADOR JOHN G WINANT. ALSO STAYED AT MILTON ERNEST HALL
- AMERICAN RED CROSS ENLISTED MENS CLUB BROMHAM ROAD/UNION STREET– HAD BEEN GEORGE LANGLEYS GARAGE (NOW OLIVIER COURT FLATS)
- MADE FIRST UK BROADCAST CONCERT JULY 9

- ANNE SHELTON RECORDED WITH GLEN 23 JULY AT CO-PARTNERS HALL & CONCERT WITH HIM AT CORN EXCHANGE
- QUEEN ELIZABETH VISITED BOTH CLUBS ON THE EVENING OF 23 JULY 1944, WHEN NATIONAL ANTHEM WAS PLAYED AT SERVICES CLUB BY 25 MEN FROM CAPT MILLERS US ARMY BAND
- THE CORNER OF BROADWAY/HARPUR STREET WAS FRASER'S MUSIC SHOP WHERE GLENN MILLER USED TO COLLECT HIS BANDS SHEET MUSIC
 - "PILGRIMS PROGRESS" PUB - USED TO BE LONGHURST & SKINNERS FURNITURE SHOP BUT ABOVE IT ON FIRST, SECOND & THIRD FLOORS WAS THE AMERICAN RED CROSS CLUB.
 - SMALL SECTIONS OF GLEN MILLERS BAND OFTEN PLAYED HERE
- CO-PARTNERS HALL - PRINCIPAL BASE, REHEARSAL STUDIO & BROADCASTING HOME FOR GLEN MILLER AND THE AMERICAN BAND OF THE AEF
- BING CROSBY, MARLENE DIETRICH, DINAH SHORE
- BEVERLEY SISTERS DID AUDITION FOR GLEN MILLER
- NOV 25-DEC 12 1944, USED DAY & NIGHT TO STOCKPILE RECORDINGS

GRANADA CINEMA (LIDL'S STORE ON SITE)

- 1934 – CLOSED 1989 ONE OF SYDENEY BERNSTEIN'S SPECIAL CINEMAS 3 SEAT PRICES
- VENUE FOR 26 NOVEMBER 1944 'CARNIVAL OF BANDS'
 - LT COL BEN LYON ORGANISED WITH VIC OLIVER AS ONE OF THE JUDGES.
 - GLEN MILLER WAS ANOTHER JUDGE & CONDUCTED THE FINALE
 - BANDS FROM FOUR STRATEGIC AIR DEPOTS
- HIS LAST FLIGHT WAS AT 1.55pm ON 15 DECEMBER 1944, WITH LT COL NORMAN BAESELL IN A SINGLE ENGINED NORSEMAN