

**THE EARLY HISTORY OF  
LEIGHTON BUZZARD AND  
ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.  
PART 1. PRICE 6D**

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The early history of Leighton Buzzard and its neighbourhood. Part 1. Price 6d by Joseph Stevenson

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**JOSEPH STEVENSON**

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PART II.]

[PRICE 6d.

THE  
EARLY HISTORY  
OF  
LEIGHTON BUZZARD

AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD;

BEING THE FIRST OF

*A Series of Lectures,*

DELIVERED AT THE INSTITUTE,

BY THE

REV. JOSEPH STEVENSON, M.A.,

VICAR.

LEIGHTON BUZZARD:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. YOUNG,

(BY PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR.)

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THE  
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LECTURE I.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

WHEN the idea of the delivery of a series of Lectures was first discussed among us, one of the questions which naturally occupied our attention at the very outset was this: What are the Lectures to be about? That the Committee has made a judicious selection in proposing to speak to you upon such great and interesting matters as those which have already occupied your attention, is, I think, sufficiently proved by the success which has hitherto attended our meetings together in this place. But I speak with more hesitation in regard to the subject which is announced as forming the matter of this evening's Lecture,—I mean the early history of this town and neighbourhood. The selection of this topic suggested itself to one's mind naturally, and appeared to present at the first glance much which

recommended it. But a nearer inspection has convinced me that, in venturing at this time to stand before you as the expositor of the history of the past, as far as our good town is concerned, I am acting very unadvisedly, very rashly, perhaps very presumptuously. It is best to tell you the whole truth at once; I have been sadly disappointed in the amount, and the value, and the interest of the matter which bears upon the topic before us this evening. I had taken for granted that a town such as ours must have had its history; and in this I fancy I am not much to be blamed; but I had also unfortunately assumed that this history was accessible—that I had only to examine the usual depositories of old documents, and that I should there discover matter which would illustrate this subject, in which we are all so much interested. The search has been made—made to the best of my ability,—and I am sorry to be compelled to repeat, that the result is disappointing. There is not much to be found, and the little which is forthcoming is of no great interest. I have been able, it is true, to gather a few incidental notices of our town, but they are of such an obvious character, that they are probably as well known to yourselves as to me. I have examined the vast treasures of MS. lore deposited in our great national establishment, the British Museum, with scarce any addi-



tional benefit: and a careful search made by the Keeper of H. M. Records in the Tower—in which are preserved the greater mass of the early legal records of this kingdom—has been in no degree more satisfactory. One depository, it is true, remains unexamined,—I mean the Registry Office of the bishop of Lincoln. This parish was formerly in the diocese of Lincoln; indeed, its transfer into the diocese of Ely has been made within a very recent period. It is probable, therefore, that the early registers of the bishops of Lincoln would supply us with much interesting matter; but a journey to that place is a formidable undertaking: these documents therefore remain unexamined for the present. I labour then, at this time, under a double difficulty. Had it been in my power to have laid before you the result of these searches as fully and as satisfactorily as I had once anticipated, I should scarce have been able to realise the expectations which some among you may possibly have been pleased to form for yourselves; and I cannot but feel proportionably uncertain as to the result when I am compelled to admit at the outset that I have very little to bring before you. But if you will extend to me your usual kind and considerate attention,—if you will permit me to narrate to you in my own way the few remarks which I have to make, you will extricate me from my difficulty.

Trusting, therefore, to your good nature, I shall now proceed to lay before you such information as I have been able to collect respecting the early history of Leighton and its immediate neighbourhood.

I told you a few moments ago, that there was an unhappy deficiency of information respecting our town. It is not difficult in some degree to account for this. It was the seat of no great family, for the Leigh Lords resided here only accidentally, and at a comparatively recent period. It was the scene of no great battle. It is not situated in a border county, and therefore takes no place in the narrative of bloody feuds, such as those which were carried on between the English and the Welsh, or the English and the Scotch. It is not a seaport town, and therefore we have no assistance from those documents which illustrate our early naval history or commerce. In fact, the inhabitants of this town would appear to have been good, quiet, steady, sedate, well-behaved people. There is, I understand, a local proverb which gives them a different character, and that a very indifferent one. The proverb, as I have heard it, runs thus,—

Tring, Wing and Ivinghoe,  
Three dirty villages all on a row;  
And if you would know the reason why,  
Leighton Buzzard is hard by.

I suspect this proverb is of no great antiquity, and I must do our ancestors the justice to say, that, as far as early history goes, it is a libel. But to return: the whole of Bedfordshire is, of a truth (speaking historically, be it remembered), a stupid county; and since I see a smile on the faces of some of our Linsdale neighbours, I may add that Bucks. is equally stupid,—still speaking historically. Take a circle of half-a-dozen miles round Leighton Buzzard, and you will not find such a thing as a ruined monastery or a mouldering castle: there are no traditions respecting a well-fought battle. There is not a single witch, I dare venture to affirm, in the whole parish. There is not, as far as I have been able to ascertain, a single ghost story, a solitary tradition, or a legend, or a superstition, in the whole neighbourhood. There is Woburn Abbey, it is true, but that is too far from home. There is the history of the family of Russell, but they came into Bedfordshire when the romance of history had ended. There is Battlesden, the name of which promises well; but history and tradition are equally silent as to the battle which it may be presumed was there stricken. I tell you this to prepare you for a dull, hard, dry detail of matters of fact; matters for which, if necessary, volume and page might be quoted. So now let us begin at the beginning of history, as far as its