

Renovated Moot Hall is Opened



Brilliant sunshine graced the re-opening yesterday (Thursday) of the Moot Hall, Elstow, which has been restored as Bedfordshire County Council's main contribution to the Festival of Britain.

Sir Thomas Keens, D.L., Chairman of Bedfordshire County Council, performed the opening ceremony, which was preceded by a service in the Parish Church.

Every seat in the church was filled, while some people were standing. For those who were unable to enter the church the proceedings were relayed to the area surrounding the Moot Hall.

Sir Thomas Keens speaking at the opening ceremony. With him are Major Simon Whitbread (left), the Bishop of Lichfield, and the Bishop of St. Albans (right).

racy of the soil. Yet at the same time they found him wonderfully gentle and chivalrous, a man of vision and sympathy, and having in him a rich vein of poetry and imagination.

"Perhaps at our best", said the Bishop, "we English folk do possess just something of these qualities; and never

lor W. T. Hobkirk in a casket—the work of Messrs. J. P. White and Sons, Bedford—made from oak taken from the Moot Hall.

On the sides of the casket are the arms of Sir Thomas and Major Simon Whitbread, the new County Coat of Arms, and the emblem of the Festival of Britain. On the lid is a carving of the restored Moot Hall.

Sir Thomas said they were meeting that day under the shadow of a great loss. Mr. J. B. Graham, Clerk of the County Council, had thrown himself with his usual determination and enthusiasm into all matters in connexion with the Festival of Britain within the

relayed to the area surrounding the Moot Hall.

It was a beautiful and fittingly constructed service, conducted by the Vicar (the Rev. S. V. Hartley). Besides Bunyan's "Who would true valour see" and "He that is down needs fear no fall", the hymns "Fight the good fight, with all thy might!" and "Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven" were sung.

The lesson, from Hebrews XI, was read by the Rev. J. W. Alexander (Minister of Bunyan Meeting, Bedford), and the Bishop of St. Albans (the Rt. Rev. E. M. Grosford Jones) gave the Blessing.

BISHOP'S ADDRESS

In his address, the Bishop of Lichfield (Dr. E. S. Woods) said that it was a happy thought on the part of Bedfordshire County Council to contribute to the Festival of Britain by promoting a notable commemoration of one of the County's greatest sons, thanking God for John Bunyan in that very church where he worshipped and restoring the Moot Hall, which stood on the Green where, as a young man, he played his games and disported himself at the Elstow fairs.

One of the most striking pavilions on the South Bank Exhibition in London was that entitled "The Lion and the Unicorn"; those two heraldic figures being held to symbolize two of the main qualities of the national character; on the one hand realism and strength, on the other independence and imagination. Those qualities shone out in John Bunyan.

As they met him in the story of his life, and as he revealed himself in his immortal allegory, they confronted a man who was tough, sturdy, eager, impetuous, self-reliant, with a talk that was

the Bishop, "we English folk do possess just something of these qualities; and never are they more needed than at the present time."

A characteristic of Bunyan's thought which brought him close to our own age was, the Bishop went on, his deep sympathy with all who were oppressed by doubts and fears, who stumbled along in a twilight of uncertainties. To-day we no longer had the confidence of the Victorian age; the prodigious advance in scientific and technical knowledge had chiefly increased men's powers to kill one another, had loosened our grasp of the eternal verities, and had left men in deadly fear of a third war, which might well destroy civilization.

Many of the misgivings and fears were acutely personal. There were those who were the prisoners of their own doubts; there were others who had not let go of religion but who had missed its radiant gladness and its reassuring certainties. Towards all such, Bunyan was wonderfully tender.

The service ended, the choir and clergy, followed by Sir Thomas Keens and the Vice-Chairman of the Council, Ald. J. Arnold Whitchurch, left the church by the west door and walked to the Moot Hall. There, Ald. Whitchurch invited Sir Thomas—on behalf of the Council and the whole of the County—to open the building. In doing so, he handed Sir Thomas a "copy of the immortal work" as a little token of the occasion.

The County Architect (Mr. S. Vincent Goodman), under whose direction the work of restoration has been carried out, then handed Sir Thomas the key to unlock the building. This key had been made and presented by County Council-

and enthusiastic workers in connexion with the Festival of Britain within the County and particularly with regard to the renovation and the re-opening of the Moot Hall.

His sudden death on Monday was a shattering blow. He had only just completed the brochure in connexion with the Hall and that day's ceremony. Although the funeral did not take place until the following day, Mrs. Graham and the family had agreed that the present proceedings must be carried on without any change. He was sure everyone would desire him to convey to Mrs. Graham and the members of her family most sincere sympathy in their tragic circumstances.

FURTHER MEMORIAL

Turning to his "most pleasant duty", Sir Thomas said this further memorial to "one of Bedfordshire's greatest sons" had been made possible by Major Simon Whitbread, D.L., who had conveyed by deed of gift the freehold of the Moot Hall and the surrounding village green to the County Council.

Sir Thomas then unlocked the door of the Hall "to the glory of God and for the use of all citizens in perpetuity, and as the main contribution by the County to the Festival of Britain".

After the opening many people took the opportunity to view the interior of the Hall, which contained an exhibition of Bunyan relics and 17th-century furniture and pictures. This exhibition will be open daily (except Sundays and Mondays) from 11 to 1 and from 2 to 6. On 1st and 2nd June, however, the building will be open from 10 to 5, and on Sunday 3rd June from 2 to 6.



Mr. Peter Donne, a talks producer of the B.B.C., examining some of the 17th century books which are being displayed in the Moot Hall. He was paying a visit to the building to collect material for the "Eye Witness" programme broadcast on Wednesday. Seen in the photograph with him are Miss Joyce Godber and Mr. O. G. Prudden.