



ARCHI'VE EXPLORED

BEDFORDSHIRE & LUTON ARCHIVES SERVICE 'AT HOME'

**Thursday 13th November 2014: 10am – 4pm,
Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Bedford, MK42 9AP**

Guided tours of our home in Bedford will take you behind the scenes exploring how we bring you the archives with which you can explore the past and create things for the future. Learn how we collect, preserve, catalogue and store millions of archives, get tips on how to explore the archives from the comfort of your own home via our website, view exhibitions, have a cup of tea and a chat.

Tickets are free. Telephone 01234 228833, or email archive@bedford.gov.uk to book.

You never know what you might uncover.

What the hagable is that?

No hagable isn't a swear word! Hagable rolls are early documents containing details of rents paid to boroughs for houses, lands and other properties.

Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Services were given one recently, dated 1589 (during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I), which a gentleman in Dorset had discovered with his family papers, rather to his surprise as they have no known connection with Bedfordshire. It has recently been transcribed and in the autumn it will be studied carefully to see what it tells us about Bedford town over 400 years ago.

There are just over 50 entries, some of which contain money paid by more than one person, almost always a man. The rents paid vary enormously. Mr. Langhern rented four houses and two pieces of land, paying 104s 10d, about £5.24 today, and John Arthur paid 5d (2p today) for a small piece of land. The borough owned a large piece of meadow land called Burgess Mead, for which fifteen men each paid 3s 4d. Elsewhere in the document several men paid rents of about 1d per year per acre, so if the rent for the meadow land was the same the Burgess Mead extended to 600 acres. It might have stretched along the north bank of the river from Bedford eastwards, but we will have look for some evidence to prove this.

The roll is very difficult to read. The outer part of the roll is so faint, because of wear, that it is a miracle that we were able to read so much of it. Another major problem is spelling. The word 'Bailiffs' was spelt thirteen different ways in the document. Also, the archivist Kathryn Faulkner and I spent several minutes looking at a word spelt Bakes..... which I wanted to turn into something about a baker or bakery. It turned out to be their spelling of 'backside!' Capital letters are another problem, some names begin with them and some don't.

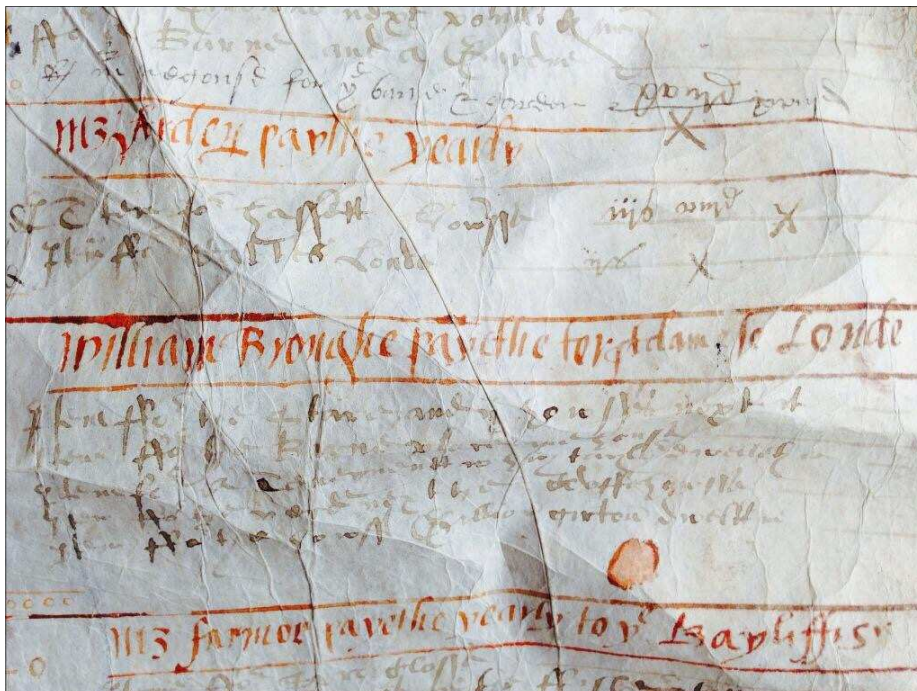
People's occupations are sometimes listed: one vicar, several wardens, three fishmongers, one butcher. Was the man named Maulster something to do with brewing? Kathryn found the names of three public houses, the Peacock, the Sargents Head and the Rose. There was a Rose mentioned in the 17th century as well. We will try to find out whether it was on the same site as the Rose on the High Street today.

It may be that something about the layout of the town can be gathered from the sequence of entries. The Burgess Mead is mentioned in five of the seven entries numbered 12 to 18 and every entry from 36 to 43.

We might find that petters Londe and petters Field were names for today's green by St. Peters church. Entries referring to Poulls may not be anything to do with pools, but may refer to St. Pauls church. It is clear enough where the bridge Fowtte (foot) was, but where on earth was Quens grond or Grownd (Queens Ground)? If you know where it was, or on which map it can be found, please let us know!

Hopefully some answers to these puzzling questions will appear in the next edition!

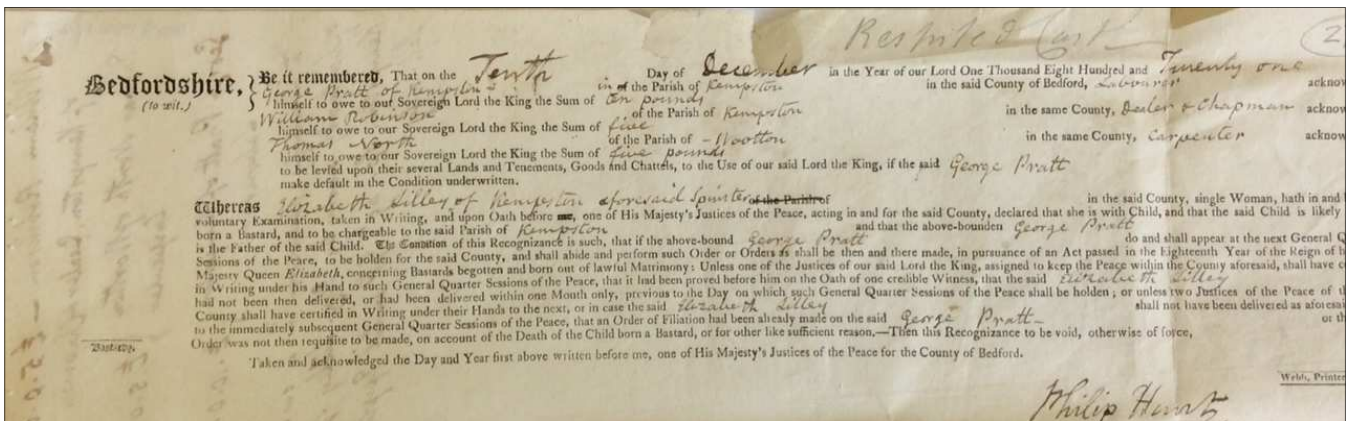
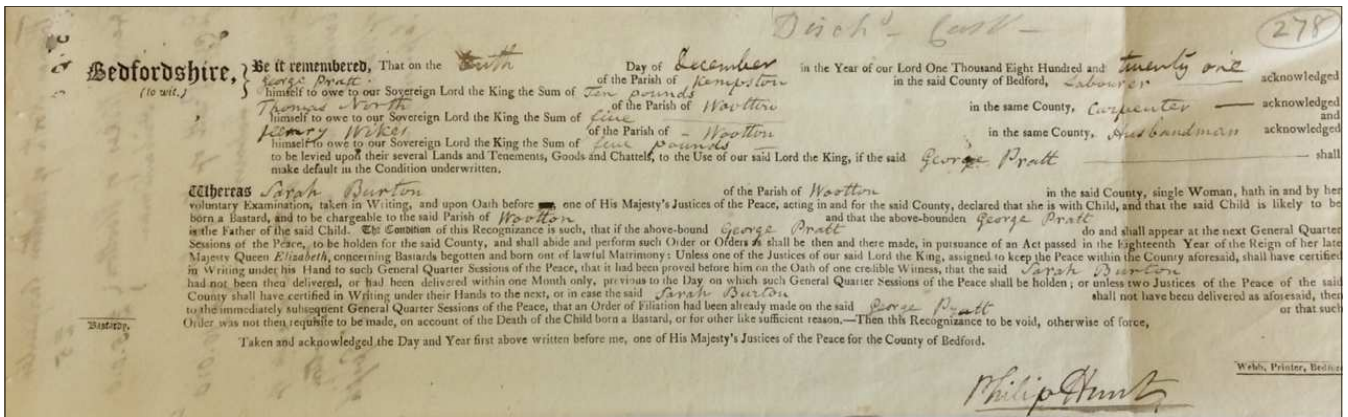
Dorothy Jamieson



Same time, same place...same man!

Amongst the most fascinating of our archival holdings are those of the Parish Poor Law records. Sadly, the survival rate is only 10%, but documenting the history of the poor and unfortunate is incredibly useful, both for family historians locating their ancestors and for academics studying the social history of the time.

In 1598, after a poor harvest, an expensive war with Spain, and many wounded and tired soldiers unable to find work in peacetime, many of the population were in need of food and employment. Queen Elizabeth I's government realised that something had to be done and over the next five years introduced the Poor Law Act, making it incumbent upon each parish to provide for its deserving poor, a system which continued until 1834. Orphans and pauper children were apprenticed; people who had moved to a parish and found themselves in need would be subjected to a settlement examination, perhaps find themselves with a removal order to be sent back to their previous parish, or if they were lucky already have an indemnity certificate stating that their parish of origin would pay their poor relief. An unmarried mother could go before the parish overseers to try and obtain poor relief for both herself and her child but only if she named and shamed the father in what became known as a 'bastardy order'. One such case, in 1821, led us to a tragic tale of poverty and misfortune.

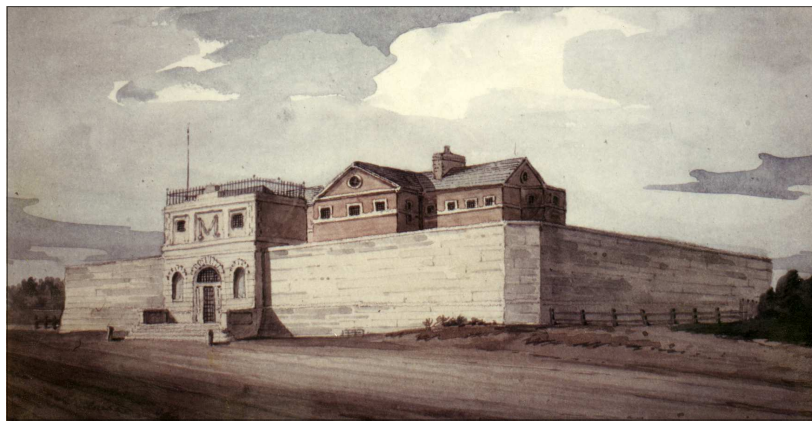


On 10th December 1821, George Pratt of Kempston, found himself in front of the Quarter Sessions, appealing against two bastardy orders, from two different women, in two different parishes! And this, long before most men owned a bicycle! Sarah Burton of Wootton stated that George was the father of her unborn child, whilst Elizabeth Lilley of Kempston also made the same claim.

George had been jailed for refusing to give security in a case of bastardy, but his case was dismissed when on that very day, 10th December 1821, he married Sarah Burton at St Paul's parish church in Bedford, just across the road from the Quarter Sessions court. There isn't a baptism record for George and Sarah's child, nor for Elizabeth Lilley's child. George Pratt died aged 30 in 1830, whilst Sarah outlived him by 40 years. But what became of Elizabeth Lilley, you may ask, given that George made his choice, and left Elizabeth on her own?

Cont.

The only Elizabeth Lilley who can be found in Kempston records at this time was born in 1806, meaning she was only 16 when she became pregnant. She died aged 20 in 1826, and although there is no baptism for the child she claimed was fathered by George Pratt, there is a three year old Lilley child buried in 1824, who may have been her son. She was from a large poverty-stricken family, who became infamous in 1829. Two of her brothers Matthew and William, forced into poaching by their circumstances, came across



Bedford County Gaol, where the Lilley brothers were held

Thomas King, a gamekeeper and in a terrible foreshadowing of the Derek Bentley case, William told Matthew to 'let him have it.' Matthew shot and wounded Thomas King. They were both sentenced to death, as they had previous convictions. We'll never know if William meant 'hand him the gun' or 'shoot him'. Matthew had taken to a life of petty crime to support his pregnant wife, and their young toddler, as there was no employment that could sustain him and his family. There was a public outcry about their deaths, and folk songs sung about the brothers who it was felt were made an example of by the rich judiciary and landowners.

Elizabeth's father Thomas came from a wealthy landowning family, so their poverty could have been avoided. In 1813 John Lilley, Elizabeth's grandfather, died and his will didn't leave equal shares to his children. Whilst his other children received £400 each, Thomas received the interest on £400 during his lifetime, whereupon his children, Samuel, John, Matthew, William, West, Ann, Mary, Elizabeth and Joseph would get equal shares if they outlived their father. John seemed to think his son was incapable of handling money and he may well have been correct. The interest Thomas would have received annually would have been £20, a decent sum if spent wisely. With nine children to support and perhaps lacking fiscal sensibility, Thomas couldn't sustain his family even with the generous amount he received from his father's will. If he had been able to, could he have improved his family's lot in life, and changed their futures?

When Thomas died in 1847, his will stated that he left his worldly goods to his second wife Elizabeth, step-mother to his children, but made clear that upon her death, the wishes of his father John must be followed to the letter, and significant sums shared equally between his surviving children. He needn't have feared, as Elizabeth left her own personal items to her niece and everything else shared amongst her surviving step-children, in accordance with Thomas and John's wishes. Of the remaining siblings, John, West and Joseph prospered well enough to leave wills of their own. Not all of the Lilley's had an unhappy ending.

For more information see our Kempston Community Archives webpage.

Laura Johnson

STAFF NEWS

We welcome four new part-time staff; our two Archivists, Rachel Bates and Alexandra Healey, our Conservator Vicki Manners and our Digitisation Technician Kirsty McGill.

We welcome ideas and material for future issues.

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