

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records Service Newsletter No.95 Spring 2013

Treading the Boards

Theatrical Connections & Collections

Linda Newey contacted us recently about her family history – a tale that was to have a fascinating twist. Linda takes up the story: My maternal three times great grandparents were William Breadon, born in Birmingham c.1819 and Caroline Darling, born in London c.1822. At the 1851 census William was a wood turner living with wife Caroline and their various children in Birmingham, Warwickshire. Their daughter Susan was my great, great grandmother.

Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.
William Breadon	23 years	Bookbinder	
Caroline Darling	20 years	Spinster	Comedian

There were intriguing family stories, handed down in family letters, which claimed that William and Caroline worked either in the circus or on the stage, but how could this be proved? Linda was initially puzzled by the occupation given in the register (above) when William and Caroline married at Woburn on 18 July 1842, but we eventually agreed that the word was 'comedians'!

Archivist Nigel Lutt, recalling that we had a playbill for theatrical performances at the Wheatsheaf Inn, Woburn, in 1842 [ref. AD3238/1] acted on a hunch which was to provide a breakthrough.

The playbill shows that the Breadons were star turns in the performance just three days after their wedding, not only proving that the family story was true but adding an unusual personal touch to Linda's knowledge of her ancestors.

Tracing such theatrical ancestors can be tricky due to the itinerant nature of the profession. The Archives Service holds hundreds of programmes from amateur and professional productions at theatres throughout the County, but pre-1920 material is scarce.

(continued overleaf)

LAWRENCE'S THEATRE
WHEAT SHEAF INN WOBURN.

THIS EVENING JULY 21st. 1842.

Will be Presented the Romantic Drama (with appropriate Scenery, and Dresses), entitled The

BRIDAL BED
OF A
MURDERER.

Clairmont Mr. READER
Mittchen (a Beehive) Mr. NOAKS: Andrew Mr. MACARTHY.
Bardie Mr. LEWIS: Murdock Mr. BREADEN.
Bothwell Mr. WILLIAMS: Adelbert Master Lawrence.
Adela, Countess of Glencairn, Mrs. BREADEN.
Marian Mrs. WELLDON: Mause Mrs. PRICE.

A FAVOURITE COMIC SONG BY MR. LEWIS.
A FANCY DANCE BY Mrs. BREADEN.

To be succeeded by a LAUGHABLE FARCE, called the

ROAD SIDE INN,

C. Bunderbuss Esq. Mr. READER. Mr. Skinnygag. Mr. LEWIS.
Bob, (Boots and Pot Boy) Mr. MACARTHY.
Mrs. Skinnygag, Mrs. BREADEN. Peggy Mrs WELLDON.

COMIC SONG BY MR. LEWIS.

The whole to Conclude with (BY DESIRE) a New and Laughable COMIC PANTOMIME called the

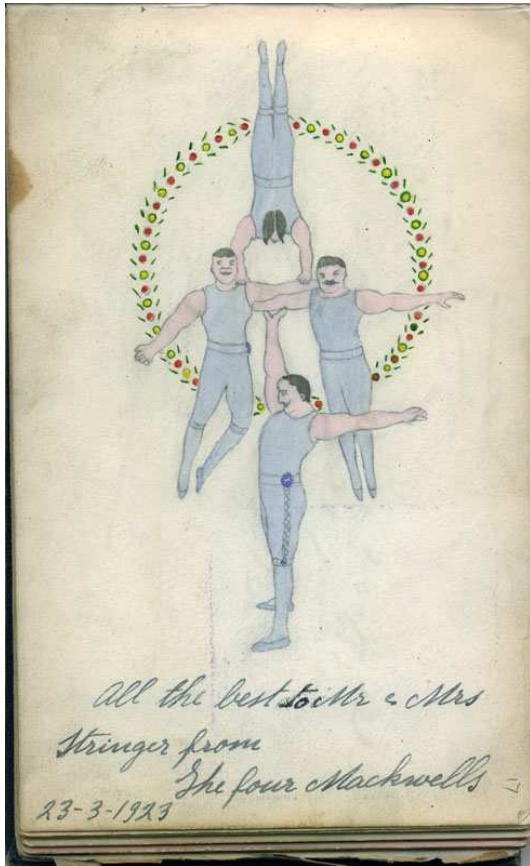
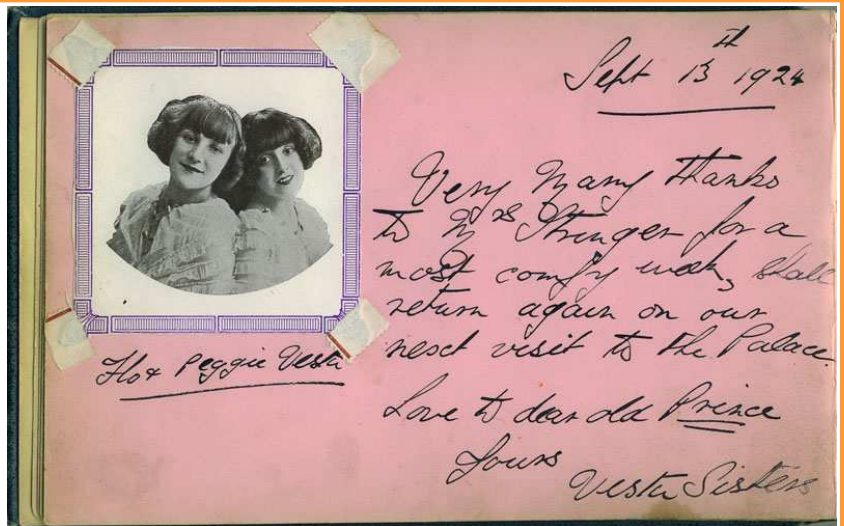
FAIRY OF THE LAKE

Harlequin, Mr. BREADEN. Clown, Mr. MACARTHY.
Pantaloon, Mr. LEWIS.
Columbine Mrs. BREADEN. Fairy of the Lake, Mrs. WELLDON.

BOXES 1s.—PIT 6d.—GALLERY 3d.—TO COMMENCE PRECISELY AT A QUARTER TO NINE.

W. CROFT, PRINTER, WOBURN.

We also hold some visitors' books from lodging houses where touring theatre companies and acts stayed. Albert and Eva Stringer of 20, Albion Road, Luton had many satisfied customers in the 1920s, including the Vesta Sisters and the Four Mackwells. [ref.Z1054/2/1]



Photographs of performers are relatively common, but individuals and groups are often unidentified. Here we have 'Frederic' in a Bedford Operatic Society production of the Pirates of Penzance in the 1890s [ref.Z50/141/418]



For more details of our theatre collections, and records of performers search our catalogues online via www.bedford.gov.uk/archive

New Publications

Early Dunstable in Maps and Pictures, by Barry Horne and Brian Dix. Illustrated by David and Vanessa Hornby. This full-colour publication of 50 A4 pages with 57 illustrations is essential reading for those with an interest in the early history and development of Dunstable. Archaeological and documentary evidence, notably the perspective view of Dunstable, 1762/66 [ref. B553] and the Tithe map of 1822/40 [ref. MAT 12/1] held by the Archives Service, has been combined to produce a fascinating story of the early years of the planned town that was founded by King Henry I. Further information is available from Barry Horne: bhorne@globalnet.co.uk Price: £12. All profits from the publication will be donated to the Archives Service.

Beats, Boots and Thieves: A History of Policing in North Bedfordshire, by Des Hoar and Richard Handscomb. This volume takes a detailed look at the organisation of the forces of law and order, local criminals, and the stories of the local policemen who had to deal with them. A Sharnbrook Local History Group publication. 145 pages in A5 format. Price: £10 or £12 by post. Available from Des Hoar: telephone (01234) 782717.

Alan Frank Cirket (20 February 1921 - 12 January 2013)

With the passing of Alan Cirket the Archives Service loses its last link with its early history. Pamela Birch looks at Alan's long and distinguished career.

Alan was born in Shortstown, Bedfordshire on the 20th February 1921 but grew up in nearby Elstow. He left Elstow Council School at the age of 14 and went to work at Igranic, the local electrical engineering company.

Eighteen months later Alan's old headmaster, knowing that Igranic didn't really suit Alan, recommended him for a temporary post at the Bedfordshire Record Office. In his letter of recommendation he tells Dr Fowler 'I think I have been fortunate enough in finding you the very boy you require...He was a fine boy at school, and was particularly good at pen-lettering and art generally.

He possesses all the qualities you mention, namely, patience, carefulness, and has neat fingers.'

Dr Fowler originally suggested that the Records Committee might need the post for a year or 18 months. However, he recommended that 'to avoid a blind alley, we should try to get him permanent employment in the Shire Hall at the end of his time with this Committee, if he prove satisfactory.' As things turned out Alan proved so satisfactory that he remained with the Record Office until his retirement in September 1983.

Alan started his record office career as 'a boy assistant to be trained to undertake repair of documents, fetch and replace such as are required and generally help in the simpler work on which it is not economical that the Clerk of Records should spend his time.' As the repair workshop was in the basement and the Record Office was split over three floors in Shire Hall above Alan was kept fit running up and down the stairs every time the bell rang to tell him his services were required.

Alan enjoyed the work and quickly showed a natural aptitude for both document repair and wider archive work. This lead Dr Fowler to tell Alan he was 'willing to try to help you in a step up from the ordinary class of clerks; so that, if you can and do take advantage of it, you might get into a more technical class, with the chance of getting some day a regular post as Records Assistant here or elsewhere. Such posts are not numerous, but are increasing...' The first step Fowler took, on receiving a favourable answer from Alan and his parents, was to pay for Alan to be taught Latin by a master from Bedford Modern School.

In 1939 Alan was called up and served with the Royal Artillery in Burma. On his return to Bedford he became an active member of the local branch of the Burma Star Association, and he also married his fiancé, Nora. Alan returned to his job at the Record Office after taking advantage of training available to him as part of his demobilization. He spent several weeks at the Public Record Office, and, with Dr Fowler no longer alive to object (as apparently he once had), Alan was able to introduce a more sympathetic style of paper repair to Bedfordshire. Many a trainee or junior archivist spent time at Bedfordshire when they wished to learn document repair.

Alan's role within the Record Office expanded to not only deal with the whole of the technical side of the Record Office but also to dealing with all the official records coming into it.

(continued overleaf)





Alan demonstrating the cleaning of a great seal on a 17th century letters patent c.1948 [ref.Z48/187]

By 1964 the expansion of the Record Office's work led to a full time repairer being appointed and Alan was appointed 'Records Assistant' and then 'Senior Records Officer'. In 1969 he organized the move of the Record Office from Shire Hall to the new County Hall.

Alan was an editor for the Bedfordshire Historical Records Society. In 1971 he edited Samuel Whitbread's notebooks. However it is his work on the Bedfordshire Wills collection, received by the Record Office in 1951, that deserves to be most remembered by the family historian. The card index he produced to the Bedfordshire Wills is still in daily use at the Archive Service, and in 1993 the British Records Society published the index in two volumes. His BHRS volume on early English Wills was published in 1957.

Alan was also responsible for a great deal of work on the Bedfordshire Parish Register transcripts. In the late 1930s he collated the volumes for Emmison, then took the finished volumes to the post office on his bicycle. When the series was restarted in the 1970s he oversaw the transcription and indexing and saw the series through to completion.

Alan's natural abilities, willingness and enthusiasm for the work of the office were never in question. However, above this he will be remembered for his kindness and gentleness. One of our staff, who remembers working with Alan, described him as a 'gentleman'. I only knew Alan long after he had retired but was fortunate to interview him for the Society of Archivists in 2000 and to hear about his early years in conservation, which was a real treat for me but has also enabled us to feature some of this early work in our centenary so Alan's contribution to this office will have the recognition it firmly deserves.

Pamela Birch, Conservator/Premises & Projects Officer.



Keep up to date with our Centenary events programme at
www.bedford.gov.uk/archiveevents

New Family History records transcribed and indexed online

Account of Interments in the Society of Friends Burial Ground at Luton. Gives name, place of residence, age and date of death of 85 people buried there between 1801-1864 [Ref. FR16/11/1/1].

Part of the vast Hobourn Solicitors Archive, also newly catalogued are Arthur Whitchelse's Charity Apprenticeship Indentures for four parishes: Ampthill 1854 - 1877 [Ref.HN4/1/30/1-16]; Ridgmont 1827-1886 [Ref.HN4/1/43/1-27]; Tingrith 1814-1841 [Ref.HN4/1/90/1-2]; Salford 1821 - 1905 [Ref.HN4/1/77/1-17b].

All the above records are indexed by name and available via 'Search our Catalogues' on the website.

This newsletter is edited by Susan Edwards, who welcomes ideas and material for future issues.
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