



ACCREDITED ARCHIVE SERVICE

An accredited archive service is:

- Externally recognised for their good performance in all aspects of governance and management, collections management, and provision of services to all users
- Sustainable and robust, ensuring the long term acquisition, preservation and accessibility of our archive heritage
- Adaptive, relevant and resilient in a changing internal and external environment
- Clear about their mission, ensuring effective planning, decision making and optimal use of resources
- Responsive to all their stakeholders and trusted in the management of their unique collections
- Supported by expert staff within clear and effective governance structures

We are very pleased to announce that *Bedfordshire Archives* has been awarded Archive Service Accreditation.

Accreditation is a relatively new UK quality standard which replaces and supplements the inspection and assessment regime that the service was already subject to. As a place of deposit for public records and a large scale public archive service *Bedfordshire Archives* was required to apply for accreditation by 2017. However achieving it still required us to review, revise and develop the policies, plans and procedures that make everything run smoothly. During 2015/16 all the staff were involved in this in one way or another and are to be congratulated on ensuring we were able to prove we know what we are doing.

The Archive Service Accreditation Panel congratulated the service on its thorough review of its functions in recent years. 'While this was still in the early stages of delivery, the service demonstrated sound policies and planning, and a very positive direction of travel. The Panel particularly noted and commended the active work underway to offer a greater variety of stakeholder engagement.'

Accreditation is designed to help services continue to improve. Therefore as well as congratulating us the report included recommendations for action. These will be considered and acted upon in the coming year. Accreditation is awarded for three years before the service is reassessed so we cannot rest on our laurels.



CEO of The National Archives, Jeff James, presents Service Manager Pamela Birch with our certificate.

Knowledge and Industry: 140 years of the Borough of Luton



COUNTY BOROUGH OF LUTON
MOTTO.
Scientiae et labori detur—"Due to knowledge and labour."

Coat of Arms, 1964 [Ref: Z772/43]

February 2016 marked the 140th anniversary of Luton becoming a Borough. Of course the type of borough that Luton is now is not the same as the type of borough the town became in 1876. This is not only to be expected but to be welcomed because the borough and the town have grown in strength and adapted to change, as its motto suggests, due to knowledge and industry. In this newsletter we take a brief look back at these themes, which are further explored in our lobby exhibition and free lunchtime talk.

Before being incorporated as a municipal borough in 1876 the town had been run by a number of different organisations—the church vestry had civil responsibilities, the poor law union board of guardians looked after the poor and sick, the board of health regulated those things that might be dangerous and harmful, and the school board made provision for educating the people. Alongside these boards, and sharing many of the same worthy gentlemen of the area, were companies which provided water, gas and a town hall. These organisations did a good job but lacked coordination and as the town grew so did the feeling that having borough status would bring something more to the town.

Once the borough charter was received the officers of the board of health, which had bought the town hall from the Town Hall Company the year before, became the officials of the borough. The first elections to the council were held in May 1876 and with the first mayor also being the chair of the school board, things got underway. Within a year the town boasted its own justices of the peace, a police force and a chamber of commerce.

The town continued to grow and the chamber of commerce were keen to attract new industries, which would prevent the town being too reliant on the hat industry. The council came up with the idea of making electricity that was the cheapest in the country as one of the town's selling points. This, coupled with other advantages such as the railway and the availability of labour, brought heavy industries to the town. Many, such as Hayward Tyler (our collection reference SP), George Kent (collection ref: GKL) and Vauxhall, moved from established premises elsewhere. Other industries, such as Laportes, and the British Gelatine Works moved in to support the hat industry but stayed as other sides of their business developed. There were of course also home grown companies such as George Farr's specialist machine company (collection ref: Z1515).



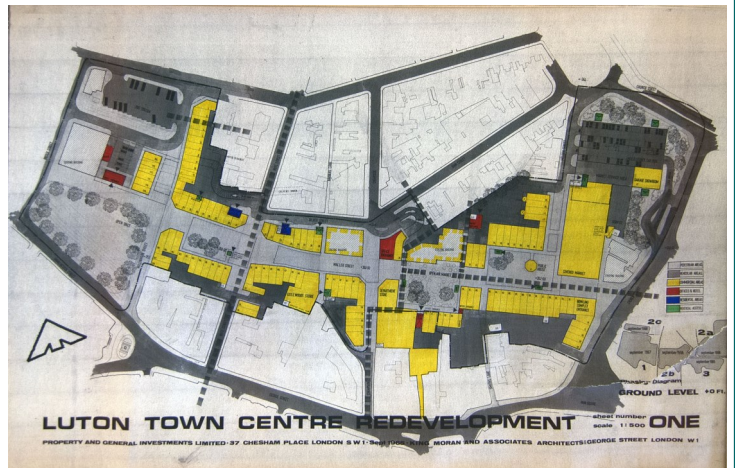
Luton Electricity Works, 1909 [Ref: Z1306/75/17/11]

More jobs brought more people. More children meant the need for more schools and the schools were built, changed and adapted to try to keep up with demand. Luton borough retained control over infant and junior schools when the County Council took control of High Schools in 1903 and this rather odd situation continued until the 1940s. Moving and building schools did not always go smoothly and some of the school log books tell of the lack of equipment, desks too big or too small and classrooms not finished. This was nothing new in April 1874 the headmaster of Langley Street, the first board school in Luton lamented 'the school was removed to the Langley St premises today although they were a long way from being in a fit condition to enter upon, the workmen were all over the place and the teachers had to stand on one side to let the woman scrub the floor under their feet; and then stand on the damp floor highly endangering their health.' (SDLutonWA1/1)

Knowledge was not just given to the children, evening schools and weekend schools were established to teach adults. The Technical Instruction Committee minute book (reference BorLMC1) records: 'The town council at their meeting held on the 24th day of February 1891 under and by virtue of section 1 sub-section 2 of the Technical Instruction Act 1889 appointed the following gentlemen to be a committee until the 31st day of October 1891 to carry out the provisions of the said Act within this borough.' The town also had a library by 1883 and later a museum was added to the places where knowledge could be sought.

Industry continued to flourish and in times when other areas were hit by slumps the town offered a new hope to people who were able to move. The Scots and the Welsh were followed in turn by the Irish and then from the commonwealth and beyond. Some of these communities have recorded their experiences through oral history projects such as *Luton Voices* (our ref: X214) and *Jamaican Voices* (ref: Z1453).

The borough continued to look forward and looked to modernise the town centre with a new shopping experience - the Arndale Centre. In 1964 the borough became a county borough, which enabled it to take control of those things previously the preserve of Bedfordshire County Council. However ten years later county boroughs were abolished and Luton lost more of its independence than ever to the County Council. The two tier system lasted until 1997 when Luton again found independence, this time as a unitary council. Without doubt in the last 140 years the town has moved away from its countryside roots and due to the size and diversity of its population has not always felt at home in the surroundings of rural Bedfordshire. However it is to be hoped that the town will always value the links with the rural villages that supplied the straw plait that laid the foundations for the thriving town Luton became.



Shopping centre development, c1964 [Ref: FDB1/18/482]

In the last ten years the records about Luton held by the archives service have increased significantly. This is partly due to new deposits from organisations and individuals and partly to major transfers of material from Luton Culture as Luton museums focus on core collections of artefacts. To find out more about these collections come to the free lunchtime talk Thursday 26th May at 1pm.

Pamela Birch

'History under my feet!' Stories of Biscot Road, Luton

Jenny Spouge reflects on her discoveries so far as a participant in Weaving Narratives, Bedfordshire Archives' community textile project, which explores the history of Bedfordshire's towns. For more on Weaving Narratives, please see the project blog: www.weavingnarrativesblog.wordpress.com

I left the first session of Weaving Narratives wondering what to do. I was fascinated by witness statements at the trial of Elizabeth Jones, who stole items of lace from a stall in Bedford Market in 1682 but really wanted to do something Luton based. The theme from my foundation degree in Fashion and Textile Design (2013) was 'Inspired by Luton' and I wondered if it would be possible to do something based on the place where I live, and to continue making 'wearable art'. Could I layer the history, with older data underneath and translucent layers for more recent information?

I began to explore Kent's and Commer Cars, as I believe the wall at the end of my garden formed the boundary between the two companies. I looked at the OS map link we were given and got engrossed in the area. In 1900 it was still fields, archive material [ref: QSR1836/4/5/18-19] revealing a sheep stolen from a farm and meat joints found under the miscreant's bed! The shepherd found the skin and two butchers compared it with the joints, proving they were from the missing sheep - I am intrigued how as I don't believe DNA testing was very advanced then! Interestingly, there was a dye works in what is now the far corner of the current residential estate. It was still there in 1922 when the other factories had been built and housing had developed outwards away from the town. The dye works appears on a map in 1946 but not in 1938 - so is one of those wrong or was it knocked down and rebuilt? The Rating Surveyor's notebook (ref: DV1/R3) I requested on our second workshop does say it was unoccupied in 1926.

On the Friday before our second workshop I attended a funeral to support a colleague taking the service. The eulogy included the deceased's reminiscences about Vauxhall tanks being tested in Biscot Road. Knowing Kent's and Commer Cars had been turned over to the war effort (and that there had probably been attempts to bomb them during the war) I thought it far more likely they were being built there - why would you trundle them all the way over from the Vauxhall site?

/continued overleaf...

I rang an older friend to see if she could remember which factory was on which side of 'my' back wall. She couldn't but she did tell me more about the bombing that took out the houses opposite - one being the manse for nearby St Margaret's Methodist Church, and where at the time an uncle of hers happened to be the minister. That morning there was due to have been a meeting of all the Methodist ministers in Luton but fortunately it was cancelled, or else they would have been killed. Instead her uncle was walking his wife and daughter to the bus to go and visit granny. They survived, but lost everything.

So as I drove up Biscot Road to our second workshop I thought excitedly of all this history under my feet! Looking at the material that had been collected together for me at the archives, I discovered: I do live on the Commer Cars site, probably in the middle of a former machine shop, and wonder if my wall is actually part of a factory building rather than a dividing wall and according to Kent's war record booklet, they made 10,000 track pins for Churchill tanks! They also made meters for the Victoria Falls Power Company and, having worked in Zimbabwe, that caught my eye.

It's all very interesting. But now, how do I produce some textile art?!

Jenny Spouge

Jenny Spouge runs a small fashion business around other jobs to pay her mortgage - find out more at <https://www.facebook.com/WildAngelsTextiles/> or <http://flowerpower.blogspot.co.uk>



Right: [Ref: GK296/9] Printed and Illustrated Brochure of Commer Cars Ltd of Luton, c.1933

CHANGES TO MONDAY EVENING OPENING HOURS

From Monday 4th April 2016, the office will only remain open from 5-7pm for visitors who have made a booking for Monday afternoon/evening by 4pm on the previous Friday. If you email your booking request, you will need to receive a confirmation email by 5pm on the previous Friday. If no bookings have been received the office will close at 5pm.

Opening hours from Monday 4th April 2016

Monday:	9.15am-5pm 5-7pm (by pre-arranged appointment only)
Tuesday:	9am-5pm
Wednesday:	9am-5pm
Thursday:	CLOSED
Friday:	9am-5pm

Why? Monday evenings require three staff to keep the office open and the number of visitors making use of the service during this time does not justify this amount of resource. However, we do not wish to remove the evening facility completely and hope this solution will enable us to accommodate those who cannot visit between 9am and 5pm but also release resource for our busier times.

EXHIBITION & TALK - 140 YEARS OF THE BOROUGH OF LUTON

Our exhibition from April to July is *Luton Borough: 140 years of Knowledge & Industry*. On Thursday 26th May 2016 at 1pm, there will be a free lunchtime talk to coincide with our exhibition. We have 20 places available, to book a place email archive@bedford.gov.uk or telephone 01234 228833.

We welcome ideas and material for future issues. Published by Bedfordshire Archives Service, Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP. Tel: (01234) 228833 E-mail: archive@bedford.gov.uk Online at: www.bedford.gov.uk/archive

 twitter.com/Bedsarchives

 facebook.com/BedfordshireArchives



Jointly funded by Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council & Luton Borough Council