

Archives For All Seasons

This year we are taking a look at the seasons of the year through our archives. Each exhibition is curated by a different archivist. Our second exhibition, Spring, was organised by Carol Walden.

SPRING

Under usual circumstances the second of our exhibitions in our reception area this year would have been spring, but as we're closed to the public at the moment and staff are working from home winter is continuing. Hopefully, spring will put in an appearance before summer comes along, but for now I'll give you a taste of spring to see you through.

For me spring is a season full of optimism as we emerge from the cold dark days of winter into the warmth and sunshine of longer days scattered with green shoots and new life.

We hold a number of records that show the unpredictable nature of spring weather. A farm diary (reference X159/3) kept by Robert Long of Oldfield includes an entry for 20 April 1861 saying that the weather has been unsettled in previous weeks, but now 'all the fine weather jobs seem to want doing at once'. The next entry on the 27th says that winter had come again as they'd had a heavy fall of snow, but it hadn't lasted long as it had turned to rain.

Easter is one of the most important festivals



Ref: X325/146/116
Daffodils by Mr Lilley

of the Christian calendar. It is a moveable feast marking the end of 40 days of Lent celebrated on the first Sunday after the ecclesiastical full moon on or after the 21 March.

The egg is an ancient symbol of fertility and re-birth; at Easter it also represents Jesus' empty tomb. The custom of decorating chicken eggs dates back hundreds of years, but in recent times chocolate eggs have been more popular.

We hold the extensive and fabulous collection detailing the story of Meltis, the confectioner who started their business from a factory in Bedford. Product brochures sent out to suppliers show their range of Easter eggs and cover most years from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Spring brings to mind May Bank Holidays



Ref:
X853/20/6/1
Easter
Eggs from
the 1984
Meltis
product
brochure

and May Queens, maypoles and Morris dancers. This celebration of the coming of spring is believed to come from the pagan festival of Beltane and locally Ickwell is renowned for its festivities.



Ref:
Z1130/84/5/5
May Day
Celebrations on
Ickwell Green

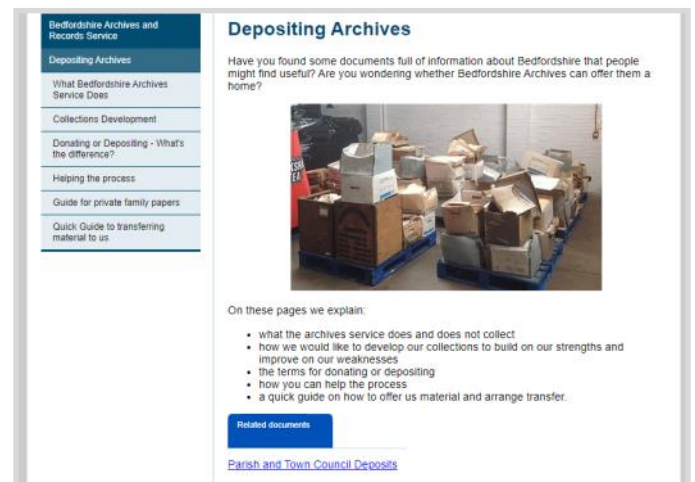
Working from home during the Coronavirus crisis

Bedfordshire Archives Service has been closed to the public since 23rd March and will be until further notice due to the current Coronavirus crisis and public lockdown of any non-essential services. As part of the lockdown of Borough Hall our staff were sent home to work remotely pending redeployment to essential council services. On Thursday 9th April we heard that as soon as possible staff would be redeployed to assist with Bedford Borough Council's community hub helping to co-ordinate the response to residents in need, it is not clear what, if any, archives work we will be able to do over the rest of the lockdown period. Below we give a brief idea of what we have been working on and what we will continue to work on should time and other duties allow. We will be updating our website with details of the service re-opening as and when those details are known. For now, we hope you and your loved ones take care and stay safe.

We have been reorganising and updating our Guide to Collections webpages in order that they are as informative as possible. We have identified where there are some gaps in these pages and whilst at home, Laura, our Customer Liaison Officer, has been going through some very old back copies of our newsletter (some are older than current members of staff!) looking for guides that would fill the gaps. These have been typed up and updated to take account of new material that we have had in over the last 30 years, some re-cataloguing of our collections, the advancements in technology including the internet and so on. As military and education were not adequately represented, Laura has added articles on these topics to the website. More topics will be added in due course. If upon reading our collection guides <http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Guide-to-Collections/Collection-Guides/Collection-Guides.aspx> you think there are any topics missing that you feel should be included, then please let us know and we will see what we can add!

Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service	Guides to collections at Bedfordshire Archives Service
Guide to Collections	
Collection Guides	
Church and Religion	CHURCH & RELIGION including parish records and glete terriers
Crime & Punishment and Law & Order	CRIME & PUNISHMENT AND LAW & ORDER including gaol, quarter sessions and police records
Education Records	EDUCATION RECORDS
Estate Records	ESTATE AND MANORIAL RECORDS , including landed estates, garden history and manorial records
Health and Welfare Records	HEALTH AND WELFARE including poor law records, hospital records and access to social service, mental health and personal records
Legal Records	LEGAL RECORDS including guides to solicitors papers and deeds
Local Government Records	LOCAL GOVERNMENT including borough council and parish and town council records
Maps and Land Records	MAPS AND LAND , including ordnance survey, terriers, land tax, tithe and enclosure records
Military Records	MILITARY RECORDS
Newspaper collection	NEWSPAPERS
Planning and Property Records	PLANNING AND PROPERTY including building plans and estate agents records
Trade and Industry	TRADE & INDUSTRY including business records
Transport Records	TRANSPORT including air, rail, road and vehicle registration records

We have also added new pages for any potential depositors. If you're taking the lockdown time to have a good clear out of the attic, the shed or the spare room and you find material you think might be acceptable for our collections, then please have a read through the pages <http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Depositing-Archives/DepositingArchives.aspx> compiled by archivists Carol, Helen and Pamela.



Our archivists are also working on some new pages for the guide to collections and on some of our Community Archives pages for parishes, villages and hamlets that haven't yet been completed. The full list of what has been done so far can be found here <http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/CommunityArchivesPages.aspx> This might be an interesting learning guide for anyone (young or old) who has found themselves

wanting to keep mentally active by learning something new whilst staying at home. If your local area is included, perhaps you can see whether anything listed on the pages can be spotted on your daily socially distanced walk.

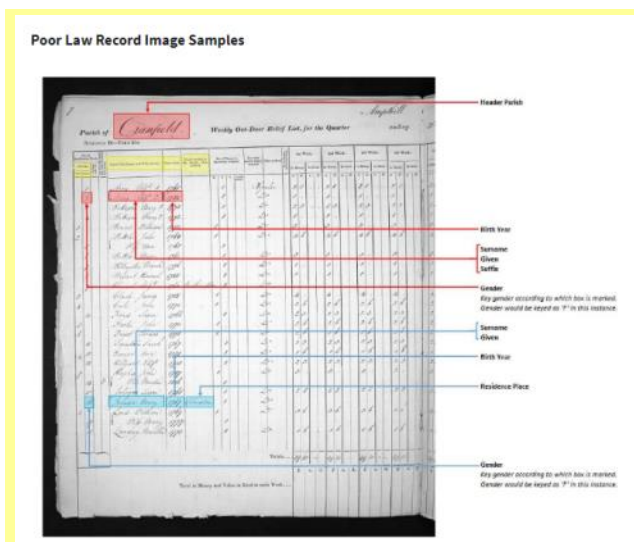
Our archivist Kathryn has been adding pages to the Community Archives pages including the roll of honour,

<http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Roll-of-Honour/Roll-of-Honour-1914-to-1918.aspx> and updating and adding to the Mayors of Bedford page <http://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityArchives/Bedford/BoroughofBedford/MayorsofBedford.aspx>.

Some of our cataloguing assistants have been adding to our online catalogues but this has not been easy to do remotely. As an alternative, they have been helping to index the poor law material from our collections licensed to Ancestry via the Ancestry World Archive project. We believe some of our volunteers and other people that we know have been doing this too, for which many thanks. Hopefully this will make that material available online in the near future. If you would like to help <https://support.ancestry.co.uk/s/article/Introduction-to-the-World-Archives-Project> gives the instructions to download the keying tool and get started. You don't need an Ancestry account; you can set up a guest account.

Finally we have been putting together this newsletter. You may have spotted that we have made a few changes to the layout. This is in response to a request from the Mayor of Bedford, who thought the layout needed a bit of an update, while recognising that the newsletter has to be something we can easily put together with in-house resources. This particular edition is longer than usual because of the Covid19 update and being only issued electronically but we will return to a 4 page layout in the summer. We welcome your comments.

We miss working with the archives, welcoming visitors to the office and dealing with enquiries from near and far however, we realise that archives are rarely needed urgently. At this unprecedented time we understand the importance of our staff being seconded to the council's Community Hub. This is an initiative set up by Bedford Borough Council (our host authority) to ensure that anyone who must remain at home until further notice due to their 'vulnerable' status, can access a service to provide their food shopping, medication and any other welfare needs including dog walking! Our staff will be working alongside many other council officers making calls and linking up those in need with volunteers who will do their shopping, dog walking, prescription collecting or anything else that they might need. This is a vital resource at this time and our staff are pleased to be able to help.



Example of page from a Bedfordshire poor law record on the Ancestry World Project blog showing what fields to index.

Conservation Corner

Z 153/41 Autobiography of Joyce Godber, 1980

In the last Newsletter we mentioned that the 20 year embargo on the manuscript of Joyce Godber's Autobiography had ended. It has since been in Conservation, where our aims have been to locate, understand and inhibit chemical degradation, also to repair and minimise further mechanical damage on handling so that the manuscript can be made safely accessible to researchers, without unduly changing the character of this unique item.

By Alison Faden, conservator

The typewritten script consists of a block of loose A4 paper, 158 paginated pages, mostly A4 white flimsy 'typewriter paper', additionally illustrated with many un-numbered pages of ephemera and appendices. The ephemera includes: original letters, paintings, drawings, photographs, press and botanical specimens as well as amendments and corrections on paper, all stuck in scrapbook style, using adhesive tape and/or gum glue. Many pages include handwritten annotations by the author. The loose pages are hole punched on left margin and fastened with treasury tags. The bundle is contained in a zipped cotton fabric patchwork portfolio, hand stitched by the author.



Mechanical damage:

- Tears and crush damage to pages, particularly at beginning and end of the manuscript

- Tearing caused by pages turning around the treasury tags lacing the punched holes
- Damage to pages caused by handling in proximity to heavy duty metal zip of the patchwork portfolio
- Flimsy paper not supporting the weight of adhered ephemera

The treasury tags were removed. Damaged paper was flattened and repaired as necessary throughout manuscript, using 5gsm Japanese paper to support weakened areas and 23gsm on the tears, all adhered verso with conservation grade starch paste.

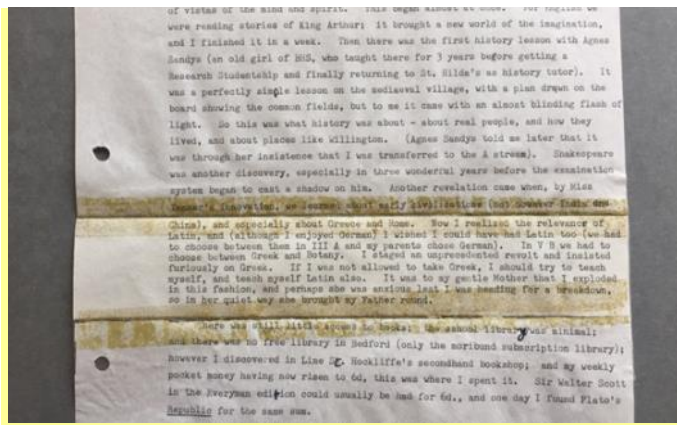
Where there were no author annotations on the backing sheet, ephemera was carefully removed, cleaned of adhesive tape and gum residues and remounted onto sturdier backing using Japanese paper hinges and starch paste. The new more robust backing also serves to protect adjoining pages from potential further discolouration.

The pages were housed in new protective four flap folders before being put back into the portfolio, thus protecting them from further damage caused by proximity to the heavy metal zip.

Chemical damage:

- Some of the ephemera stuck into the manuscript is exhibiting local chemical degradation for example botanical specimens, photographs, paintings
- Use of adhesive tape and gum glue throughout is causing local discolouration and chemical degradation

Adhesive tape consists of 2 layers, 'the carrier' - a plastic film, and the adhesive layer. In this case the 'carrier' was easy to remove (it is not always) but the adhesive



layer was much more difficult to deal with as it is chemically unstable and over time reacts with the paper beneath causing an irreversible chemical change - the classic 'sellotape effect' where the paper below becomes brown, transparent and brittle. As much of the adhesive residue as possible was removed and the paper was re-repaired with conservation grade materials (above).

Photographs:

A variety of 20th Century photographs are stuck into the manuscript, from professional hand printed black and white photographs of excellent quality to polaroid photographs most of which are already considerably faded. As most of them have been stuck onto the lightweight paper with gum glue and then been annotated by the author it was felt best to leave them as they are, with some silversafe interleaving to inhibit continuing chemical changes. The chemical instability inherent in polaroid photographs makes it particularly important to protect these items from UV light. A sensible option with fading

photographs is to make digital copies before they get any worse.

Paintings:

Most of the paintings in this collection are watercolours. The oily transfer onto the adjoining page (above) implies that this one may be an oil painting, although in other respects the pigment looks like acrylic or gouache. To be certain, we would need to carry out a destructive procedure involving taking samples. Interleaving with a protective barrier was felt to be the best solution in this case to inhibit further transfer of material potentially damaging to adjacent pages.

The portfolio:

The hand-stitched, cotton fabric, patchwork, portfolio lends much character to this item and in order to preserve this, and the fabric, a bespoke box was made to house all of the elements together (below), looking as far as possible as it did when it came into the archive.



Botanical specimens are very fragile and are causing local discolouration to the substrate (left).



Joseph Tall—pioneer, prisoner

One of the convicts depicted in a series of mugshots taken in Bedford Gaol has been identified as a pioneer in the use of concrete as a building material. His name is Joseph Tall, born in Ampthill in 1820. How he came to be serving a prison sentence for a crime he very possibly did not commit is a story unearthed by buildings historian David Scott Cowan.

Joseph Tall was descended from a long line of Bedfordshire builders, but he started out as a toolmaker and engineer in London, first making pliers to set saws, then taking out a series of patents in the 1850s for inventions such as woodworking planes, roller blinds, brooms and perambulators. These were praised by trade journals, but Joseph had difficulty in turning a good idea into a sound business, and he was regularly in and out of the insolvency courts. During that decade he also experimented with apparatus to build concrete walls for houses. By 1859 his patents had lapsed, and he returned to Bedford, where in 1861 he established the town's first steam-powered sawmill, originally sited on Queen's Head Lane, and later at Batts Ford. His advertisement in the *Bedfordshire Times* claimed that the results obtained by his new machinery were "far superior to any done by pit sawing", and his charges were "35 per cent under the old scales for deal cutting." And that is where things started to go horribly wrong for Joseph Tall.

He returned home one evening in January 1863 to find that his house and that of his next door neighbour had been broken into and ransacked. His neighbour found some silverware to be missing. Two days later, Tall discovered this bundled up and dumped at

his sawmill. To his dismay, he himself was arrested and charged with larceny. He pleaded not guilty. The court case aroused great excitement in Bedford, and the newspaper reports still today exude an atmosphere of high drama. Tall's defence ridiculed the prosecution's circumstantial evidence, suggesting instead that he had been fitted up by a group of disaffected pit sawyers put out of work by his mechanical sawmill, but the jury was having none of it: after a short deliberation they found him guilty, and he was sentenced to two years' hard labour in Bedford Gaol. His last words before being taken down were: "I am innocent."

By happy chance, his incarceration coincided with a project set up by the governor of the gaol, Robert Evan Roberts, to photograph particular convicted felons, and Tall was discovered to be among these records.



On his release in 1865 Tall patented his concrete-building apparatus, and for a while he was very successful. His pioneering work in this field has earned him a place in construction history, and modern-day historians are delighted that, thanks to an extraordinary set of circumstances and enlightened prison governor, we can now put a face to his name.

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

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