

Floods and Archives Don't Mix

Away from the office over Christmas, we watched anxiously as the Great Ouse burst its banks and Bedford saw the worst flooding since 1998. We were not concerned about the flood level reaching the archives we hold, as these are stored on the 4th floor of our building, but we were worried about all those people who might not be so lucky. However, water doesn't just come from floods, and here, our conservator, Alison Faden, looks at the importance of prevention and planning when protecting Bedfordshire Archives.

The smallest amount of water on archival materials can spell disaster. Wet paper goes pulpy and soaks up stains; parchment becomes slippery; inks and pigments run; photographs stick together; and bookbindings disintegrate.

To make things even messier, if archival materials stay damp for long, they become breeding grounds for mould growth. Even a small but constant drip could cause irreparable damage in an archive if it goes undiscovered.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE!

The design of our building took the risk of flooding into account—it's why we are on the top floors.

We monitor our building, paying particular attention to the flat roof, gullies, gutters, drains, water tanks and pipes.

The environment in our strong room is monitored constantly and regular checks are made for leaks.

High quality packaging protects our documents.



Should disaster strike, we have a plan for what should be done. It is a team effort and we carry out salvage training regularly, so that the team knows what to do in an emergency.

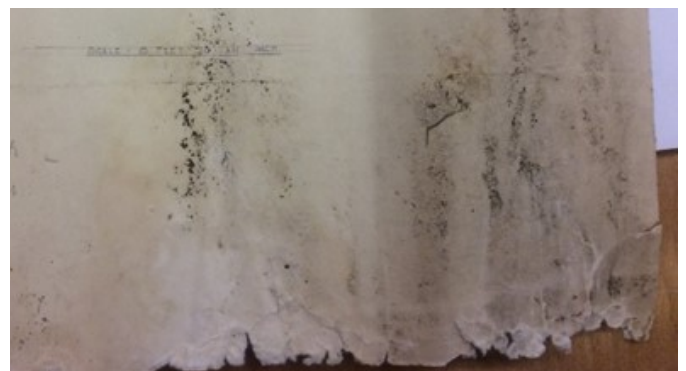
If water incursion is discovered, speed is of the essence. The source of the water is identified and dealt with. Standing water is removed; wet archival material is identified and removed from

the shelves; and dry archives are left in place if it is safe to do so, protected with plastic sheeting.

Wet material must be dried as quickly as possible. There are tried and tested techniques to minimise further damage to the variety of archival materials, all requiring different approaches. This is a specialist operation.

If there is too much archival material for the in-house team to deal with we may need to call in a professional salvage company for back-up. They have the resources and facilities, including giant freezers, to cope with very large numbers of boxes full of wet archives. Not all archival materials can be frozen, but freezing some of it temporarily, gives some breathing space in the race to get it dry before the mould develops.

Treating water/mould-damaged archives is a time-consuming, costly and highly specialised process. Far better to minimise the risk of it happening in the first place.



Historic mould and water damage to an architectural plan from The Franklin Deacon Briars Collection FDB1/18/667

New Additions to the Archives

In January each year The National Archives invite archive services to send a list of the additions to the collections that have been made in the previous calendar year. This is so that they can monitor trends in collecting; find out what public records have been transferred to places of deposit; and publicize where certain archives can be found. This has been a difficult year in very many ways but we have still been able to take in some new material and here, the county archivist, Pamela Birch, takes a look at a few of the additions to our collections in 2020.

Just before the beginning of the first lockdown, one of our archivists collected the archives of Heath Band. We believe this is the first collection belonging to a brass band that we have ever received. The band was formed in 1933 in Heath & Reach and is still going strong.



The archive consists of quite typical material for an organisation that brings people together for a common interest, that is then shared with others through performance. There are records of: how the band is run; the people who have belonged to it; the competitions they have entered; concerts and events at which they have played; and photographs. We are currently in the process of sorting and cataloguing the material, which has the reference Z1736.

In September we were notified of a few things coming up for auction. We rarely purchase items, but thanks to the donations from our researchers, we sometimes can if the price is right. We bid unsuccessfully for one item, but were surprised and delighted to hold the winning bids on two watercolour paintings by Thomas Fisher, now referenced Z1330/4/1-2.

Thomas Fisher (1782-1836) was an antiquarian and draughtsman in London. Knowing that the history of Bedfordshire had been little recorded, he decided to concentrate

his antiquarian interests on the county. He painted many views of Bedfordshire and produced two publications: *Collections Historical, Genealogical and Topographical for Bedfordshire*; and *Monumental Remains and Antiquities in the County of Bedfordshire*; in 1812-16 and 1828 respectively. He was supported in his efforts by Sir Gregory Osborne Page-Turner of Battlesden House and the provenance of the two watercolours recently purchased is recorded as being through the Page-Turner family.

One of the nice things about these watercolours is that they show particular houses. Fisher usually stated the name of the place at the bottom of the painting. This can be very useful although it can take a bit of investigation to find out where certain houses, known only by the name of their then owner, actually were.

M r s
S a n d y s '
house at
Eversholt
has been
identified as
a house that
still stands
today, but



the exact location of Mr Robert's house in Tebworth is a mystery. If you can help please let us know.

Another pictorial addition to our collections, Z1742/1, was received from Wales. It is a delightful photograph of the Gery Arms at Bushmead. Investigating the history of the pub, so as to catalogue it, revealed a tragedy.



The licensee of the pub was Charles Brightman. He is almost certainly the man in shirtsleeves to the left of the door. The woman standing to the right of the door is probably Charles' first wife, Rose. Charles and Rose took over the pub in about 1901, but in 1909 Rose died, as the result of suffering burns when a lamp she was extinguishing for the night exploded. A witness at the inquest reported 'She was wearing a thin silk blouse, which burnt like tissue paper.' Rose was removed to the County Hospital and Dr Best gave evidence that 'she was going satisfactorily for a time, but on Thursday evening the night sister reported that the patient was cold and not so well. He ordered her brandy, but at seven she was reported worse...' (Bedford Record 21/12/09). In 1910 Charles married again; he and his second wife went on to have nine children.

In October, we received a bundle of deeds, ref. Z1741/1. The deeds told the story of a piece of land and cottages in Clapham from 1822 to 1925. They included the will of John Campion, who left the cottages and other property to his five daughters. John had been a farmer, but by the time of his death in 1848, he had retired to Bedford and had quite a portfolio of properties. His will gives details of these properties, including a reference to one of his cottages in Oakley being used as a meeting house, thereby

extending our knowledge of nonconformity in the village.

The deed bundle arrived just as we were making our videos to relaunch our Community Histories pages and was given a starring role in our video on 'Using Deeds' as a source for local history, <https://youtu.be/rzpjvllmh7E>

The final large collection deposited in 2020, was X1033 - the business records of C A White, Builders and Contractors of Bedford. The company was formed in 1919 by Christopher A White and Thomas Conrad Eckstein. Sadly, Mr White died in February 1924. Mr Eckstein's new partner was Alexander 'Jock' Chrystal, father of Ian and Alexander 'Sandy' Chrystal. However, the company continued under the name of C A White.



Can you help fill gaps in our collections?

We want the archives that we hold to represent the diversity of the people of Bedfordshire. We rely on people offering us material for the archives and this often means that it is an official record, such as an admission register, which gives very little detail about the cultural background, beliefs and preferences of individuals. Some groups and communities create very few written records of their activities, whilst others prefer to keep their records within the community rather than depositing them with a public archives service. This makes it difficult to ensure that our collections reflect the diversity of the people connected with the county. Can you help us improve the situation? If you know of any personal or community group records that would tell us more about the diversity of Bedfordshire people, we would be very happy to hear from you.

Building in Bedford

Jean Gambold explains how two parts of the planning records for Bedford can now be searched via our online catalogue to increase our understanding of the way the town has developed.

c.1860 - 1948

Researchers who have used the pre 1948 Bedford Borough Building Plans (BorBP), will know that the only way to access them used to be via the handwritten index sheets and block plans kept in the searchroom. The index sheets were produced in about 1986 and run from the mid nineteenth century to around 1930, organised by street. The staff at that time made attempts to identify street numbers and sometimes added the architect's name.

PLAN/NO / DATE	DETAILS	FOR:
162B	Additions to ^{ENEXT TO 62} fence line	Mr. Bamfield
147/1-2. (1868)	House [NO 42 SINCE DEMOLISHED]	Miss Clark
346 (1871)	Additions to Two Houses [NO 192]	Mr. Meek.

Lockdown provided the opportunity to copy the index sheets onto the online catalogue. Although the information is still very top line, it is now possible to search by date, by street, by architect and by project owner (often a developer or builder, sometimes an individual house owner or company).

Searching by date, one can start to build a picture of how Bedford developed over the period as estates were released for building and who the key players were. Search for these by both 'subject' and 'person'. Mayor Joshua Hawkins with partner William Ashwell developed residences in streets between Clapham Road and Bromham Road. Thomas Spencer was involved all over the town as was Benjamin Litchfield. Builders Rootham & Jeakings were particularly active in Queen's Park. Architect EHC Inskip seems to have had a particular speciality in adding WCs to older properties.

..... and post 1978

The BorBPC collection comprises information and plans deposited by North Beds Borough Council and subsequently by Bedford Borough Council which allocate postal house numbers and postcodes to new developments and conversions. Postcodes are allocated, as phases are released for building (Not Yet Built, NYB) and so give an indication of the date of construction. The collection covers Bedford Borough and the parishes and includes many significant developments including at Elstow, Goldington, Norse Road, Great Denham, Wixams and Shortstown. Some conversion of old sites to flats and other new uses is also included.

For the period 1978-2010 information is on paper, but after that is in electronic form, so can be read directly from the catalogue. This is still work in progress for the period after 2010, especially for the parishes, but it is worth searching for specific addresses.



[P.S.] Transferring 4,666 BorBP entries to the catalogue was a collaborative effort. We learnt a lot, including how much work still needs to be done to open up the collection further. We are already considering how volunteers could help us with this when we are able to open to volunteers once more. *Pamela*

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Luton

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