

This edition focuses on the work of some of our volunteers, as several of their projects recently reached significant milestones. We would like to take this opportunity to record our appreciation to all our wonderful volunteers, past and present, for the work they do, the enthusiasm they bring and the support they give. Thank you all.

## SHUTTLEWORTH BILLS *by Alastair Grant*

In 2005 sacks containing thousands of fragile documents were discovered in the cellar of Shuttleworth House at Old Warden. In a poor condition they, were carefully dried out and deposited in 19 boxes with the County Archive. In 2019 I offered to help the Shuttleworth Trust try to understand the contents of the documents and at the same time catalogue them on the County Archives' system.



Where it all starts. Box 1 in progress.

The documents include bills and receipts from the Estate Office from the time Joseph Shuttleworth bought the Old Warden Estate from Lord Ongley for £150,000 in 1872. They range from major works to the smallest of expenses. The estate itself was completely transformed over 5 to 6 years following the purchase. The new mansion was built by William Cubbit & Co (as prime contractor) of Gray's Inn Road, London, for a total cost including architect's fees of £34,125. A local contractor, Samuel Foster of Kempston, built farm buildings and lodges for a further £2,367. Most of the several hundred thousand bricks required were supplied by William Love of Stonely near Kimbolton.

Some idea of the scale of the works to the grounds is given by an order from Peter Lawson and Son in Edinburgh. This included 8,000 Larch and 1,000 Spruce trees. The trees were shipped (literally) to London and then by rail to Biggleswade. A further order for 10,000 Larch seedlings followed. The activity involved in moving this amount of material must have

been extraordinary and completely transformed the landscape. All local transport was by horse and cart at a cost of 6 shillings and 6 pence per day.

Local businesses benefitted for many years. These included John Maythorn of Biggleswade who built and repaired horse drawn carriages. They also subsequently repaired and maintained the new 'Automobiles' when they were used in the early 1900s. David Daulby and Brothers, also of Biggleswade, maintained and renovated numerous properties on the estate including Mount Pleasant House.

Research also added detail to some of the vehicle exhibits on show at Shuttleworth today. The De Dietrich A1853 was known to be registered by Richard Shuttleworth in 1928. However, it is now known to have been on the estate in 1914 registered to Dorothy Shuttleworth.



copy

Particulars of Motor Cars for Inland Revenue Returns.

Letter & No. of Car.	A. 1853.	L.C.9639.	B.M.2181.	B.M.2040.
No. of Cylinders having a Single Piston.	4	4	6	4
Internal Diameter of Cylinder.	4	4 5/16.	3.9/16	3.1/8

The property of Mrs Shuttleworth.  
January 1914.

*Mrs. Repsch. No 2013.*

I have found working on these documents to be very interesting. I feel it is particularly important to have the original physical records stored safely for reference. The challenge is to extract the information and try to present it to a wider audience.

## REPACKAGING ABT – *Conservator Alison Faden interviews archive volunteers Helen and Linda about completing their 5-year long project.*

**Helen and Linda, please describe the ABT collection?**

ABT stands for ‘Archdeaconry of Bedfordshire Transcripts’. They are Bishops’ Transcripts, i.e. contemporary copies of parish registers. After 1598, all parish priests had to complete an annual copy of their parish register and send it to the Archdeacon for his records. Bedfordshire Archives’ collection of ABTs dates from 1602-1878.

Our project dealt with the pre-1812 ABTs, which covered 125 Bedfordshire parishes contained in 89 boxes. Estimated number of documents - 25,000.

This project began in April 2018 with a survey to determine the scope of the ABT collection, to help us to understand what we needed to do and to make a project plan. We identified the parishes, the condition of documents, the quality of the packaging (or lack of packaging!) and decided to start working with the ‘dirtiest and loosest’.

**What information is included in ABT?**

Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, giving names, date, residences, family details, occupations, plus the name of the Curate or Church Warden signing them off. But not all of those all of the time - some curates gave more details than others, and some curates had neater handwriting than others! It was also interesting to see the development of handwriting styles between 1602-1812.

**Tell us about writing materials and inks**

ABTs are made of parchment and written by hand in iron gall ink. We occasionally found paper documents. Also there was some re-used parchment - Linda noticed old parchment indentures that had been cut up, turned over and used for writing the ABT.

**What was the physical condition of the documents, typically?**

The size and shape of the documents varied widely - from long parchment rolls, to parchment and paper pages stitched together

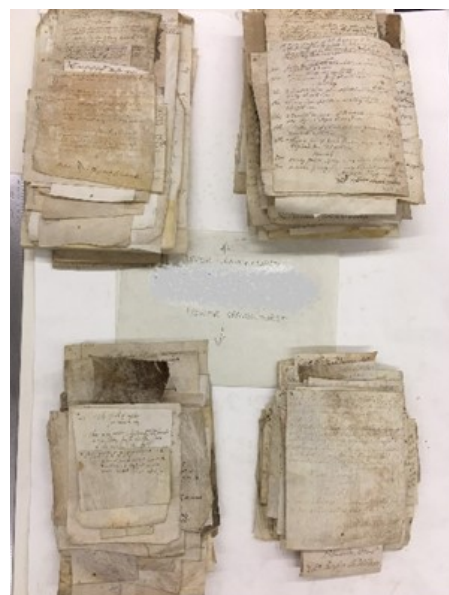


at one corner, to tiny parchment slips no bigger than 2x3 inches. The documents were folded to fit into bundles. Some historic damage was apparent such as crushing, mouse nibbles and sooty surface dirt, although some documents were perfectly clean depending on how well they had been stored. Some of them were wrapped in waxy fabric or brown paper parcels, some in more modern folders and some ‘loose and dirty’ as we called them.

**What did the work actually entail?**

Working on one parish at a time we started by sorting the documents into chronological order, noting the years present and those missing as we went along.

We flattened the documents under weights for a week or two before carefully surface cleaning each one with special conservation smoke sponges and brushes. We then packaged the bundles into stout four flap folders, which we made to size from heavy conservation grade paper. We also labelled each package, again noting any missing items in the package.



Finally, we listed everything onto a spreadsheet for later inclusion on the Bedfordshire Archives catalogue. Each parish took approximately 3-4 weeks to sort, clean, package and list onto our spreadsheet



When we got to the end of the main collection we found five boxes of documents labelled ‘duplicates’ and one box labelled ‘misc’. Some of these documents



were incomplete, e.g. missing the parish name so we set about trying to identify them.

By using the original Parish Registers plus other sources such as [www.bedfordshire-surnames.co.uk/glossary](http://www.bedfordshire-surnames.co.uk/glossary), or the index of rectors or curates names (FASTI/1), we were able to identify many of these previously unidentified documents.

In all, we were able to use 'duplicates' to replace missing documents in 93 of the 125 Bedfordshire parishes.

### **Any other interesting observations?**

Occasionally we found a parish sequence was broken, so we set out to find out why. For example we discovered that while the church at Souldrop was out of use in 1793-96, the congregation was moved to Knotting and records kept there instead. We recorded our discoveries, cross-referencing onto our spreadsheet to help future researchers.

Almost all of the records from 1777 were missing, and we never found out why! Other gaps in the collection were more understandable, for example during the upheavals of the English Civil War and The Interregnum 1649-1660.

We discovered that older Parish Registers marked the year from Lady Day to Lady Day (25<sup>th</sup> March) until 1752 when the year was marked from January to December.

### **I understand that you both found some of your own ancestors in the Bedfordshire ABTs ?**

Linda - I found records relating to my ancestors the Lords, the Childs and the Twelvetrees in Milton Ernest, Bletsoe, Yelden and Felmersham.

Helen - I found 16 Bedfordshire parishes with family connections going all the way back to 1538 when Parish Registers were introduced. I have used other archive sources to trace my family back on two lines to the late 1300s.

We have both successfully used the internet to research our family trees, but nothing beats the kick of seeing your ancestors name on an original document. There is a huge personal sense of connection when you find 300 year old relations getting married or christened or buried in a particular village.

### **Finally, Bedfordshire Archives clearly appreciates and benefits hugely from your time and your efforts as volunteers, but what do you get out of it?**

Friendship! We met through volunteering at Bedfordshire Archives years ago.

A sense of achievement, this project would not have been completed by now if we hadn't tackled it.

For posterity, Bedfordshire ABTs are better preserved for other researchers, a legacy to the place where we grew up and live.

A personal interest in family history developed into something wider. We were learning all the time, increasing our knowledge of social, church and local history. Not to mention our palaeography skills, and research skills. Our problem solving was tested and we developed new practical skills and methods as the project progressed.

## **BorBP Repackaging project 2022-23**

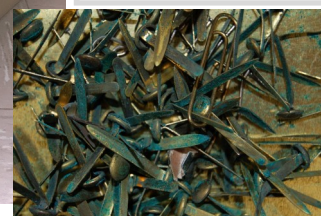
The repacking of 150 large boxes of building planning applications, submitted to Bedford Borough Council between 1864-1948, was recently completed by volunteers Becky and Phil.

This part of BorBP contains approximately 18,600 applications each consisting of several pieces usually held together by a brass butterfly clip. Groups of folded plans with their associated paperwork were originally tied in bundles, but it was not easy to tell at a glance what numbers a bundle contained and the search for the correct bundle caused wear to the plans. The repackaging project aimed to protect the bundles in four-flap enclosures, which could be easily written on to make retrieval and extraction of individual items easier and therefore reduce damage.



A completed box with bundles inside neatly packaged and labelled.

Inset—removal of the brass paperclips removed waxy verdigris and makes the documents easier to use.



## FIRST YOU NEED A PLAN, THEN YOU NEED WILL POWER!

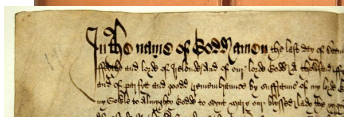
In 2014 Luton Museum deposited the collection of Franklin, Deacon and Briars, architects and surveyors of Luton with Bedfordshire Archives (reference FDB). Archive volunteers had done some preliminary listing of the plans for the museum in 1997-1999 but there was no opportunity for sorting and the descriptions were minimal so, when all of the plans were transferred to the office at Bedford, we felt they should be sorted, given proper references and a full catalogue description. Work began in 2015 and 3,224 items later, was finally completed in June 2023. Huge thanks are due to Frank Jackson, who worked on the



An FDB drawer opened at random.

collection from 2015-2020 and, more recently, Becky and finally Ellie.

A donation by Bedfordshire Family History Society enabled us to start creating item level entries on the online catalogue for the ABP/W collection of wills in 2018. We employed someone for a few weeks to kick start the project. This was important as the collection has 22,065 items. Volunteers: Cheryl, Sam, Chris and Gill, then continued - working backwards from 1857 to get to grips with layout and handwriting, before getting to the more difficult, early boxes. The end was almost in sight when the pandemic hit. After the pandemic Gill returned to the project and at Easter 2023 listed the last will. Having the basic, name, place



ABP/W boxes; extract of first will of 1536

and occupations on the online catalogue has had a real benefit and increased requests for access. Gill is now making the will registers, ABP/R, easier to use.

## FOR YOUR DIARY

13 Sept 2023



**Heritage Open Day at Luton Hoo Walled Garden 11am- 3pm**

Bedfordshire Archives are delighted to be joining the Luton Hoo Estate for their heritage open day when we will be telling stories uncovered during the cataloguing of the late medieval Luton title deeds we acquired earlier this year. Try out your skills at reading old handwriting and listen to tales of Leigh, ladies and landscapes.

**Admission free** - see <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting> for more details.

12 Oct 2023

**An introduction to palaeography, Bedfordshire Archives, Borough Hall, Bedford, 1-3pm**

“That looks amazing”.. But what does it actually say? Come along to this workshop and learn the basics to decipher and read historic handwriting using examples from Bedfordshire Archives. During the session, you will become familiar with recognising letterforms and learn strategies to deal with challenging documents.

**To book a place call 01234 228833 or email [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk)**

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