

Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service



Annual Report 2016/2017



Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service Annual Report, 2016/17

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Finance**
- 3. Staff**
- 4. Accommodation**
- 5. Collections**
- 6. Public Access**
- 7. Records Management & Deeds Registry**
- 8. For more information**

1. Introduction

Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service began in 1913 under Bedfordshire County Council. Since 1913 it has provided a public archives service and corporate records management for semi-current files for the county council and its successors - Luton Borough Council, Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council.

The service is hosted by Bedford Borough Council but serves the other two Bedfordshire unitary authorities under service level agreements.

2016/17 was a year rich in outreach and engagement (see pages 10-13 for details). However, the year began with the formal award of our Archive Service Accreditation by Jeff James, chief executive of The National Archives. This event provided an interesting first day of working at Bedfordshire Archives for our newly appointed archivist and the externally employed team of four digitisation technicians.



2. Finance

As a shared service our funding is drawn from all three unitary authorities of Bedfordshire based on population. The expenditure shown for 2016/17 does not include capital funds for map storage (see 3. below) or consultancy fees for development of software required as part of a corporate roll out of an electronic document management system, which were borne by Bedford Borough Council.

Account (T)	2013/14 Outturn	2014/15 Outturn	2015/16 Outturn	2016/17 Outturn	2017/18 Initial forecast*
Employees	£393,782	£365,270	£362,046	£346,546	£350,000
Transport Related Expenditure	£310	£364	£605	£515	£500
Supplies and Services	£13,406	£20,437	£14,790	£13,560	£13,550
Records Management	£79,979	£94,097	£76,303	£84,928	£85,000
Total Expenditure	£487,477	£480,168	£453,744	£445,034	£449,050
Customer and Client Receipts	£24,485	£33,323	£20,436	£29,997	£28,600
National Cataloguing Grant	£19,500	-			
East of England Regional Archives Council grant		500			
Total Income	£43,985	£33,823	£20,436	£29,997	£28,600
Net expenditure	£443,492	£446,345	£433,308	£415,037	£420,450
<u>Contributions</u>					
Luton Borough Council	£45,452	£42,578	£41,925	£38,835	
Luton Cultural Services Trust	£116,877	£109,487	£107,809	£98,546	
Central Bedfordshire Council	£195,088	£182,477	£182,405	£166,732	
Bedford Borough Council	£86,075	£111,803	£101,169	£110,923	
Total contributions	£443,492	£446,345	£433,308	£415,037	
<u>Accommodation contributions</u>					
Luton Borough Council	£16,363	£16,854	£16,854	£16,854	
Luton Cultural Services Trust	£42,044	£43,305	£43,305	£43,305	

3. Staff

Early in 2016-17 we welcomed Clare Davison and Esther Bellamy as learning officer and full-time archivist, respectively.



We also said goodbye to Ravinder Teji, who moved to take up a position at Bedford Borough Council's customer care centre. The full-time position of reader support assistant, which Rav had occupied, was removed from our service's establishment in October as part of the restructuring of the Democratic and Registration Services department. We have compensated for this in part by increasing the hours of the part-time reader support assistant and recruiting three casual reader support assistants to provide cover during periods of particular need.



Later in the year our record assistant, Elzbieta Pawlowska left to take up a position in the private sector and we welcomed her replacement, Kavita Leal to the records management team.

We continued to support staff with in-house training and development opportunities and when possible and appropriate attendance at external courses. We were very pleased to see articles written by archivist Rachel Bates and former archivist, Alex Healey, published in ARC, the magazine for the Archives & Records Association. Rachel wrote about running the *Weaving Narratives* project while Alex reflected on one of the things she learnt after joining us as a newly qualified archivist – the usefulness of 'an openness to the unexpected and the ability to adapt.'

Work experience

One undergraduate and one year-10 student gained work experience in the service, exploring archives as a career choice. One post-graduate from Canada, sponsored by a local rotary club, spent six weeks working part-time with our service and part-time with The Higgins.

Volunteers

Over the year 22 volunteers worked on a variety of projects for us, including:

- Cataloguing the Chrystal postcard collection (Z1306), George Kent (GKL), Brown & Merry Bedford (BMB), Charter Design Partnership (CDE) and Franklin, Deacon & Briars (FDB)
- Data entry into our online database of Bedford Gaol registers.
- Cleaning and repackaging, particularly in preparation for digitisation and of Townswomen's Guild scrapbooks and Richardson & Houfe photograph albums and Bedford Hospital maternity registers.
- Numbering, checking and cataloguing the marriage licence bonds and allegations collection, (ABM).

Thanks are due to all our volunteers and placements for their work during the year giving us approximately 3,000 hours of their free time.

4. Accommodation

The Service occupies two floors of the Riverside Building Borough Hall, designed in the mid 1960s and our home since May 1969.

Accommodation remains our biggest challenge and this was recognised in the key findings and required actions of the Archive Service Accreditation panel.

‘Recent investment in the building has improved the storage conditions in the repository area, but storage capacity remains an issue for the archive service, particularly for ongoing collections development and satisfactory care of all collections held at Bedfordshire Archive Service.

Any redesign of the public facing and back office accommodation is limited by the nature of the building. Current accommodation is adequate in space but awkward in layout, which will pose challenges for the archive service in terms of ongoing development of on site services.

Required/improvement?

Requirement number(s) to which it relates

Details

1 Required action

1.4

Continue seeking solutions - short term, medium term and long term - to increase storage capacity in PD5454 compliant accommodation.’

During early 2017 we were able to increase our flat map storage with the addition of a number of new drawer units.

For the medium term we have been discussing options for off site storage with our property department.

For the longer term we have been considering possible sites for the relocation of the service, while recognising that this would require substantial external investment.



5. Collections

New Accessions

119 new accessions were received this year (approx. 80 large boxes or 2.0 m³). Although this was more separate deposits than in 2015/16 most of them were quite small (less than three boxes), which is fortunate given our lack of storage space. However, small deposits can take an amount of time to process disproportionate to their historic importance and we have made efforts to improve how depositors work with us to streamline the processing by completing paperwork for us ahead of the handover of the deposit.

Deposits included:

Parish deposits from Leighton Buzzard, Bletsoe, Carlton, Southill, Clifton, Meppershall, Dunstable, Studham and Luton St Francis

Bedfordshire

- Royal British Legion (X1008)
- Bedfordshire County Council social services files (SS)

Bedford

- Kempston Rovers FC minutes (X1011)
- Bedford Choral Society (X817)
- Bedford Borough Council (BorB)
- Bletsoe parish council (PCBletsoe)

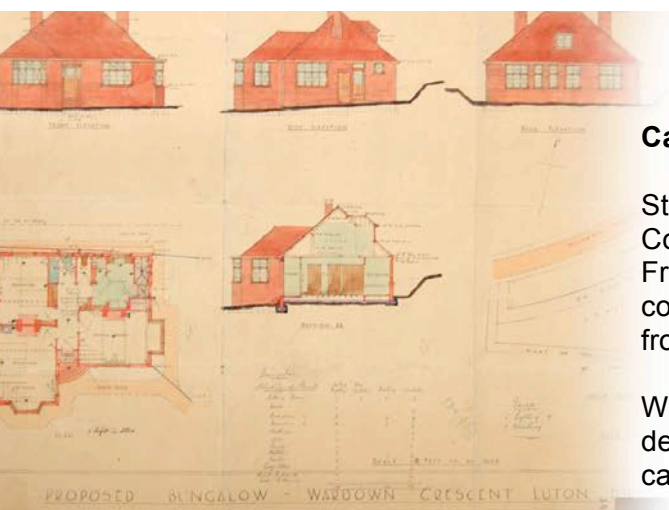
Central Bedfordshire

- Langford St Andrew's Drama Club (Z1654)
- Clifton deeds (WE)
- Brewers Hill Middle School (SDDunsBH)
- Ampthill Town Council (TCAmphill)

Luton

- Warden Hill School (SDLutonWH)
- Leasiders Folk Dance Club (Z1646)

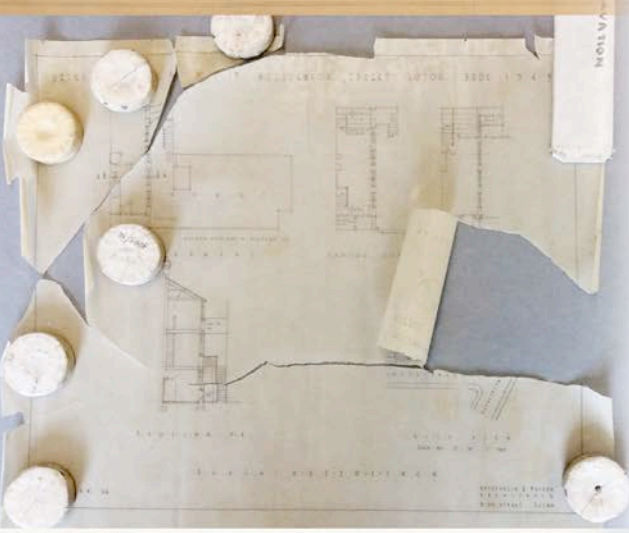




Cataloguing

Staff and volunteers catalogued 7,134 documents in 133 different collections. These included: Bedfordshire County Council social services files, Tom Lawson's Leighton Buzzard collection, George Farr of Luton, Franklin, Deacon & Briars of Luton, Bedford Training College and Bedford Choral Society. In spite of continuing to receive new accessions we were able to reduce the bulk of the backlog awaiting cataloguing from 22.588 m³ to 22.38 m³ (approximately 9 large boxes).

We continue to catalogue and index material to the highest international standard so researchers can decide whether they need to see the original. Catalogues appear immediately on our online public access catalogue <http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk>



Conservation

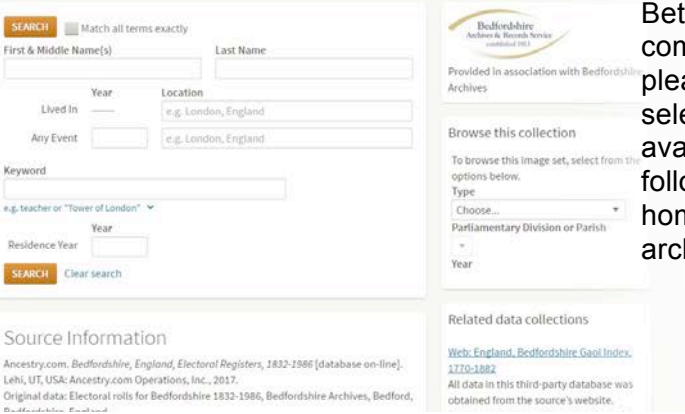
The benefits of having a dedicated member of staff for conservation and two volunteers working on cleaning and repackaging was again reflected in this year's figures for conservation. 2,455 items received attention compared to 1,501 items the previous year. This included 609 items reviewed prior to digitisation by an external company.

The reader support officer on document production continued the implementation of the repackaging programme as part of their background tasks.



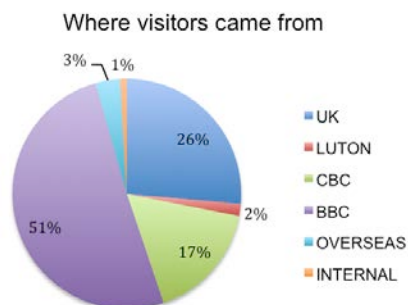
Digitisation

Between May and October 2016 digitisation technicians from one of the major digital publication companies worked at the record office to digitise five collections from our holdings. The team were a pleasure to work with and the project went well and finished slightly ahead of schedule. The collections, selected for being name rich sources suitable for the family history audience, will be much more easily available than ever before. The first of the collections is due to be published in early April 2017 with the rest following during the summer and autumn. People will be able to access the material online from their own homes by paying a subscription or they will be able to access them for free via the computers at the archive service.



6. Public Access

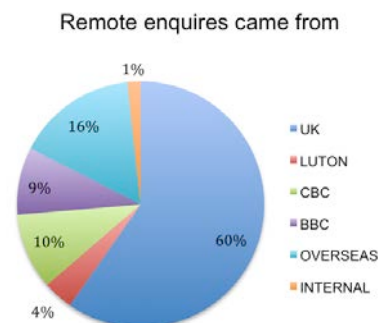
In common with other record offices we are experiencing new trends in public access. Visitor numbers were again down on the previous year – 1,485, against 1,823 visitors in 2015/16. The number of documents retrieved from the stacks was 16,073 (this figure includes approximately 4000 volumes retrieved for digitisation).



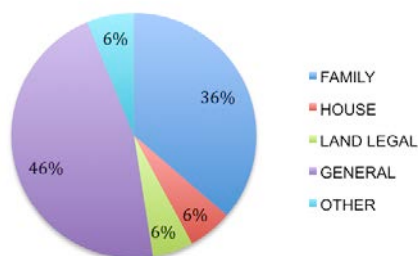
The system for visitor bookings continues to develop; we have started to investigate software for online booking. Booking enables us to manage our resources better, provide a personal and well prepared service for the visitor and keep visitors informed of any issues that may affect their visit or research. In September we introduced a new signing in procedure to ensure compliance with data protection.

Staff answered 1,212 enquiries that required detailed advice or research. 96% were answered within two working days of receipt. Our target is 95% within 2 working days. 87% of our remote enquiries come to us by e-mail. This makes it increasingly difficult to establish the location of the

sender, which explains the continued increase in UK over Bedfordshire based enquiries over the last few years, but also means that many enquiries are extremely brief and unclear. We intend to introduce an online enquiry form in early 2017/18 in the hope of gathering better information from at least some of our enquirers thereby cutting down the time spent clarifying exactly what is being asking for.



Subject of research



Family History research showed another decline down to 36% from 40% in 2015/16.

We seek and listen to people's views and monitor and respond to feedback. This year we received 5 pieces of negative feedback. Four of these related to the same incident of a data breach of our newsletter mailing list. Everyone involved was notified and received an apology. Staff training was undertaken to avoid a similar incident in the future. The other negative feedback related to an off-site visit and was dealt with immediately to the satisfaction of the complainant and staff training undertaken. We received many positive comments but only 3 that gave sufficient detail to make them worthy of logging. Comments included: 'Thank you for such an efficient & helpful service. I accomplished a day's research in a few hours' and 'thank you once again for your invaluable help which made for a very memorable visit to Bedford.'

We took part in a national survey of visitors the results of which were published in early 2017. Our overall rating on a scale of 1-10 was 8.7, (national average was 9.28). As usual staff rated very highly but we were let down by the appearance, access and facilities of the building. 85% of our respondents said their visit had improved their knowledge, 20% had gained skills, 59% understood their community better, 78% enjoyed themselves and 66% felt inspired to research more. 54% had used online sources to prepare for their visit (national average 47%). Comments included: 'I think this is the fastest archive I've ever visited (and I've been to many)' and 'a relief after several weeks of frustration...I came home thrilled.'

Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service



The Bedfordshire Record Office, as it was formerly known, was established in 1913 by Dr George Herbert Fowler (left) and was the first County record office in England. We hold the archives for the County dating from 1166 to the present.

On-line presence

The decrease in physical visits to the service is counter balanced by the use of our service on-line. The number of page views of our website totalled 307,879 the decrease on the previous year being as a result of a change of webhosting during the year. The gaol database, which can be accessed via *Ancestry*, received 49,008 views. Our online catalogue had 249,183 views.

We have:

- Our website, of general information, guides to sources, on-line newsletters, exhibitions and our community archives pages.
- Our programme of adding detailed local material to the website this year added information for the parishes of Bolnhurst, Eversholt, Houghton Conquest, Keysoe, Steppingley and Tempsford. Further pages were added for Luton. In September we began to recruit volunteers to assist us with the compilation of community archive pages of our website and a small team of volunteers are enthusiastically researching parishes of their choice.
- Our online public access catalogue. At the end of the year 91.7% of our catalogues were available online.
- Twitter @BedsArchives. This is used to highlight events and developments and has enabled informal first contact, which we have then been able to build on more formally.
- YouTube Channel BedfordshireArchives. We launched this channel to enable people to interact with our centenary exhibitions and have added videos to help people understand our work and some relevant for people thinking of visiting the service.
- Facebook page. This is another way of highlighting events and developments within the service. It has been good to receive positive feedback on the service via our social media.
- Our database of 19th century gaol registers. This has continued to grow. There were 50,349 entries at the year-end.
- World War One commemorative blogs and Twitter feed telling stories of life on the home and service fronts.

Home > Community and living > Archives and records service > Community archives > Flitton School

Flitton School



The Church Hall October 2010

A directory of 1864 mentions that Mrs. Ann Wheeler was school mistress in the village and it seems likely that this is the first reference to a daily infants' school which must, therefore, have commenced between 1847 (as no such school is mentioned in the national church school survey) and 1864. It probably met in the building later used as the infants' school which is now the church hall on the

Centenary Year!

system - the perfect present!

Hall, Bedford.

er.com/#!/BedsArchives for pages and events.

Bedfordshire Archives Service Catalogue

INTRODUCTION SEARCH RESULTS DETAILS SELECTION SEARCH HISTORY

Advanced search

Search in Archives

Advanced search

Expert search

Person/institution

Subject term

Archive creator

Word(s) from the title / content



Bedfordshire Archives and Records Service

Bedfordshire Gaol Register



1 gaol registers held by the Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS). Level of detail varies from some of the following details of the criminal: name, age, hair colour, height, crime, dates of committal and trial, release, death, transportation etc. The database presently covers the period between 1801 and 1879 (with gaps). Our aim is to add the details from all the surviving County Gaol and House of Correction registers held at BLARS for a total of 35,000+ entries.

You must complete at least one field. Gaol records will be matched against the exact spelling of the criteria entered. If

PLUS:

n:	<input type="text"/>	Year To:	<input type="text"/>
ie:	<input type="text"/>	Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
iest):	<input type="text"/>	Age (latest):	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	Trade or Occupation:	<input type="text"/>
n:	<input type="text"/>	Birth Country:	<input type="text"/>
e Town:	<input type="text"/>	Residence County:	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>	Sentence:	<input type="text"/>
y:	<input type="text"/>	How Disposed:	<input type="text"/>
iaol:	<input type="text"/>	Document Ref:	<input type="text"/>

Search Reset

A Sandy Soldier at Ypres



Sandy Market Place [Z1306/99]

Tuesday 30th March 1915: 7163 Private Oscar Emery of B Company, 1st Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment is currently with his unit in the front line near Ypres. He tells us: "We are now doing 60 hours in the trenches instead of 48. The trenches are fairly good. There are some old houses but behind the line they are broken down by German shells and are



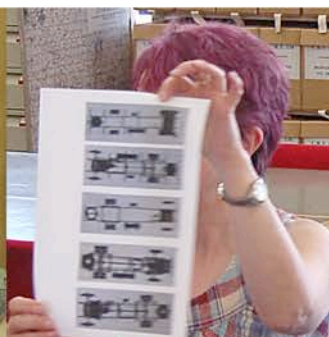
Weaving Narratives

Led by archivists, Rachel Bates and Kathryn Faulkner, and based on an idea previously run in Hertfordshire, this project invited people to be inspired by our collections to produce textile art.

Twenty-three people rose to the challenge and produced a fantastic range of work. They included amateur and professional textile artists as well as a staff member who couldn't resist!

A series of three workshops introduced participants to the work of the archive service and its holdings, enabled more exploration of the records chosen as inspiration, and, finally, gave the group a chance to show what the records had inspired them to do.

The sources and techniques were equally varied. Clockwise from top left: Dunstable Middle Row in reversed applique, Bedford market and floral hall in embellished painted fabric, crime & punishment in various techniques, Bedfordshire lace in lace, In Memoriam of Elizabeth Snitch in embroidery, Leighton Buzzard in cross stitch, women's mental health in raised work and transfer print, Bedford castle and bridge in printed fabric and needle felt, Meltis Newberry Fruits in crochet and lace, Cardington Mill in needle felt, Commer cars factory Luton in block printing and dressmaking, Bedford Hospital tiles in beading and embroidery, the iconography of weddings in fabric printing, Britannia Ironworks in needle felt and Ampthill workhouse diets in Smyrna cross stitch.





602 people attended the exhibitions, during a total of 9½ days. We collaborated with members of Bedford Camera Club to have most pieces photographed to produce postcards, which were sold at the exhibitions. The exhibition at Borough Hall was timed to coincide with Heritage Open Days and also offered behind-the-scenes tours of the archive service; 63 people took the tours. At the very end of March 2016 hanging pieces went on exhibition at Bedford Hospital's Bluebell gallery for 12 weeks.

Outreach

Staff gave 11 talks to external groups with a total attendance of 420. In the autumn of 2016 we ran a series of five talks at Leighton Buzzard library and five at Flitwick library in Central Bedfordshire. The talks were a combination of talks previously given at other venues and new talks.

Meanwhile at the office we ran a series of five workshops sponsored by the Bedfordshire Local History Association. The workshops were aimed at local history groups and covered: archive collecting basics, copyright, data protection, digitising and recording new communities with techniques such as oral history.

6 groups visited the office either as part of their regular programme of meetings or for training sessions to help group members use the archive service for research projects.

We mounted three exhibitions on the theme of urban growth. This theme was chosen to celebrate two significant anniversaries in the county during 2016. The first exhibition, *Knowledge and Industry: 140 years of Luton Borough*, was followed by *Royal Towns of Central Bedfordshire* and then *Bedford Borough - Signs and Symbols*. Our theme for 2017 is *Thinking of You* and we began with an exhibition called *Thinking of You – With Love*, which ran from January – March. A newsletter article and a free lunchtime talk supplemented each exhibition.

Items from our collections were lent to The Higgins, Bedford for their Simplex exhibition and to the Yale Center for British Art at New Haven, Connecticut, USA for the exhibition *Spreading Canvas*. An image of the item from our collection is also included in the very impressive exhibition catalogue (right).

This year we took part in the Bedford High Street Showcase day in June and Love Bedford Day in early July. At both events we successfully concentrated on a game that celebrated 850 years since the granting of a royal charter to Bedford. The charter is one of the oldest documents held by our service.

We worked with the Bedford art group of *Carers in Beds* who produced art pieces inspired by items in our collections on the theme of Bedford. An exhibition was held at Borough Hall in November.

2016/17 saw the final year of our three-year Heritage Lottery funded Learning Officer project. This year concentrated on Central Bedfordshire schools and we were happy to welcome groups from Husborne Crawley Lower and Wootton Upper School. However we also welcomed pupils from Rushmoor School in Bedford and the learning officer worked with schools throughout the county. The project also launched an interactive computer game based on Bedford in World War Two and ran an extremely successful creative writing competition for short stories and poems inspired by documents from our collections.





A young visitor to the High Street Showcase searches for clues as to which 12th century document is the Bedford Borough Charter granted by Henry II 850 years ago.

University of Bedfordshire students on a group visit were given a real life task to tackle – using the interior design skills they are learning to decide a possible solution to the archive service's need for more space.



Two of the Carers in Beds art group working on their pieces inspired by a picture of the bandstand and an advertising brochure from the Meltis collection.



Carers in Beds exhibition private view in the council suite, Borough Hall Bedford. Carers were thrilled to see their work on display and to discuss their inspiration with other guests.

7. Records Management & Deeds Registry

The Records Management team have continued their vital work in receiving consignments, managing the storage, retrieval, and when appropriate the transfer or destruction of semi-current internal records of the three funding authorities, including shared ex-Bedfordshire County Council consignments. The team can be contacted by telephone on 01234 228923 or by e-mail at records.management@bedford.gov.uk

The team concentrated on stocktaking files that had been out to departments for a long time. This has resulted in the return of many files and enabled other files to be removed from the system.

In June 2016 we were required to relocate the RM team and material stored on the 3rd floor of Borough Hall due to office moves and the formation and relocation of Bedford Borough's own registrar's office. The team worked hard having to meet a tight deadline and to deal with complications caused by teams having to rethink their retention and scanning policies in order to reduce the need for paper storage in their new accommodation.

The number of boxes received totalled 3794: Bedford Borough Council: 1013; Central Beds Council: 198; Luton Borough Council: 602; shared: 84.

361 boxes were securely destroyed during year having reached the end of their retention period.

The number of files requested totalled 1,220, with 570 relating to Bedford Borough Council holdings, 532 to Central Beds Council, 101 to Luton Borough Council, 17 to Shared services.

The service runs a deeds registry of title deeds, agreements, leases etc. for Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council. During 2016/17 531 items were accessioned for Bedford and 677 for Central. 2,930 deed packets and files were requested back by departments during the year (52% related to Bedford Borough). 2,755 files were returned by departments.

8. For more information

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