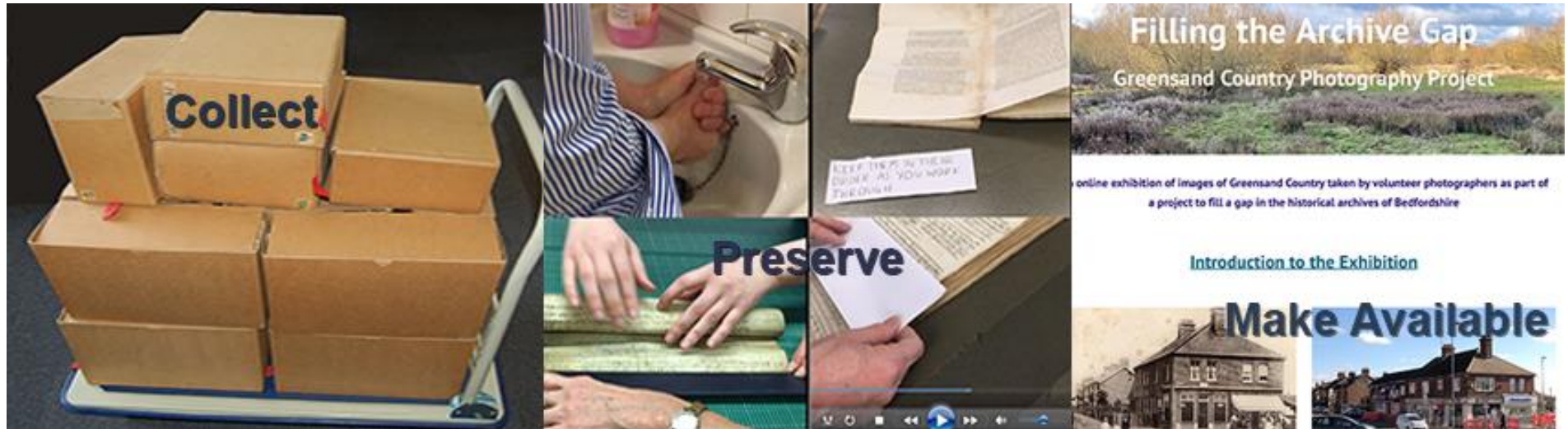


Bedfordshire Archives



Annual Report 2021/22





Bedfordshire Archives Annual Report, 2021/22

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1. Introduction

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

The year 2021/22 saw some major changes to the service. Under ongoing restructuring of Bedford Borough Council, Bedfordshire Archives joined the Environment directorate as part of the suite of cultural services while the Records Service joined the new Corporate Services directorate. This splitting of the previously integrated service created a number of challenges and the archives service continued to provide some seconded support to the records service. The archives service only had the capacity to do this due to continued restriction on opening caused by the pandemic. The archives opened to visitors on 12 April, the earliest possible date under government restrictions, with the safety measures of: masks, social distancing and hand-washing in place to provide a safe working environment for staff and visitors.



Bedfordshire Archives is hosted by Bedford Borough Council but serves the other two Bedfordshire unitary authorities under service level agreements. The service became accredited under the national archive accreditation scheme in 2016. To retain accredited status a full reapplication is required six years post award and this reapplication was submitted in March 2022; the results of the assessment will be known in summer 2022.

2. Staff

As well as saying a fond farewell to the records service team in July we said goodbye to one of our full-time archivists; we welcomed their replacement, Tom Larner, in November.

In March we said goodbye to one of our part-time cataloguing assistants, Nicky King, who moved on to a job elsewhere.

Our part-time archivist, Kathryn Faulkner, retired at the very end of the year. Kathryn had been with us for nearly 11 years, first as a cataloguer on the Paths to Crime project and then, from 2012, as an archivist.



Work Experience and Volunteers

In the summer we were delighted to be able to welcome back some of our volunteers, who we had not seen since the beginning of the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly a few volunteers had gained new commitments and interests since we last saw them in March 2020 and decided not to return; we thank them for their past help and wish them well in their new ventures. Some volunteers were not yet ready to return but hope to come back in future. Four new volunteers started with the service towards the end of the year. By the end of the year our volunteers had contributed 1,064 hours to the service.

We provided two-week work experience placements to two people considering a career in archives. One of these people has remained with us as a volunteer; she begins her post-graduate archivist training at university next autumn.

Over the year volunteers worked on:

- Translating manor court rolls for Leighton Buzzard.
- Providing content for our community archive webpages on Carlton and Chellington.
- Repackaging various collections.
- Ongoing cataloguing of: ABM, ABP/W, BTNeg, FDB, QSR, X928.



Since returning volunteer Phil has weeded and repackaged 9,000 35mm slides from the former Bedfordshire County Council Planning department.

3. Accommodation

Although our building has served us well for over 50 years, accommodation remains our biggest challenge and this was recognised in the key findings and required actions of the Archive Service Accreditation panel in 2016.

‘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.

Required/improvement?	Requirement number(s)	Details
1 Required action	1.4	Continue seeking solutions - short term, medium term and long term - to increase storage capacity in PD5454 compliant accommodation.’



At the very end of the year we began to move some boxes to an out store belonging to The Higgins, which had some spare capacity. The boxes moved are all of collections on restricted access due to data protection legislation, making more room on site for records likely to get regular use.



4. Collections

New Accessions

58 accessions were received during the year. This included more than 80 marriage registers closed due to the introduction of the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act on 4th May 2021.

Deposits included:

- Bedfordshire Federation of Women's Institutes (X939)
- E P Rose/Debenhams (X679)
- Bedford Rambling Club (X1036)
- Farming records of Great Barford (Z1750)
- Smith & Carpenter Ltd Kempston (Z1759)
- Prints from the estate of the late Richard Wildman (Z160)
- W H Allen training officer's scrapbook (Z1768)
- Keysoe parish records (P48)
- Little Staughton Parish Council (PCLittleStaughton)
- Consolidated definitive map and statements for North Bedfordshire (UB/Lei/RW)
- Ampthill & District Preservation Society (X1000)
- Dunstable Town Council (BorD)
- Flitwick Parish Council (PCFlitwick)
- Clophill and Stondon Parish Councils (PCClophill; PCStondon)
- Sutton parish church and parish council (P123; PCSutton)
- Ampthill, Millbrook and Steppingley parish records (P30; P95; P82)
- Marston Moretaine parish church (P41)
- Leighton Buzzard parish church (P91)
- Aspley Guise war memorial committee (PCAspleyGuise)
- Jane Cart Trust, Dunstable (X699)
- Christchurch Bushmead parish records (P162)
- Luton Borough Council minute books (BorL)

We welcome new material that meets our collecting policy and we are particularly keen to receive material that reflects all the communities and diversity of the county and fills gaps in our collections.





Cataloguing

26,579 catalogue entries were added to the online database. 15,533 of these were for the Bedfordshire Quarter Sessions 1724-1829, which were added by those staff working from home. The original early 20th century catalogue, which is on The National Archives' Discovery, is not always easy to use due to abbreviations. During transfer to our online catalogue discrepancies have been corrected. Now the catalogue for the Quarter Sessions 1724-1901 can all be found via our online catalogue. Volunteers also started to catalogue the post 1901 QSR collection.

Catalogue entries were added to 70 different collections. New cataloguing included: Bedfordshire County Council Social Services and County Architect's records; Dunstable Local History Society collections including AC-Delco staff magazines (Z1362); Dunstable Town Council (BorD); photographs by John Cushion (Z1758); Millbrook parish records (P95); Hobourn of Woburn solicitors (HN11).

Catalogues are published on our online public access catalogue <http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk>



Conservation

716 items passed through the conservation studio (33 volumes, 9 maps, 481 documents, 51 illustrations, 142 bespoke enclosures). Repackaging projects were undertaken on parts of 10 different collections.

In October the air conditioning system for the main document storage developed a fault. Fortunately, due to the mild winter and the insulation of the building, the cooling/heating could be turned off without causing any problems. With the assistance of the National Conservation Service, to which we subscribe, we began collecting more environmental data on one of the other areas in which we store archives to see if any improvements are needed to ensure the safety of the archives.

In January staff training sessions were held on: disaster recovery, document handling, and pest monitoring. The training included staff making a series of short training videos on the best way to handle particular document formats.

Digitisation

In June Ancestry uploaded the indexes to images of our Poor Law collections 1834-1916 and usage went up from 588 views in May 2021 to 22,573 in June 2021, showing the importance of indexing. From May 2021 to March 2022 there were 162,149 views of these records.

Digitisation of collections produces digital files that need to be looked after. Over the spring and summer archivist Helen Bates undertook the National Archives' digital preservation peer mentoring scheme and, with the help of her mentor, looked at how we would implement a commercial digital preservation system. Procuring and installing a new system is a long process requiring the support of other departments in the council, but Helen's work (and mind-numbing spreadsheets) has helped to narrow the bewildering amount of information down to two or three possible options which we hope to take forward in 2022/23.

C	D	E	F	G	H
			Product		
	Preservica	Arkivum Perpetua (User Arkivumatic - Link to video below is from University of Westminster in 2017 which uses Arkivum Perpetua. Useful in explaining how Arkivum Perpetua and Arkivumatic work together (just 20 minutes); later video useful for workflows for digitized records (2020/2021))	Arkivumatic	ArchivesDirect (Done Arkivumatic)	Libraris (Done)
ded	X - Amazon S3, Glacier Optional backup includes Microsoft Azure, Envorox. Can also set up a hybrid	X - UK based two locations	N - Integrates with Arkivum	X - via Directcloud	X - no direct cloud
eration	X	X	X	X	X
ork	X	X	X	X	X
entification	X	X	X	X	X
Access Restrictio	X - Done through Access Portal		X - Done through Access portal		
ant	X	X	X - strategy to normalise rather than migrate		
to or similar	X	X - ISO 9001:2015, ISO 27001:2017	N		
Security of standard	X	X	X		
stated/preservation	X	X - ESCROW	N	X	X
ig	X			X	
ervation of disk im	X			X	
other	X - (Assed Adls - would need to investigate requirements further)		X - but not Adls	No	
with cataloguing soft					

5. Public Access

We reopened to visitors as soon as we were able to with strict measures in place to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The number of visits to the office was 397, a significant rise on the 59 of the previous year. 116 of our visitors were carrying out research for work e.g. land use surveys, and 54 for academic study e.g. PhD thesis.

The number of documents retrieved from the stacks for visitors and enquiries was 9,094 (2,157 in 2020/21).

Staff answered 1,075 enquiries that required detailed advice or research (compared with 1,055 in 2020/21). We continue to encourage people to use our website and search our catalogue before contacting us.

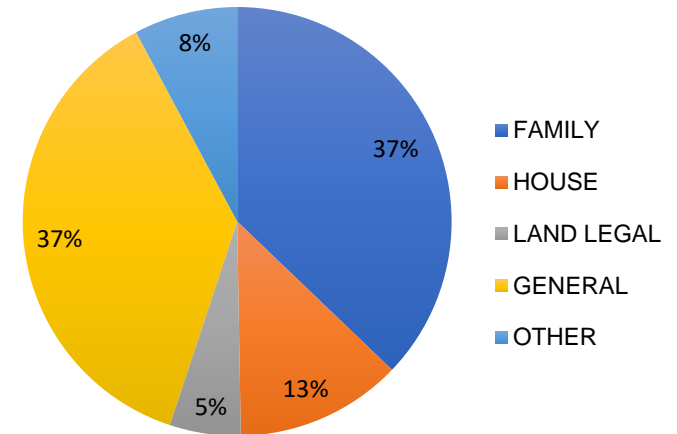
We seek and listen to people's views and monitor and respond to feedback.

Fortunately, we only received 4 negative comments. Recorded feedback included:

- Difficulties of using the online catalogue (3) and how good the catalogue is (3) one person who we gave advice to after they had first struggled with the catalogue responded 'Thankyou, that was very helpful, a very full archive once you know how to get into it!'
- Inaccurate information regarding parking (1) – we investigated and updated our website.
- Enjoyment of online events (2) including 'I am glad I managed to join in from Malta, thanks to the wonders of Zoom!'
- Efficient service (5)
- Quality of education pack written for school 'These are excellent!'
- Quality of research – 'Excellent piece of work'
- Positive depositor experience (3) including 'I have shared your list with a number of colleagues and they are impressed with your service', 'I am delighted with the work you have done and hope the material is of interest to some of your researchers'.
- Work experience (2) 'I've learnt so much from all of you', 'Thank you all for being so welcoming, and for being so helpful!'
- Emotional impact on family (3) 'I will be proud to pass it onto my family', 'it was all rather emotional to see it finally have a place in Bedfordshire Archives', 'I know that my brother will be equally pleased that the record is now complete'.

Although we appreciated all the positive feedback our favourite for the year had to be the 10-year-old on a school visit whose response was 'It's all so lovely!'

Subject of research

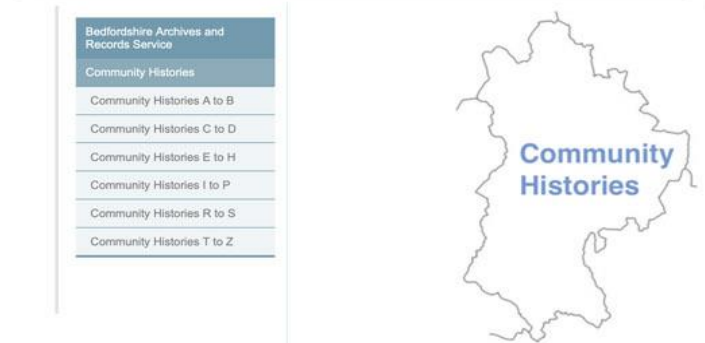


Online presence

With many things, including our office, reopen we saw use of our website and other online resources drop towards the pre-pandemic figures from the high of last year. The number of page views of our website totalled 402,061 (564,762 20/21; 423,779 2019/20). Our online catalogue had 320,688, (352,850 20/21; 307,887 2019/20) views. Our resources on *Ancestry* had 1,149,687, (1,260,181, 2020/21; 916,631 2019/20) views. The gaol database received 22,517 (39,080 2020/21) views and 24,122 via a link from Ancestry.

- On our website of general information, guides to sources, on-line newsletters, exhibitions and community histories pages, we updated guides and continued work to make the navigation easier.
- We added pages to our detailed information about places in Bedfordshire. These included pages for: Carlton, Chellington and Shefford. We continue to welcome contributions from volunteers.
- At the end of the year over 97% of our catalogues were available online via our online public access catalogue. Entries are added and edited every day.
- Our database of 54,598 transcribed entries of the Bedford gaol registers c1760-1905 remained popular.
- From January we introduced a new rota for scheduling our social media posts to: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This aims to share the task between members of staff and enable us to engage more regularly.

You can find us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.



Bedfordshire Archives Service Catalogue

Welcome to the on-line catalogue of Bedfordshire Archives Service. This enables you to search our archive catalogue or our searchroom library catalogue. We strongly advise you to read the help files available to ensure the best results. There are general help files to the left of each screen, or specific help by clicking a field.

Please note that this database does not yet include catalogues of all our holdings. Researchers should therefore [contact us](#) for further information.

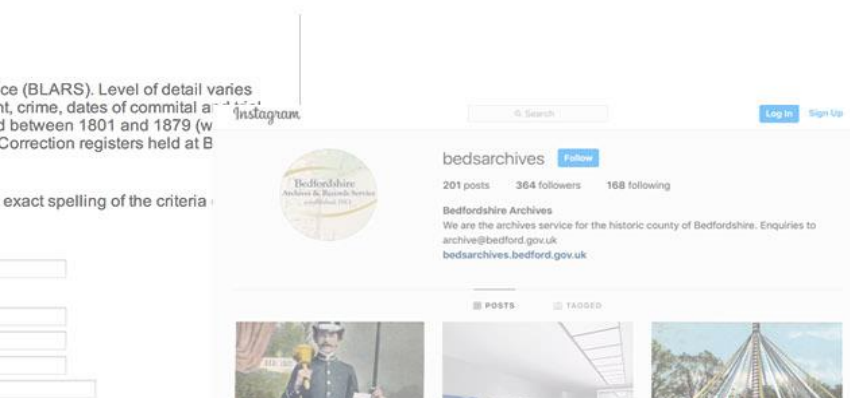
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Bedfordshire Gaol Register

database contains entries from gaol registers held by the Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS). Level of detail varies between registers but each entry gives some of the following details of the criminal: name, age, hair colour, height, crime, dates of committal and means of disposal e.g. release, death, transportation etc. The database presently covers the period between 1801 and 1879 (was updated on a weekly basis. Our aim is to add the details from all the surviving County Gaol and House of Correction registers held at Bedford 1801 - 1901, an approximate total of 35,000+ entries.

To enter your search criteria. You must complete at least one field. Gaol records will be matched against the exact spelling of the criteria. Have any queries please [contact us](#).

Year From:	<input type="text"/>	Year To:	<input type="text"/>
First Name:	<input type="text"/>	Last Name:	<input type="text"/>
Age (earliest):	<input type="text"/>	Age (latest):	<input type="text"/>
Gender:	<input type="text"/>	Trade or Occupation:	<input type="text"/>
Birth Town:	<input type="text"/>	Birth Country:	<input type="text"/>
Residence Town:	<input type="text"/>	Residence County:	<input type="text"/>
Offence:	<input type="text"/>	Sentence:	<input type="text"/>



Outreach

It had been hoped that in 2021/22 we would be able to return to providing outreach in person as well as virtually however once again many events were postponed until the following year.

- We made monthly contributions to the Leighton Buzzard Observer based on our Quarter Sessions Rolls.
- Staff delivered four talks via Zoom to four different local history groups.
- We delivered an introduction to the archives for library staff from Central Bedfordshire via Teams.
- In December we contributed decorations for the Heritage Bedford tree at the St Paul's Christmas Tree festival. The theme this year was pantomime, which allowed us to draw on our collections of theatre posters and programmes. Two of our volunteers soon perfected the technique for making the decorations, which stood out well on the tree.
- In December we welcomed three classes of year 5 from Bedford Girls' School who were investigating maps as part of their work on explorers and exploring.
- We provided information and images for the Bedford High Street improvement works in the heritage action zone. This included information on 58 High Street which was used on the banners around the premises during the works. We also revised our web page on the history of the site once occupied by a pub and later a cinema
<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Bedford/TheChequersHighStreetBedford.aspx>
- From January we developed a new rota for our social media content and this has enabled us to better engage with this form of outreach.
- Unfortunately we were unable to publish our quarterly newsletter due to the service restructure, nor, with so few visitors, was it worth reintroducing our lobby exhibitions – we hope both may be reinstated in the future as we believe that they not only provide a way of introducing our work and our collections to readers and visitors but they also give the archivists an opportunity to develop their knowledge of our collections and their skills at presenting this to audiences.



Bedfordshire Archives
Greensand Country
photo project
Filling the archives gap

Help create a research resource for generations to come by capturing record quality photographs of the Greensand Country. Through a series of 3 workshops you will find out what is needed and curate the project exhibition. In between workshops is the time for you to get out and about in Greensand Country capturing the images.

See overleaf for more details.



Weeding celery at Filton, 1958 by Eric G Meadows



Greensand Country
Landscape Partnership



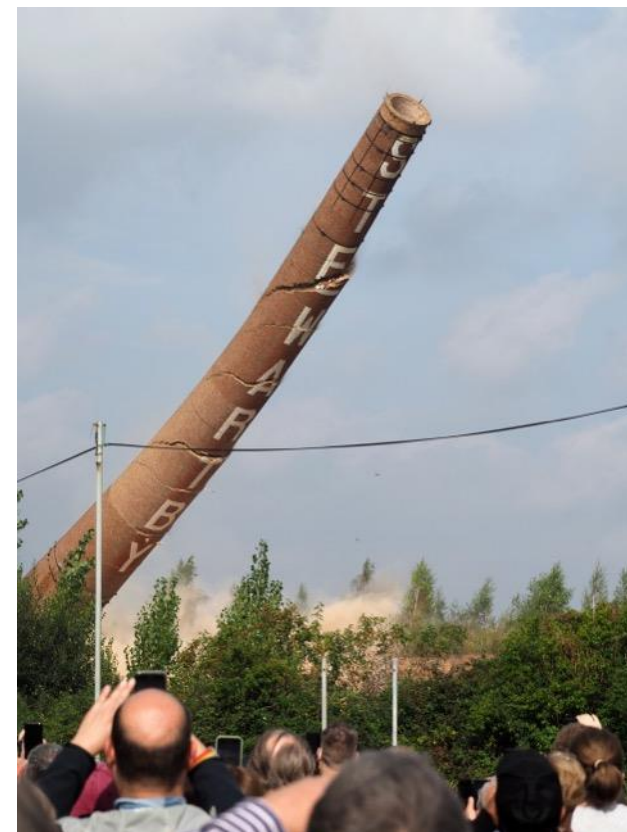
HERITAGE
FUND

Our *Filling the Archives Gap* Greensand Country photo project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund via the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership, came to an end with the cataloguing of 390 photographs of Greensand Country supplied by our project participants.

Although we were unable to have any in person exhibitions to celebrate the end of the event we launched two virtual exhibitions as part of the Greensand Country Festival in May. The 3D version of the exhibition was only available during the festival but the 2D version is still available to view at <https://sites.google.com/view/fillingthearchivegap>

We were particularly pleased that some of the volunteers who had participated in the *Filling the Archives Gap* project sent us pictures of the demolition of the last of the Bedfordshire brick work chimneys at Stewartby on the 26th September 2021, showing that the project had taught them that their photographs recording changing in the county would be useful for future generations if they were added to Bedfordshire Archives.

The fall of the Stewarty brick chimney
– note the use of mobile phones!
by Martin Nellist



7. For more information

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