

Bedfordshire & Luton
Archives & Records Service
established 1913

BLARS Newsletter No.96 Summer 2013

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Centenary Quiz Night

Twenty three teams took part in our Centenary Quiz Night at Marston Vale on 23rd May and were rewarded with a piece of this fantastic cake made by our Conservator & Projects officer Pamela Birch. Congratulations to the team from Bedford Times & Citizen who were the winners of the quiz devised and compered by our Enquiries Officer Laura Johnson.

Opening the Archives to Bedfordshire Schools



Supported by

The National Lottery[®]
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service has been granted £82,400 by The Heritage Lottery Fund to employ a Learning Officer for three years to work with Bedfordshire schools. The officer will work in Luton for the academic year 2013-14, in Bedford Borough in 2014-15, and in Central Bedfordshire in 2015-16. The Learning Officer will work with primary and secondary schools of all types - LEA controlled, academies, free schools and private schools.

Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service has a great wealth of source material for teaching such subjects as geography, RE and science as well as history. The Learning Officer will work with schools to:

- ◇ Provide packs of facsimile documents illustrating the local aspects of curricular topics;
- ◇ Provide material particularly for primary schools undertaking a local study;
- ◇ Arrange class visits to Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service to see what we have and what we can do;
- ◇ Deliver lessons via video-conferencing. This may be done by the Learning Officer or another member of staff or it may be a re-enactor bought in to play a part such as a Victorian poacher or a World War Two housewife;
- ◇ Deliver advice to teachers regarding our sources and our knowledge of various facets of the past;
- ◇ Set up a Young Archivists programme for children interested enough to want to find out more about what an archivist does, why and how original material survives (or doesn't) and how it is made available for people to study.

If you would like more information about this exciting project please contact us on 01234-228827 or e-mail us at: archive@bedford.gov.uk.

Flying over Bedfordshire in Summer 1913

Summer fetes throughout the County were enlivened in 1913 by displays of 'exhibition flying'. One of the most famous pilots of the day was Claude Grahame-White (21 August 1879 - 19 August 1959), a former pupil of Bedford Grammar School whose parents lived at 23 Rothsay Road, Bedford. He became internationally famous in 1910 when he was the first pilot ever to make a night flight, during the London to Manchester air race. In the same year he won the Gordon Bennett Aviation Cup race in Belmont Park, Long Island, New York. In 1911 he established a flying school at Hendon and it is alleged that in 1912 he gave H. G. Wells his first flight.

Crowds gathered at Biddenham for the Primrose League Summer Fete on Thursday 24 July, and the Bedfordshire Times & Independent recorded the anticipation and excitement::

'At 3.40 it was said that Grahame-White had made three attempts to leave Hendon, but that the wind was too strong. The pessimistic ones said 'He won't come' but in spite of this there was a brisk demand for tickets for the flying ground. Once there was a roar from the multitude. Shouts of 'Here he is! went up and all eyes were scanning the sky, but it was only a good sized wood pigeon and the crowd enjoyed the hoax....the next message was received at Mr Peacock's house at Biddenham, was to the effect that Grahame-White had left Hendon at 6.20 in a Morane-Saulnier monoplane, and at a quarter to seven when the organ on the roundabouts was sarcastically playing 'We all go the same way home' there was a growing excitement among the crowd at the far end of the field. At first there was some suspicion of another joke, as only those with good eyesight could discern the speck advancing at great height from the south east. In less than a minute everybody seemed to have gone crazy. Hats came off, handkerchiefs were being waved, spectators cheerfully paid the price of admission to the enclosure, and little boys scrambled through the hedge.

Cheers came from thousands of throats, thousands of faces were turned skywards, and the pessimistic ones clapped the back of their companions and said 'I told you so'. The promoters of the fete heaved a sigh of relief. The steam hooter on the roundabouts went into hysterics, and two men left the refreshment booth without finishing their drinks. Meanwhile, the aeroplane had passed over the High Street, from which point it was seen at 6.45, turned

Programme for the Primrose League Summer Fete at Biddenham [ref. AD3243]

down Lime Street and made off for Biddenham...the golden rays of the westering sun gilded the machine, which against the blue sky looked magnificent. Each circuit brought him nearer and at last, with a glorious vol-plane, his machine touched earth...and ran about 500 yards before it stopped. The crowd...cheered enthusiastically as the aviator arose from his seat and laughingly acknowledged the greetings of his admirers.'

'Mr Grahame-White then received the congratulations of a number of ladies and gentlemen, among whom we noticed Mr Gerald Hargreaves, Mr & Mrs R. Whitworth and Major B. F. Columbine.'

[Photograph ref.Z50/143/160]



Two days later Claude Grahame-White was displaying his prowess in the south of the County. The Luton News reported the 18th Leagrave and Limbury Horticultural Society show on the 26th July as a great success:

... 'a factor which played an important part in bringing the venture to such a gratifying issue was the happy idea of securing the services of a famous aviator to give exhibition flights in the grounds. Everything was conducive to success. The Clerk of the weather who had previously been in an undecided mood, shone forth in all his glory and a brilliant afternoon attracted what must have been a record crowd for Leagrave. The takings at the gate amounted to £140, and the attendance has been estimated at least seven or eight thousand. Some £25 was taken in the flying enclosure. The aviator was the famous Grahame-White, who arrived at about half past three, circled round the park three or four times and then alighted in the enclosure. He flew a Morane-Saulnier monoplane and he was given an enthusiastic reception as he descended. After having rested for half an hour or so he flew three or four times around the park, gave an exhibition of vol-planing, then went off without alighting to Hendon.'

Claude Grahame-White's aerodrome in Hendon was purchased by the Royal Air Force in 1925, after a protracted legal struggle. After this he lost his interest in aviation. He made a fortune from property investments in the UK and US, and died in Nice in 1959.



For the Record, Luton

The first of our two centenary exhibitions ran from 22nd March to the 23rd June at Wardown Park Museum, Luton. Twelve showcases were themed to give an idea of the varied collections we hold - using examples from the south of the county - while the wall panels documented the history of the record office over 100 years. The exhibition also used video, oral history extracts and games. A series of talks, calligraphy demonstrations and a children's make-a-diary day completed the programme.



We would like to thank: Bedford Estates, The Harpur Trust, Charles Wells, T & E Neville, Conservation-by-Design and George Cowley for sponsoring the exhibition, Bill Grant, Sara Sheridan and Nick Barratt for their demonstrations and talks, and the staff of Luton Museum for their help and support.

The exhibition was well received and we were very pleased to meet students of Barnfield College Art and Design course, who used the exhibition to inspire part of their work. (left & right)



The northern version of the exhibition will be at The Higgins, Bedford, from 12 October to 5 January.

Heritage Open Day on Saturday 14th September

We are holding an open day at the Archives, and as it is a special year for us we have decided to make it a special open day too. Events will take place between 10 am and 4pm. As well as tours behind the scenes of the office in Riverside Building, Borough Hall, we will be using the Council Suite for the day in order to give us room for more things to see and do, including activities, displays and talks, which will include a talk by Stephen Poulter about his new book *Bedfordshire Through Time*.

We would like to invite other organisations, who may not have a pitch for Heritage Open Week, to join us to have a stand. If your group is interested please contact Pamela Birch on 01234 228833. We realise that many of you will have other events on, but even if you cannot attend we would welcome any display material you may like to show.

Further details on what we have planned will be available here: www.bedford.gov.uk/archiveevents.

Walk the Paths to Crime Trails!



Walkers setting out on June 30th (above) and in Church Lane, Odell (below). [Photos: Pauline Lazell]



Paths to Crime was a two year project to catalogue and repackage the Bedfordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls from 1831-1900, a valuable collection of papers for both the family and social historian. The cataloguing, by two part-time cataloguers, was funded by a grant from the National Cataloguing Grant Programme for Archives. The repackaging was carried out by volunteers and was made possible by generous donations from Bedfordshire Family History Society, present and former High Sheriffs of Bedfordshire, and the Rotary Club of Sandy.

The project has proved itself very worthwhile. We have sorted, numbered, cleaned, packaged and catalogued thousands of paper and parchment documents. This has made them available to the public for the first time and has opened up some wonderful stories of life in Bedfordshire.

We have shared some of these stories with you via our document of the month and blog but many others remain for you to discover for yourself. To mark the end of the two year project we are planning to launch a series of self-guided trails with details which will soon be available via our website:

www.bedford.gov.uk/archivecrimepaths

Working with Bedford Borough Council's Rights of Way team we have created walks around Harrold & Odell and Sharnbrook. A group tried out the first of these on a sunny Sunday in June.

If funding can be secured we will look to roll out more trails in other areas of the County all telling true stories about 19th century crime, detective work and life in the locations it took place. If you or your group would like to be involved in helping us develop these trails please contact us.

This newsletter is edited by Susan Edwards, who welcomes ideas and material for future issues.

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