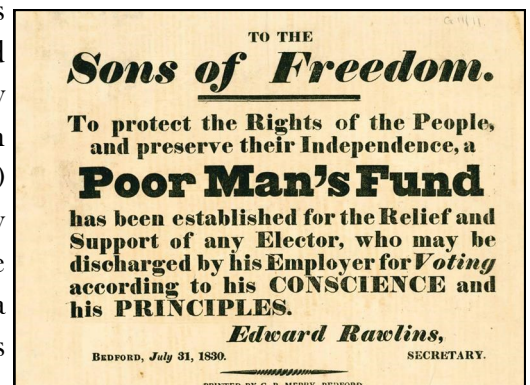


ELECTION MATERIAL AT THE ARCHIVES

The general and local elections scheduled for May 7th will soon be over and many people will breathe a sigh of relief that there will be an end (at least for a while) to the press coverage, the canvassing, and the leaflets dropping through letter boxes. No doubt the political parties will have made a considerable contribution to paper recycling collections over the last month or so. Here at the archives, however, members of staff have been encouraged to bring in any election leaflets or newsletters they receive. By adding this to any additional material we acquire from the local political parties we hope to be able to provide future generations with a snapshot of the local political scene as it was in 2015. We already have a collection of this type for the 1997 general and county council elections (reference Z981). Even at a distance of only eighteen years there are some instantly noticeable differences in the political scene. Do you remember the Natural Law and Referendum parties, each of which had a number of candidates standing locally in 1997? If you would like to know what types of chocolate Thorntons suggested would be suitable for the various party leaders in that year you can find the answer in document Z981/1/X2!



We also hold an extensive collection of election material for Bedfordshire county and Bedford parliamentary seats as part of the Bedford Borough archives (reference BorBG). The earliest item in this collection is the record of a judgment made by royal justices in 1425 in a dispute over liability to pay expenses for the two burgesses attending Parliament on behalf of the Borough of Bedford. Clearly arguments over parliamentary expenses are nothing new. The collection contains poll books recording the names of individuals who voted for each candidate from 1704 to 1872, the last election held before the introduction of the secret ballot. Open elections caused many problems as voters could be coerced by their landlords or employers with the threat of eviction or loss of employment: a poster from 1830 announces the setting up of a Poor Man's Fund for the support of any elector who lost his job as a result of voting according to his conscience [Ref: BorBG10/1/26]. The Bedford Borough archive also includes a considerable amount of 19th century election propaganda material. This was rather more diverse than today's election leaflets and posters, including skits, poems, songs, and even spoof theatre bills.



Last but not least, we also hold registers of electors from their introduction in 1832 through to the present day. These are one of our most popular collections, used extensively to find the names of individuals living at a particular address, or to try to establish where someone was living at a particular date. Unsurprisingly given their original purpose they also have their uses for studying electoral history. For example, did you know that women could vote in local elections before they were granted parliamentary suffrage in 1918? You will find the names of those who qualified to vote in the electoral registers. They also give a graphic illustration of the extension of first male and then female suffrage through the Reform Acts.

CHANCE MEETINGS

In November 2014 I was given a leaflet advertising an open day at the Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service. I was amazed to find that the leaflet featured a photograph of my cousin, Connie Wood, in a group of uniformed young women.

I remembered that Connie had been in the Women's Land Army in World War Two but had no details. The Archives Service told me that they had chosen the photograph for their leaflet from the Bedfordshire Press negative collection. Starting with the archive catalogue information, I went on to discover that the photograph was taken in the lounge of the Potton WLA hostel, a commandeered town house, in January 1943. Connie was then 17 years old and I was five.



Connie in 1943

I followed up the story on the internet and then looked for the book by Stuart Antrobus about the WLA in Bedfordshire. I managed to find a second-hand copy, which gives an excellent insight into those hard times.

Connie was not the only member of the family involved in war work at this time. Connie's mother, my aunt Edith, was filling shells at the Elstow Storage Depot. Her father, my uncle Arthur, was in North Africa having been evacuated from Dunkirk. In peacetime he had been a lorry driver and a member of the Territorial Army in Bedford and was called up into the Royal Artillery at the start of the war. My brothers, Ronnie and Eddie, were in the Scots Greys and the Royal Marines respectively.

In January 1943, while Connie was posing for the camera, Ronnie was recovering from a bullet wound in the upper arm at a hospital in Cairo. Uncle Arthur went to see him and on going into the NAAFI he found my brother Eddie and his mate waiting to be served before leaving after visiting Ronnie. Uncle Arthur coughed up a ten shilling note (50p) which enabled the two Marines to stay in Cairo for another day.

David Wood, Ampthill

CONSERVATION CORNER

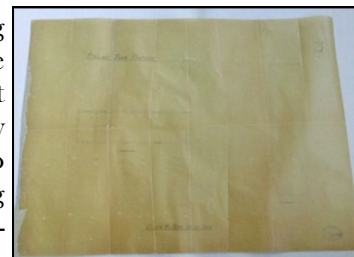
All county archives contain a large number of architectural drawings and the holdings of Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service are particularly rich in this type of collection. For example a recent deposit, FDB, contained an estimated 1,500 drawings when it arrived at the office last year. The significance of architectural drawings should not be under-rated in terms of understanding the local, architectural and social history of a building. A major problem with these drawings however, is that the materials and procedures used to make copies means that these drawings deteriorate with age, making them extremely brittle and fragile - sometimes resulting in them having to be withdrawn from public access.

The document below is a typical example of a tracing plan needing repair. The document was extremely fragile when it arrived in the conservation studio at Hull History Centre (where I was working recently on a short-term training placement). The tracing plan was in already in 8 pieces when it arrived and just by carefully picking up the piece on the bottom left hand side, a further fragment fell off - typical of the fragility of this type of document. The solution to this was to create a lining for the back of the document that would provide a permanent support layer to piece all the loose pieces together - as well as providing a general overall support to the document to make it less fragile.



Document before repair in 9 pieces

The process took two days to complete as the lining had to be prepared first using a conservation grade Japanese paper and a specially prepared wheat starch paste that would be strong enough to allow the various pieces of the tracing plan and lining to stick together, but at the same time not containing any chemical or process that could cause both short-term and long-term damage to the document.



Document after repair

From my perspective, there is something very satisfying about piecing back together a damaged document so that members of the public can gain access to a document that had previously been withdrawn.

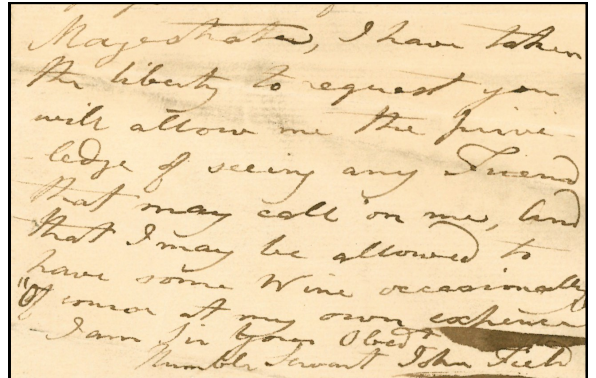
Vicki Manners

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER!

The Quarter Sessions project often highlights how one small piece of documentation can be the start of something big. Recently the team have been repacking the Quarter Session rolls of 1809 to 1811, and although the Quarter Sessions did not try capital offences, they found themselves investigating two gruesome tales worthy of a TV crime drama.

QSR1809/107 is a bill for printing notices – notices regarding the murder of James Crick and his housekeeper, Rebecca Read at Lidlington. A quick search revealed a full account of the crime on the Bedfordshire Libraries' virtual library http://virtual-library.culturalservices.net/webingres/bedfordshire/vlib/0.digitised_resources/lidlington_crick.htm. A further search of the British Newspaper Archive online <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>, now available in our searchroom thanks to Bedfordshire Libraries, revealed that in 1836 reports circulated of a deathbed confession by a man named Kingston. However the *Huntingdon, Bedford & Peterborough Gazette* takes the view that there is no foundation to this and that a man named Bollard was the more likely suspect.

In the rolls for 1811 the team came across two letters relating to John Field of Polehanger, Meppershall. One of the letters was from Field himself who describes himself as 'Being so far unfortunately situated as to be confined in the County Gaol'. and requesting food and wine beyond the Prison allowance and visits from friends. [QSR1811/298 pictured] The other letter pleads for the same luxuries on Field's behalf.

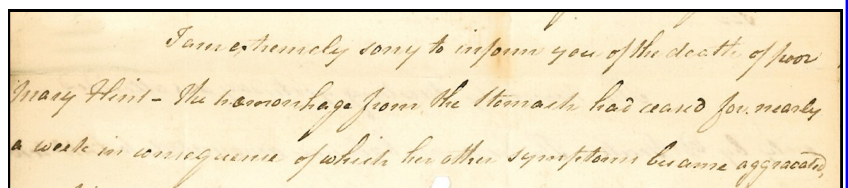


Magistrate, I have taken the liberty to request you will allow me the privilege of seeing any friend that may call on me, and that I may be allowed to have some wine occasionally if I come at my own expense - I am, Sir, your Obedt. Humble Servant John Field

At first these letters provoked some sympathy for this 'young man' from 'a respectable family' (QSR1811/297) although he did perhaps appear to be a little naïve. However, a quick search of our gaol database revealed that at 38 years old he was not so young and he was charged with violent assault. The gaol register also revealed that although committed in September 1811 he was not tried at either the Michaelmas or Epiphany Quarter Sessions but at the Lent assizes in March the following year. A search of our online catalogue then revealed a set of letters in the Whitbread Estate archive that told the rest of the story (W1/1774-1787)

John Field had been 'cruel and brutal in the extreme' towards his servant Mary Flint. Field was committed to the gaol and poor Mary to the infirmary. On the 8th October the magistrates decided to examine Mary as to the assault; John Field was invited to be present during the examination it being feared that Mary would die 'in consequence of the wounds and injuries which she received from you'. In November John Field wrote to Mr Whitbread regarding reports 'set afloat by some villain that Mary Flint has several times been with child by me and that she has so often by my direction taken stuff to procure abortion, As I know myself to be perfectly innocent of any such crime I earnestly solicit you will be so good as to examine Mary Flint concerning the above report and then (as you will find it to be without the least foundation, although I believe her to be a bad Girl) it may be a means of stopping the report from further progress'.

Field was refused bail and remained in the prison. Mary finally died at the beginning of January 1812 [W1/1782 pictured] and an autopsy was performed. This revealed that the poor girl had the early signs of tuberculosis on her lungs but that it was an



I am extremely sorry to inform you of the death of poor Mary Flint - The hemorrhage from the stomach had ceased for nearly a week in consequence of which her other symptoms became aggravated.

existing internal complaint that had been the cause of death. At the inquest that followed five doctors expressed the opinion that the assault by Field had accelerated Mary's death and three the opinion that it had not. The inquest lasted from 11 am to 11 pm and was mainly taken up by the medical gentlemen's evidence. After retiring for half an hour the jury decided that the blows by Field had been a factor. John Field duly stood trial at the Lent Assizes but with 'no evidence to prove the deceased had received blows upon the region of the Stomach ... the jury were directed to acquit the prisoner.' This came as no surprise to Mr Wilshere the magistrate who had committed Field to gaol. After the inquest he had written to Mr Whitbread that 'supposing myself a juror on that trial I could not convict him...I believe that his violence towards his poor creature in her diseased & irritable state, increased the morbid symptoms and hastened her death, but the blows were I think too remotely the cause of death to amount in law to the crime of murder.' However Mr Wilshere went on to say 'he very amply deserves the confinement expense & ignominy he has subjected himself to'. The Quarter Sessions volunteers couldn't help but agree.

NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service were pleased to welcome a delegation of Chinese archivists from the province of Hubei to the Archive Service at Borough Hall on Thursday 19th March. The Sub-inspector and two deputy directors of the Hubei Provincial Archives Bureau with colleagues from the Wuhan Municipal Archives Bureau, the Huanggang Municipal Archives Bureau and the Enshi Autonomous Prefecture Archives were on a four day visit to the UK to find out about UK archives, archive management and digitisation.

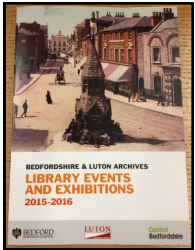


Hubei is in Central China. It covers an area of 185,900 km², compared to Bedfordshire's 1,235 km², has a population of over 57 million people, and a history stretching back 2000 years. The Archive Service showed a range of documents from its collections. Some of these represented the type of collections held by the service while others showed how Bedfordshire companies had supplied ploughs, pumps, cranes and engineers to China in the early years of the 20th century before sitting down for a more formal discussion of general archive matters. There was some common ground but one area of management that the Bedfordshire archivists were envious of was that in China all local and national government departments make sure that they pass their records onto the archives regularly.

As well as enabling Bedfordshire Archives to find out more about archives in China the visit provided an excuse to make connections closer to home. Inviting the archivist at the Physical Education Archive at the University of Bedfordshire to come and meet the delegation became a good opportunity for the Archives' Learning Officer, Clare Rogers, to discuss working together to provide resources for schools and higher education.

Pamela Birch

BLARS Library Events



Don't forget to check our website for information on our upcoming talks at libraries around the county www.bedford.gov.uk/archiveevents or pick up one of our leaflets with all the details of the talks and the exhibitions we'll be holding here at the Archives throughout 2015 and 2016.

FREEDOM AND RIGHTS

To mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, the 750th anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament, and the May elections, during May and June the small exhibition space in our reception area will be showcasing a few of the items in our collections relating to "freedom and rights". To tie in with this archivist Kathryn Faulkner will be giving a talk on *Bedfordshire and Magna Carta* on Thursday 4th June at 1pm at the archives. Entry is free but please let us know if you are planning to come by emailing archive@bedford.gov.uk.

CUSTOMER NOTICE

The Archives Service will be closed **ALL DAY** on **FRIDAY 8th MAY 2015** due to staff involvement in the elections. We will also be closed, as usual, on the May Bank Holidays.

We welcome ideas and material for future issues.

Published by Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service, Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP.

Tel: (01234) 228833 E-mail: archive@bedford.gov.uk Online at: www.bedford.gov.uk/archive



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