

PROTECTING AND CONSERVING ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

It's been a very busy year for the Conservation Team at Bedfordshire Archives, as you can see from the 'What have we worked on this year?' section below. Not bad considering our team consists of one part-time Conservator (Vicki), and two volunteers (Linda and Helen) who come in and help out once a week. By far the biggest and most complex item we worked on last year was a 1.33m long map. I am only 1.64m (5'4"), so that is almost as tall as me! The item came into conservation for repair as someone had asked for a digital image of the map. (Just in case you are not aware, Bedfordshire Archives offers a fee paying service to digitise certain items at a very competitive rate). However, as you can see from the photos below, it was not possible for us to take a digital image of the map as it was torn into several pieces and many of the key areas that needed to be read were along the folds. Typical!!!

The map [Ref: L26/1127] had originally been folded into 32 pieces, but due to the conditions it had originally been stored in, the folded areas had become very fragile and brittle. The map was too large to go under the normal scanner, which meant it had to be photographed. As the document was in several pieces, it would have been difficult to take a clean image unless the document was flattened and the pieces carefully aligned first. So how did we repair such a large document?



An essential part of the repair process for a map this big, is to make a lining which the torn and loose pieces can be adhered to. When a document has only one or two small torn and/or loose pieces, a more localised repair is possible, whereby a small 'patch' is placed on the back of the document for the new repair to 'sit on top'. However, in a map as large as this, particularly one that has had so many tears, the only solution to provide maximum stability is to line the whole of the back of the document.

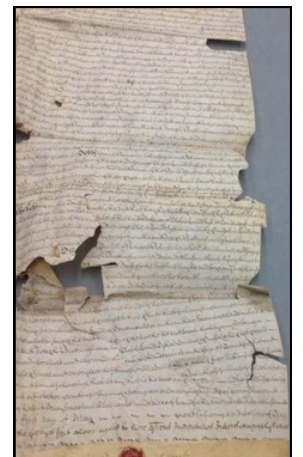
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WHAT HAVE WE WORKED ON THIS YEAR?

As part of protecting the archival heritage of Bedfordshire, our conservation team have:

- Re-packed **1249** documents in archival acid free folders to protect them from many of the 'crimes' mentioned above.
- Cleaned/Repaired:
 - 46** paper documents, which have included a number of 17th Century wills;
 - 20** maps which have included a number of estate plans in the Bedford area;
 - 36** books, which includes the treatment of Red Rot on our poor law records;
 - 1** royal seal, relating to George III



At the moment we are repairing this parchment document which is a marriage settlement dated October 1726. [Ref: W1273]

When lining a document, the back of the document temporarily becomes damp and 'wet'. Therefore, the first step before any repair can take place, is to clean the document to remove any surface dirt. If the surface dirt is not removed before-hand, it impregnates the paper when it becomes wet, causing permanent staining. From a conservation perspective, this would not be acceptable as a key mantra of any conservation activity is to stabilise a document, without causing the document any harm in any way.

Once the document was cleaned, a lining was prepared for the map. The lining selected was a Japanese paper. We use conservation grade Japanese paper to line documents, as we know there are no nasty chemicals in the paper that can cause subsequent damage to the document. Due to the size of the document, the lining and repairs were done on a 'map wall'. The lining was prepared by applying a very thin layer of rice-paste to the map wall, and applying a large piece of terelyene to the wall. Once this was dry the Japanese paper was pasted onto the terelyene (again using rice paste) in much the same way you put up wall paper. The terelyene was applied to the map wall first to make it easier to remove the map from the wall once all the map repairs were finished. Once the lining was dry, the map pieces were very carefully pasted on to the lining, one piece at a time, taking care to line up all the text and map boundary markings.



Above: Preparing the lining, making sure there are no air bubbles, pasting on the sections one piece at a time, and finally lining up the map correctly.

Once all the pieces were in place the map was left to dry on the wall, ensuring that there were no bubbles or ripples, and all the pieces had adhered flat. The final part of the repair process was to do 'in-fills' on all the missing parts of the map, which in this instance was about ten areas. In-fills are a process where conservation grade paper is used to literally fill in any the missing areas in a document. They are an important part of the repair process, because if there are any missing areas, it puts undue pressure of the areas next to it, and can cause tearing. Once these were dry, the document was ready to be photographed. Overall, the process took about 3 days to complete.

After photography, the final part of the preservation process was to make a large protective polyester enclosure for the map. This gives the document the much needed extra support when it is being handled, and limits any exposure to any pollutants in the atmosphere.

Please see the back page of the newsletter for details of our exhibition on the subject of conservation, which runs from January to April 2016 and a free talk that is taking place in March, in which you'll get a behind-the-scenes look at the work carried out in the conservation studio.

Vicki Manners, Conservator



Above: an example of one of the infills on the map and finally safe in polyester

AN INTERNATIONAL VISIT



In December the office was pleased to receive another visit by archivists from China. This time our visitors were from the province of Jiangxi. Coming from government archives they were particularly interested in the process we have for receiving local government archives and public records particularly the international standard of a 20 year rule, which has recently been adopted in England. However, we also discussed how insects and other contaminants are kept out of the archives and priorities for digitisation. China's long history is a little intimidating for the English archivist but it turned out that the oldest document they have in the state archives is from 1847 and most of the archives date from after 1946. Once again it was interesting to hear of the challenges faced by archives and archivists from around the world and in January we look forward to welcoming archive students from Japan.

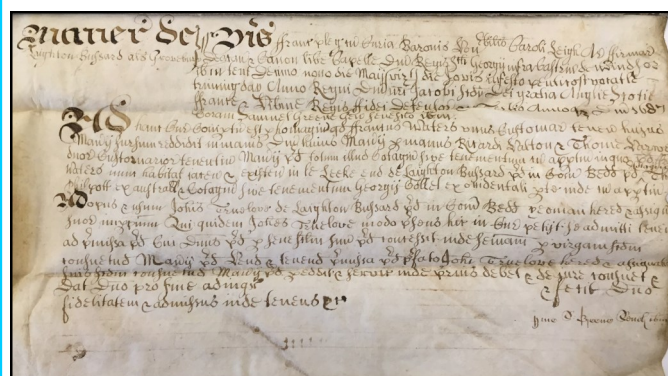
Pamela Birch, Service Manager

IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

Recently the Archives Service staff have been helping me to search through their catalogues looking for a series of fifteenth century manor court rolls. I hoped to compare other manors with Willington, as part of a book that I am writing for Bedfordshire Historical Record Society.

I was surprised to find that, although some manors have good records going back much earlier, most of them only have a handful of court rolls dating from the 1400s. Blunham, the neighbouring parish to Willington, seems to have the best series, and there are three folders of its rolls from 1413 to 1457 in the archives, with a Blunham Charter of 1471 [Ref: L26/229] in which Edmund, Earl of Kent sets out the conditions under which his tenants can sell their holdings. Thankfully the Blunham records have been translated from the Latin, but many other interesting collections have not. Two important series are just waiting for someone to come along to translate them. Leighton Buzzard records, of different sorts, should shed light on the early development of the town centre and have no English translations; neither have the records for Stotfold Newnham manor; these are a straight-forward collection of court rolls, or extracts from them, in different hands, and are generally in readable condition.

So is anybody out there who might like to tackle one of these or other treasures that surely must lie hidden in the Bedfordshire archives? Or might a small group of people like to work together? In my experience producing English translations from the Medieval Latin requires good eyesight and much patience, but the work does yield its rewards. It keeps the old grey matter busy for one thing, rather like doing crosswords or solving a detective puzzle, and you meet some lovely people along the way. I have been much helped by the staff at Bedfordshire



Leighton Buzzard manor court roll, 1681 [Ref: KK280]

Archives and other record offices, and by archivists and friends with better Latin skills than I. A knowledge of Latin is of course helpful, but I only had one year of Latin at school, a very long time ago, and have been on several courses over the last 12 years to improve on this. When I first began I had much help from Bridget Jones (Dr. Bridget Jones, archivist that is!) and friends in Bedford.

So, is there anybody out there, who would like to begin a similar project? Please get in touch with Martin Deacon or Kathryn Faulkner at the Archives for more information.

Dorothy Jamieson

THE RECORDS OF BROMHAM HOSPITAL

The current emphasis on partnerships in local government is nothing new...in 1930 the 'Joint Board of Control' was established to provide institutional care for adults with learning difficulties. The Board represented Bedfordshire County Council, Northamptonshire County Council and Northampton Borough Council. In 1930, the Board purchased Bromham House estate from the Allen family for £7,500 and over several years developed the site to provide accommodation for over 200 men and women. In July 1948, 'Bromham Colony' became part of the NHS and in May 1950, 'colony' was dropped and 'Bromham Hospital' used instead.

The Hospital's early history is well documented in the archives. The Joint Board collection [Ref: JB] comprises a full set of minutes and a number of plans and contracts showing the development of the site.

Recently I catalogued a small collection on the Hospital, which was transferred to the archives shortly after it closed in 1997 [Ref: HoBC]. The collection includes accident records, inspection reports, newsletters and some patient registers (currently closed in accordance with the Data Protection Act). Its strength is a series of photographs of residents and staff, which document the Hospital's annual fête day, special events and outings. There are also formal promotional shots designed to attract trainee nurses to Bromham. There is little in the way

of contextual information for this collection but much of it seems to be related to the activities of the Hospital's Parents and Friends Association. This key body helped to ensure the smooth running of the Hospital and enhanced its relationship with the wider community.

Did you have any dealings with Bromham Hospital or the Patients and Friends Association? If so, we'd love to hear from you!

Rachel Bates, Archivist



[Ref: HoBC/F/3/18] Photograph of His Grace, the Duke of Bedford demonstrating a chair lift on the Hospital's new coach, 1968

Welcome to the Archives...but please make a booking!

We have operated a booking system since April 2014 and the majority of visitors do contact us in advance to ensure that we can accommodate them. However, we still have customers who arrive 'on spec' and this puts us in an awkward position, as we do not like to disappoint people but may have to turn them away. It will be even more important to book in advance over the coming months as we are due to have some work done to the office which will require us to close at short notice for approximately a week. Keep an eye out on our website, our Facebook page and our Twitter feed for the dates when we will be closed.

EXHIBITION & TALK - *Preserving Our Archival Heritage*

Our new exhibition, from January to April is on the topic of conservation and entitled *Preserving Our Archival Heritage*. On Thursday 17th March 2016 at 1pm, Conservator and Archivist Vicki Manners will give a free lunchtime talk about the conservation activities at the archives service, along with a tour of the conservation studio and storage area. We have 20 places available, so if you wish to attend please let us know by emailing archive@bedford.gov.uk or by telephoning 01234 228833 to book a place.

We welcome ideas and material for future issues. Published by Bedfordshire 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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Jointly funded by Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council & Luton Borough Council