

TWO ROYAL RESIDENCES IN SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE

One of the lesser known facts about Bedfordshire is that during the middle ages both Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard were the sites of royal residences, one purpose built and one probably inherited from the Anglo-Saxons. The royal manor house (sometimes called a 'palace') at Dunstable was the creation of King Henry I. Dunstable is not mentioned in *Domesday Book* and it is likely that there was no settlement on the site of the town at this time, unless a remnant of the Roman town of Durocobrivis survived as a hamlet of the royal manor of Houghton. The location at the intersection of Watling Street and the Icknield Way was too good to miss and by 1107 King Henry I had founded a new Borough at the crossroads. The convenience of the location led him to build a royal residence on nine acres of land north of what is now Church Street. The exact location of the building is not known. An eighteenth century farmhouse, Kingsbury Court, was said to be on the site of the royal 'palace', but no archaeological evidence has been found to prove this. It has been suggested that Ladies Lodge may be an alternative site. When King Henry founded Dunstable Priory in 1131 the prior was given near royal authority over the town, which lost its status as a Borough. The royal house, known as Kingsbury, was excluded from the lands given to the priory and reserved for the use of the king. However, the Dunstable Cartulary tells us that the house was granted to the priory by King John in 1204.

The royal residence at Leighton Buzzard has much earlier origins. Extensive archaeological excavations carried out in the 1970s and 80s indicate that a considerable manorial site at Grovebury in the south west corner of the parish was in occupation from at least the late Anglo-Saxon period. *Domesday Book* shows that in 1066 Leighton had two mills, one of which was most likely located at Grovebury. Given its proximity to Yttingaford (now Tiddenfoot), where a treaty was signed between the Saxons and the Danes in 903, the extensive royal lands in the area and the high quality of the manorial buildings, it seems likely that the property may have been used as a royal residence before the Conquest. During the upheavals of King Stephen's reign the manor declined; in 1155 a survey shows its buildings were dilapidated and its stocks of grain and animals far lower than they should have been.



Painting by Thomas Fisher (active 1812-22) of the site of Grove Priory showing a mound thought to be the location of a mill [Z315/3]

In 1164 the manor of Leighton was given by King Henry II to the royal abbey of Fontevraud and by the end of the twelfth century a priory had been established on the site of manorial buildings. However, the archaeological investigation has made it clear that it became a joint manorial-monastic property, and documentary evidence shows it was regularly used as a royal residence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Kings Henry III, Edward I, Edward II and Edward III all stayed at Grove Priory, or 'La Grava' as it was known. Henry III's widow Eleanor of Provence sent correspondence from Grove between 1273 and 1275, and Edward I's daughter Mary of Woodstock was given charge of the priory. The royal connection with Leighton Buzzard disappeared in the fifteenth century; the priory was dissolved and by the end of the century the manor had been given to St. George's Chapel, Windsor. Nothing now remains of the royal residence and its site has been swallowed up by the sand industry.

TALES OF WORKHOUSE WOE

Last year, whilst giving a series of talks about the Poor Law using images of workhouse records, I showed a page of the Punishment Book of Bedford Workhouse [Ref: PUBV28/1]. One woman was listed several times over a short period. I mentioned her in every talk I gave, as her misdemeanours ranged from obscene language to throwing water over the needle mistress. At one of my talks, an audience member asked “What do we know of her? Was she young, old, a criminal or just fed up with her circumstances?” I felt ashamed that I didn’t know, and so I decided that I would find out more about the workhouse revolutionary that was Annie Lightfoot.

Annie Priscilla Lightfoot was born in 1879 in Bedford, to George and Alice Lightfoot. She was the second eldest of ten children. In 1896, Annie’s father George Lightfoot died aged 43. Her mother took in laundry to provide for herself and the younger children, whilst the older children were already working. In November 1900, aged 21, Annie was admitted to Bedford workhouse. She gave birth to her illegitimate daughter Alice on 10 March 1901 in the workhouse infirmary. The page of the punishment book that I had seen only covered 1907 to 1909, meaning Annie had been in the workhouse for nearly a decade. It was at this point that I became determined to find out what happened to Annie and Alice.

Using the British Newspaper Archive I checked the local papers between 1901 and 1911 and found three separate incidents when Annie’s behaviour resulted in her going to prison. In 1902 and 1904 Annie had assaulted staff members at the workhouse and caused damage to property and both times was given six weeks hard labour in prison. In 1909, she was given three weeks hard labour. In 1907 Annie’s case, brought before the Board of Guardians, was reported in the paper. It makes clear that Annie’s behaviour was consistently difficult and aggressive and that they had boarded her daughter with foster parents as Annie didn’t have the capability to look after her. It would appear that Annie, with financial help from her family, was trying to get Alice boarded with a family closer to where Annie wanted to live outside of the workhouse. Sadly, Annie hadn’t given enough notice to the workhouse to retrieve Alice from the foster family so that she could leave the workhouse with her. The Board of Guardians made it clear that the child’s welfare was their primary concern and that with Annie’s bad behaviour being a mark against her they were unlikely to be on her side. Alice was now back in the workhouse, awaiting the outcome of Annie’s case. Annie’s continuing bad behaviour, which had resulted in her yet again being punished by being put in the tramp ward (the very unpleasant rooms set aside for the habitual vagrants) seems to have caused the Board of Guardians to make an example of her and not let her leave the workhouse with her daughter as she wanted. This appears to be the case as the 1911 census shows Alice back with her foster family in Wilstead whilst Annie is living in London at a house run by a rescue worker for the London Diocesan Council’s Rescue & Preventive Work department, possibly a home for troubled young women.

A REFRACTORY INMATE.
Annie Lightfoot, 22, inmate of the Bedford Workhouse was charged with refusing to work and with assaulting the workhouse master on Jan. 28.—She pleaded guilty and said she was very sorry.
Vincent John Barlow, said that defendant was placed on bread and water diet for 48 hours in consequence of having wilfully destroyed provisions. She refused to do any work so she was arrested; when arrested she kicked witness who was standing near.
The Bench having convicted, and a previous conviction for a similar offence having been proved, defendant was sent to prison for six weeks with hard labour.

Bedfordshire Mercury - Friday 31 January 1902

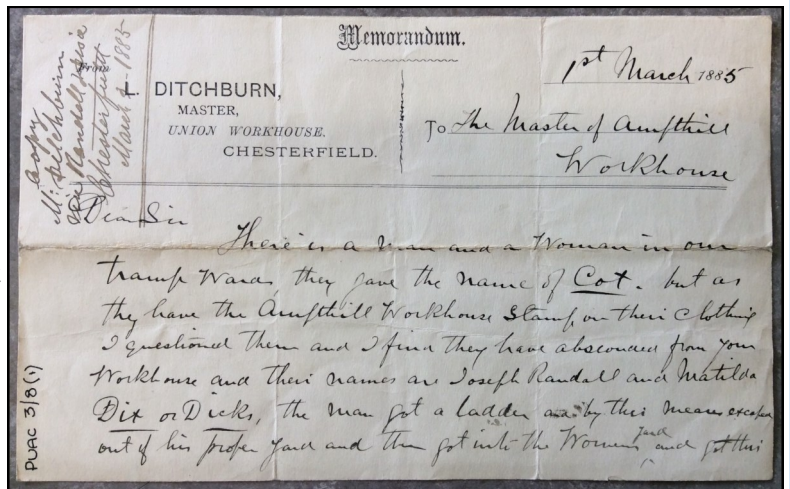
According to the online London electoral registers Annie remained in London, living at the same address in Fulham for over twenty years, until she died aged 58 in 1937. She couldn’t have afforded to live there if she hadn’t had a regular wage, so I’m hopeful that she found work and was helped to build a life for herself, possibly by the Rescue & Preventive Work team. She never married, and several of her siblings emigrated after their mother died in 1904, while Annie was still in the workhouse. Thanks to more online sources, we do know she had further contact with Alice.

The London records online include workhouse material, and in 1917, aged 16, Alice is taken in by the Shoreditch workhouse, where she is interviewed. She stated that she had briefly been staying with her mother in Fulham, but her mother could no longer accommodate her (possibly the landlord wouldn’t allow it or Annie couldn’t afford the extra rent) so she moved to a different part of London but now needed poor relief. Knowing she originated from Bedford, the Shoreditch workhouse sent her back to Bedford.

Alice was re-admitted to the place of her birth on Thursday 14th June 1917 [Ref: PUBV1/22]. Having stayed there for several months she is then noted as temporarily disabled and sent to the Three Counties Asylum. The asylum case book [Ref: LF27/11] notes that she had previously escaped from the workhouse at Bedford, and was later found in London (when she had been with her mother). Her behaviour appears to have been

similar to her mother's with aggression and poor communication skills mentioned. Alice left the asylum in 1923, and was put into the custody of the After Care team, who supervised all the individuals who needed help after leaving the asylum. I can't find any further trace of her. I know her date of birth, but there are many women of that name, none of whom married or died in the Bedfordshire or London areas where Alice had once lived. I have checked passenger lists in case she did as her aunts and uncles had done, and emigrated, but there's no-one matching her name and age. We can only hope that Alice's later life was a relatively happy one.

On a somewhat more amusing note, in 1885, Mr L. Ditchburn, Master of Chesterfield Workhouse wrote to the Master of Ampthill Workhouse stating that two new inmates, who gave their name as Mr and Mrs Cox, had arrived in fresh clothes with Ampthill Workhouse stamped on them. Under close examination, the truth was revealed. Joseph Randall and Martha Dix had in fact absconded from Ampthill Workhouse. Randall had found a ladder and climbed out of the men's yard, got into the women's yard and helped Martha Dix escape. Once out of the workhouse they realised they didn't have any money or food, so made their way north and admitted themselves to Chesterfield Workhouse. Mr Ditchburn states that "they have slept at two union workhouses previous to coming here, it is three weeks tonight since they escaped, if you do not send for them, I shall take them before the magistrates here for obtaining relief in false names." Quite why you'd escape from one workhouse only to admit yourself to another is anyone's guess, but perhaps not everyone thought them so inhospitable.



PUAC3/8/1 letter to the Ampthill Workhouse Master

Laura Johnson

CONSERVATION CORNER

Many of the previous articles in this section have focused on 'interventive conservation', the area of conservation that aims to repair and treat items once they have become damaged. However, a far more important aspect of conservation is 'preservation conservation' which aims to prevent further or potential damage to archives. After all, there would be no point spending days repairing a rare and valuable document, only to then store it in a folder or box that has a high acidic content or in a damp room that is exposed to airborne pollutants.

Therefore, an essential part of preserving any collection is to store and stabilize documents to protect them from:

- Acid deterioration through chemical and biological contaminants
- Poor mechanical handling
- The effects of poor environment

An essential part of this process is to enclose documents in custom-fit archive grade folders and boxes. At Bedfordshire Archives the majority of our items are housed in standard sized archival grade acid free folders and then further packaged into large boxes. This provides a layer of double protection, especially when retrieving items from our temperature controlled stack room where we keep the archives. To maximize the protection of documents for general handling, it is essential that the documents fit exactly into the correct size folder of box. If the box/folder is too big the documents will rattle around inside and become damaged at the edges, and if the box is too small the documents become squashed folded and/or rolled, which eventually causes tearing and deterioration.



So as you can imagine, at Bedfordshire Archives the conservation team spend a lot of time making custom fit boxes and folders. An example the conservation team worked on recently are the Women's Institute scrapbooks (Ref: X351). All the scrapbooks were too large to fit into the larger boxes, thus each one had to have its own custom made box to fit on the shelves (see picture above).

Vicki Manners

GETTING CREATIVE WITH ARCHIVES

We were delighted to welcome back two groups in June - our *Weaving Narratives* textile artists, who are working towards a touring exhibition this Autumn (for dates, please see our website), and a group from local charity *Carers in Bedfordshire*, who will be working in a variety of media for an exhibition in November (date to be confirmed).

Many of our creatives are working with this year's theme of town life and identity, with projects on the history of Riverside North, Horne Lane Cattle Market and Silver Street, Bedford, Middle Row, Dunstable and Commer Cars, Luton. Other projects are inspired by: Meltis sweets, Britannia Iron Works, town architecture, and the diet at Ampthill workhouse to name but a few. Ultimately, both exhibitions will show how archives can be interpreted in new and creative ways.



The *Weaving Narratives* group is well under way with their pieces, and they shared their ideas and techniques with the rest of the group on the 11th June (above). The level of enthusiasm, engagement and skill on display was impressive and incredibly moving. Not only did we get a chance to learn what archives had inspired the pieces, we also learnt about the variety of techniques being used: lace, applique, crochet, tapestry, cross stitch, embroidery, felting, dyeing, printing and dress making.

The *Carers in Bedfordshire* group will be working on their pieces over the summer in the mixed media and photography clubs. We look forward to visiting them at the Pilgrim Centre over the course of the summer to see where their ideas have taken them.

Rachel Bates

NEWS

Our **website** is undergoing a much needed software update and will remain frozen until testing and launch of the upgraded site is complete. Later we may be able to make improvements to the look and navigation of the site, while there will be limitations on what we are able to do we welcome your suggestions.

We need **volunteers** to help us write our popular 'Community Archives' web pages. If you are interested in learning more about your locality or about how to research a place, take a look at our website to see what we do and which places are already covered, think about where you would like to investigate in a similar way and contact us to find out more. Volunteers will receive training and places on our autumn workshop programme.

Our **Gaol Database** has a new web address <http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/grd>

EXHIBITION & TALK - Royal Towns of Central Bedfordshire

Our exhibition from July to October is Royal Towns of Central Bedfordshire. On Thursday 21st July 2016 at 1pm, there will be a free lunchtime talk to coincide with our exhibition. We have 20 places available, to book a place email archive@bedford.gov.uk or telephone 01234 228833.

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