

THINKING OF YOU - WITH LOVE

Following on from 2016's theme of urban growth, this year's lobby exhibitions will strike a more personal note. There are four exhibitions planned for 2017 and the first of these, entitled **Thinking of You - With Love**, brings together items sent by Bedfordshire residents to their loved ones. The documents on display include letters to friends and family members, novelty postcards, valentines and love letters. They're drawn from a variety of sources and time periods but they all offer a really touching insight into the lives of ordinary people in this county.



Ref: Z1306/101/21/2 postcard

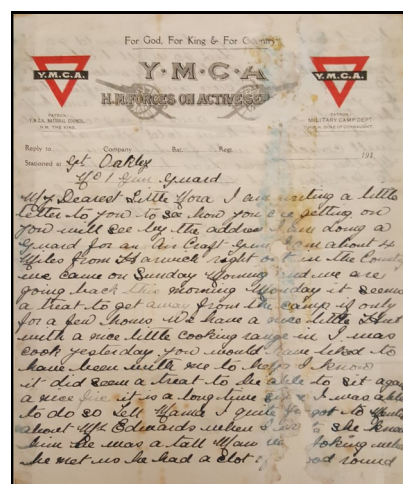
The oldest item on display is a letter written by sixteen year old Isabella Everard to her sister Ann Eccleston in 1727 [HW86/41]. At the time Isabella and her coachman husband were hiding in Amsterdam, having eloped together the year before. Nine of Isabella's letters to her estranged family are held here, along with a further one hundred and eleven relating more generally to the elopement. The nine letters home span almost twenty years and although they contain repeated pleas for forgiveness it's not known whether she was ever reconciled with her parents. The Eccleston/Everard letters can be found amongst the papers of Richard How of Aspley Guise, who acted as a sort of intermediary between Isabella and her family. Another item from the How papers is currently on display here: a coded love letter from Richard's son, also named Richard, to his married lover Silena Ramsey in 1762 [HW88/48-49]. It's written in a simple code of jumbled up letters which must have taken ages to write and even longer for the poor archivist tasked with cataloguing the letters to decipher! Silena and Richard eventually married and they went on to spend seventeen years together and have five children.

One of my favourite items in the exhibition is a letter from Albert Culpin, son of the then minister of Shillington Congregational Church. Young Albert appears to have been of quite a restless nature and his long absences from home with no communication obviously caused his family a great deal of concern. The letter now on display here must have produced particular alarm as it was written from a military prison at Chatham where Albert was awaiting sentencing for desertion from the army in 1879 [X345/27]. Following his release from prison Albert stowed away on a boat to America where he spent several years travelling the country working on the railways, in gold mines or wherever there was work to be found. It seems he even briefly contemplated joining a circus! Albert's years travelling the globe, and the many desperate times he endured, make his letters home particularly entertaining to read. They're full of real fondness for his family, regret for all the worry he has caused them and, of course, the occasional request for money!

The remaining items in the exhibition include letters from the Belgian trenches, a handmade Valentine given by an Elstow man to his bride-to-be and a letter from a seven year old boy in India to his grandmother in Bedford. They can be viewed in the reception area of the archives until the end of March. A talk to complement the exhibition, titled **Writing Home: Letters from Bedfordshire People Abroad**, will take place in the searchroom on Thursday 16th February 2017 at 1pm. It will look more closely at some of the stories in the exhibition and others from within the archives. The event is free but please call or email to book a place in advance (contact details on the back page).

Esther Bellamy, Archivist

Right: Ref: Z1018/2 a soldier's letter



CONSERVATION CORNER

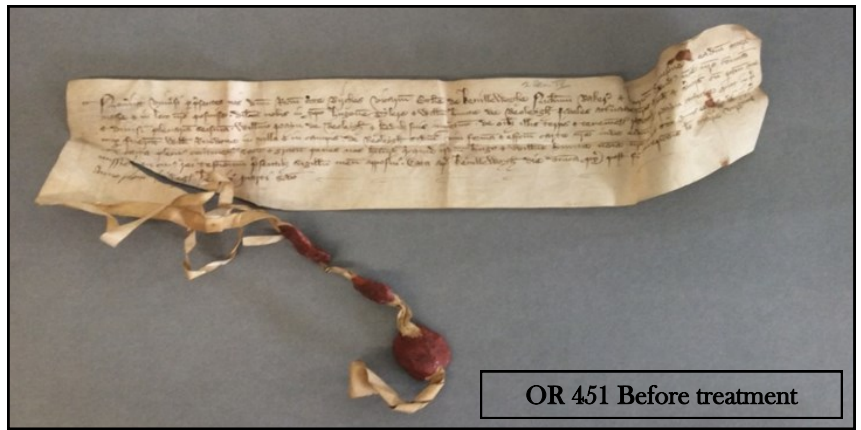
This letter of attorney (Ref OR451), dated December 1400 was sent to the Conservation Studio for repair as the parchment was torn; two of the seals were broken with the edges flaking; and the right hand portion of the document was very creased, making it difficult to read.

The repairs to the tear on the parchment, and fragmented seals were relatively straight forward. However the main dilemma in treating this document was what to do with the long thin strip of parchment that was tightly coiled up on the left hand side.

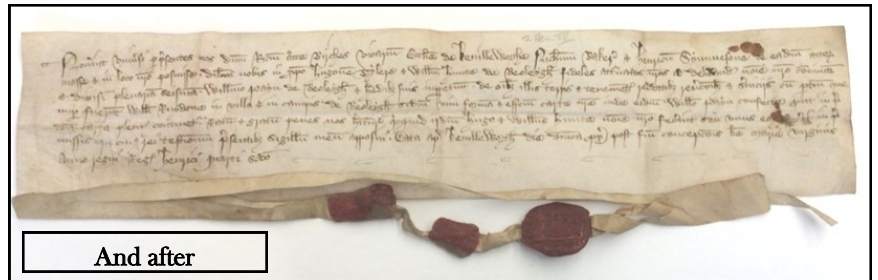
A key tenet of any conservation treatment is to retain the original format of the document. I had not seen a long thin strip like this on a document of this nature before, so initially I thought the very fine strip was perhaps intended for the inclusion of additional seals, but never used. I decided a bit of research was necessary. After reading various articles on medieval parchment structure, I found that the long thin strip was used to tie and bound the document together once it had been folded. Looking at the before photo, you can see how the document was originally folded. The document was 'relaxed' in an humidification chamber, but not completely flattened, so future generations could see how the document was used originally.

Finally, for my own curiosity, I wanted see how the document would have looked in its folded state over 600 years ago, so I made a small paper mock up based on the original dimensions.

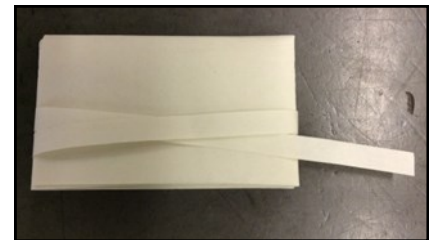
Vicki Manners, Conservator



OR 451 Before treatment



And after



CELEBRATING BEDFORD 850 - CARERS IN BEDS EXHIBITION

As part of the celebrations marking Bedford's oldest surviving royal charter, the Archives rounded off 2016 with an exciting art exhibition featuring work by *Carers in Bedfordshire*. *Carers in Bedfordshire* (registered charity 1135507) provide vital respite and support to unpaid, family carers. Carers belonging to the art and photography clubs used historic documents at the Archives as inspiration for their work, focusing upon the history of Bedford. This work was exhibited to the public in the Council Suite and promoted to key stakeholders at a private view. 42 people attended the private view, including carers, their families, members of local art groups, the Chief Executive of Carers in Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council's assistant chief executive for governance and human resources.

This collaboration was a great success. The carers exhibited their work to a wider audience, which gave them an enormous sense of satisfaction and pride. The project also gave them time out from their caring roles, helping them to refresh and be inspired. The Archives had the joy of seeing their documents reach a new audience and used in new and creative ways. As with the *Weaving Narratives* project, we were very impressed with the variety of techniques and approaches – we'll never look at the historic parishes map (right – 'Flower Garden', by Patricia Gooch) in the same light again! One attendee wrote: 'Wonderful to see both the inspiration of the archive materials and the artistic achievements of the carers.'

Rachel Bates, Archivist

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND! There is another chance to see our *Weaving Narratives* textile exhibition, this time at Bedford Central Library, from **Thursday 9th-Saturday 11th February** during normal library opening hours.

CELEBRATING BEDFORD 850 - CARERS IN BEDS EXHIBITION



Above: The private view



Above: Cattle Market Horne Lane by Tineke Venne



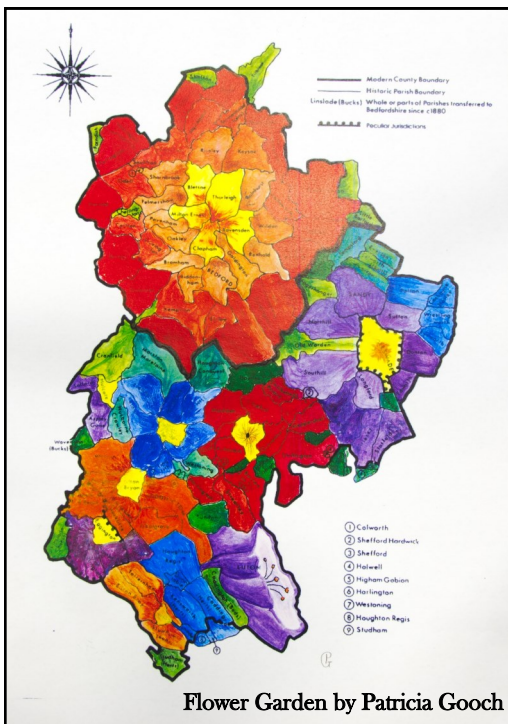
Above: Bedford Arcade by Janet Rice



Above: Floral Hall by Heather Petty



Above: The Wall of Curiosity by Michelle Deardon



Flower Garden by Patricia Gooch

Right: Bedford Park Bandstand by Wendy Gould

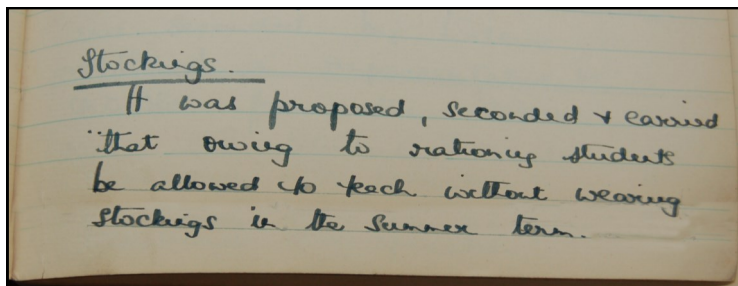
Below: Jackie Trundle-Wear working on her piece 'Park Avenue, Bedford'



JUST A MINUTE

Minutes are found in many, many collections in the archives. As an organisation's official record of proceedings at meetings they are vital for tracing how and what decisions were made, how that organisation was governed and what it did. In December we received the minutes of the annual general meetings of the Leasiders Folk Dance Group. Founded in 1948 as the Luton group of the English Folk Dance Society they had decided to close due to a drop in members but realised that their memory could live on if they deposited the minutes with the archives. Unusually these minutes also include information on what dances were danced at meetings during the year.

Minutes vary in quality - some are excellent giving a full picture that would inform anyone not at the meeting of what happened, others barely tell you that a meeting took place. The catalogue of the Bedford Training College collection has recently been completed and includes various sets of minutes including the Old Students Association and the student union. Unfortunately some of these minutes are less than easy to use. For example BTC7/1/1 has AGM minutes running from the front of the book towards the back and committee minutes running upside down from the back towards the front. This in itself would not be a problem had they not abandoned the committee minutes in 1911 in favour of another volume but returned to the original volume in 1924. However the main problem is the lack of dates. It is annoying but not unusual to have to work out what year the minutes relate to by working back to January where hopefully the new year is recorded but there are times when the date is not recorded at all saying only that 'a meeting took place on Wednesday' necessitating lots of searching through the minute book for a date to work from. This is a shame as the minutes offer a lovely insight into the way that the young women of the training college were pushing to change with the times - the principal of the college refused to sanction the wearing of trousers when it was first requested by the student union and smoking remained an issue for many years.



An unexpected benefit of rationing in 1941, Reference BTC3/10/1

Just occasionally an entry really takes the reader by surprise. The Bedford Training College student's watch committee minutes (BTC3/13) for the 3rd February 1974 include the following entry: 'A particularly fine rainbow was observed to the east of the tower block at 3.05pm. Only the lowest arc of the circle was absent, seemingly disappearing into the five a side football pitch. There being no other business the meeting closed at 4.09pm' We have probably all been to meetings where we ended up staring out of the window rather than paying attention to the business but this seems to have been the only thing the whole committee did for over an hour! If you are the writer of minutes a good resolution must be not only to make every second, but every minute count.

Pamela Birch, Service Manager

REMEMBER THEM...AND SHARE THE MEMORY

When attending a funeral or remembrance service have you ever been struck by the amount of information within the eulogy, which gave you a new perspective on the life of the person you had known in just one of their roles in life? Annette Bygraves has and, having given the matter further thought, realised what a unique insight eulogies can give in the way people are remembered. Annette approached the archive service to find out whether we collected them. While we have a few in family collections eulogies do not turn up in the archives very often but we could see that they could have potential as archives. We have therefore worked with Annette to establish a way in which eulogies can be submitted to the archives for posterity. Full details are on our specially created webpage www.bedford.gov.uk/archiveeulogies

EXHIBITION: THINKING OF YOU - WITH LOVE

The theme of our exhibitions this year is *Thinking of You*. Our exhibition from January–March is: Thinking of You - with Love. There will also be a talk about the exhibition, *Writing Home: Letters from Bedfordshire People Abroad*, at 1pm on Thursday 16th February 2017. We have 20 places available so please email archive@bedford.gov.uk or telephone 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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