

THINKING OF YOU - IN TIME OF NEED

On 1st September 1939, the day on which Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declared war on Germany, a scheme planned for over a year was put into effect – the evacuation of vulnerable members of the population, including large numbers of unaccompanied children, to safer areas in the British provinces. Bedfordshire stood ready to receive its share, and trains carrying school children arrived at stations across the county that same day, to be followed by mothers and accompanied children. The organisation required to meet the challenges posed by this influx was considerable. Billets had to be found, the children had to be fed and clothed, and schools had to reorganise to accommodate evacuees.



Evacuees arriving at Biggleswade Ref:Z1306/16/34/6

In January 1939 a survey of Bedford Borough had shown that the town could cope with 20,000 evacuees, though “willing” billets could be found for only 8,050 unaccompanied children. When the evacuation took place Bedford was told to expect 17,500 over three days, but in the event less than half this number arrived, including 4,000 school children. This pattern was repeated across the county. The government had considerably overestimated the numbers of children who would be sent to the comparative safety of the country; many of those who did arrive returned home within a few months, although some returned after the Blitz began.

Finding accommodation even for these lower numbers was no easy task. Children had to be squeezed in wherever possible. In Stotfold a visiting grandmother complained that a local mother of four young children was struggling to cope – not surprisingly! – with the three evacuees who had been billeted with her. Later in the war a large musical box was thrown at the billeting officer of Leighton Buzzard by an irate woman who refused to accept a mother and daughter into her home. In at least some cases this reluctance is understandable. One evacuee wrote of his arrival at the vicarage of Northill that “We came bearing gifts: of head lice, impetigo, scabies and probably other complaints the names of which were unknown to us”.

Despite the difficulties, many evacuees settled well in their temporary lodgings and returned home after the war with happy memories of their time in Bedfordshire. For some the experience was life changing. The Northill evacuee went on to say “The people ... not only took more than their share of small refugees into their homes and provided food and shelter, they also took them into their hearts and provided care and love in abundance. Our visit to Northill was a new beginning for us because we had seen a new and better way of life that nothing and no one could erase, and although we returned to the Becontree Estate and our old way of life, we carried the Northill experience with us.”

In its new free lobby exhibition *‘Thinking of You - In Time of Need’* Bedfordshire Archives examines the experience of the evacuees sent to the county during the Second World War and of the communities which hosted them. Items on display include evacuation record cards, school log books, instructions for billeting officers, a schoolboy’s diary, photographs and letters. The exhibition will run until 4th October. **Kathryn Faulkner, Archivist**



Programme for concert given by evacuees at Biddenham Ref: X535/6

PLAYING HAPPY FAMILIES

Bedfordshire Archives holds many family collections. These generally contain legal papers, photographs, correspondence and various things connected with the interests of the families and individual family members. Many of these collections are quite small, such as the collection deposited recently relating to Mr Cyril Birley Townsend, which consists of only 20 items (Reference X1015). Other collections are much larger and can also cross reference to other estate and family collections we have received from other sources. Sorting, cataloguing and cross referencing such collections can be a time-consuming challenge.

In the first week of July we received 2 tin trunks, one wooden box and 7 banana boxes of material relating to the family of the late Rev. Ian Graham-Orlebar. Between 1973 and 2003 we had received four other substantial sets of family papers from Ian Graham-Orlebar and his mother Mrs Erica Graham née Orlebar. Now, with the death of Rev. Graham-Orlebar these previous deposits and the new material had been gifted to the archives service.



We also have a substantial estate collection from the Orlebar family some of which we own and some of which is with us on deposit. Naturally there is some overlap between the collections and we do not want multiple copies of a picture of little Ian or little Erica as babies.



The first thing was to sort out the material that had just arrived. We were fortunate that on the day it arrived we had two work experience placements with us who could help us separate the wheat from the chaff. There were some things we definitely didn't want—the school cap and tie, the embroidered tea cosy, a pair of ice skates and a large brass grasshopper- but on the whole the material consisted of a lot of letters, mementoes, photographs, notes and diaries.

Once checked, sorted and put into archive boxes the material could at least be put tidily away on our backlog to await further sorting, weeding and final cataloguing.

However, being very short of space it seemed a good idea to try to reduce the duplication between the family photographs as soon as possible and with



the help of two other summer work experience volunteers we set about playing a combination of Happy Families and Snap. By the end of the day we had seen the Orlebar and Graham families grow from babies to mature adults and could tidy away the photographs we need to keep into carefully labelled folders ready for the next phase.



Our regular volunteers do a huge amount of valuable work for us on long-term projects but our work experience placements are equally helpful for short, sharp projects that also make a great contribution to the work we do.

Pamela Birch, Service Manager

CONSERVATION CORNER

Although the majority of records held by Bedfordshire Archives are about Bedfordshire and its people there are some which are to do with places further afield. An example of this is held in the WY collection which contains documents relating to the establishment of Pennsylvania, one of the original 13 states of America, by William Penn in the 1680s. The presence of Penn family manuscripts in WY is accounted for by the marriage of Sophia, daughter of William Penn's son Thomas, to William Stuart, son of the 3rd Earl of Bute of Luton Hoo.

Whilst updating and transferring the WY catalogue to our on-line catalogue, cataloguing assistant Sue Fowler came to the entry for WY1029 - 'packet of burnt or charred documents, in need of repair'. This is explained by the documents being at Tempsford Hall, which was owned by William and Sophia's descendants when it caught fire in 1898.

The documents were tightly rolled in an envelope, with the words 'Penn maps' written in pencil on the outside. They were very brittle and too fragile to handle therefore Sue brought them into conservation.

The first thing to do was to carefully separate the individual maps, whilst trying to keep any loose pieces with the correct map - which was very much like doing an 'impossipuzzle' jigsaw puzzle. Each map was then layered within acid free paper to keep the pieces together while allowing the documents to relax a little prior to treatment.



After carefully opening the bundle. 11 maps in total.



The iron gall ink corrosion was significant, causing the document to fall apart along the heavily inked lines (left). This damage was over and above the fire damage that had caused brittleness and discoloration. The iron gall ink was treated with the application of a phytate treatment. The treatment is very complex and involves several stages of washing and removal of either chemicals or products of discoloration. The procedure is too lengthy to mention here, but if you are interested a very good overview can be found at https://irongallink.org/igi_index43e7.html.

Immediately following the phytate treatment, a lining was applied to the back of each document to support it and hold all the loose pieces in place (left).

The next stage is to fill in the missing area with a Japanese paper that matches the thickness of the paper in the map. Hopefully next time you can see the finish product of this and some of the other maps in the collection.



Vicki Manners, Conservator



heritage open days

BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHIVES - BEHIND THE SCENES

Bedfordshire Archives will be open on Thursday 7th and Saturday 9th September for guided tours as part of the national Heritage Open Days festival. These will give an opportunity to see behind-the-scenes at the Archives on days when the service is normally closed to the public. Learn how we care for the county's documentary heritage, take a look at our specialist storage areas and watch demonstrations of archive conservation. Find out more about the archives we have and how we make them available for you to use.

There will also be an opportunity to view exhibitions on the theme *Thinking Of You In Time of Need*, illustrating Bedfordshire's long history of welcoming refugees, evacuees and other migrants. In archives reception you will be able to see our exhibition looking at the experiences of evacuees in Bedfordshire during the Second World War. 'Voices - Different Pasts, Shared Future', a travelling exhibition from The Higgins Bedford focusing on refugees, will be on display in the Borough Hall Council Suite.

Tours will take place at half-hourly intervals between 10am and 12pm and between 2pm and 4pm and will last around 50 minutes. The gathering point will be in the Members Area of Borough Hall, which is accessible via the main visitors entrance to Borough Hall. The tour involves some walking, and the storage area is only accessible by stairs. To book a place on a tour please telephone 01234 228833 or email archive@bedford.gov.uk.

After visiting us why not try:-

Bunyan Museum, Mill Street, Bedford Especially for Heritage Open Day (**Saturday 9th September only 1100-1430**) - guided tours of the Church under-croft on the hour and half hour & drop-in to see the new museum store and refurbished library store; areas normally closed to the public. Visitors can also see (**Thursday-Saturday 1100-1600**): the summer exhibition '*Inspiring Women of Bunyan*'; a special exhibition celebrating the anniversary of the Reformation; and an exhibition of non-conformist portraiture from the collection of the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust, not normally on public display.

Panacea Museum, Newnham Road, Bedford An exhibition, *Panacea Propaganda: The Box in Print*, will feature some of the Society's most iconic advertisements, promoting their campaign to persuade the Church of England to 'Open Joanna Southcott's Box'. Heritage Open Day visitors can view the exhibition, explore the museum to discover the story behind the campaign and attend a short talk on the mysterious box of prophecy. **Thursday 7 September, Friday 8 September & Saturday 9 September: 11:00 - 17:00 daily**; pre-booking is preferred. Museum and Exhibition are free to explore but talks (**daily at 1400**) must be pre-booked.

Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre **Thursday 7th - Sunday 10th September 10am - 4pm** The restored jewel of the Marston Vale Line! Features the original Victorian Booking Office & vintage Tea Room (in the former Ladies Waiting Room). Special Marston Vale Line 170th Anniversary Exhibition '*Steam & Diesel Through Time*'.

St Paul's Church, St Paul's Square, Bedford will be open all day, **10am-6pm, Saturday 9 September. Guided tours 10.30 am and 2.30 pm**. Donations to St Paul's. **Organ Recital:** Adrian Gunning of St John the Evangelist church, Islington **12 noon -12.40**. Free

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