Bedfordshire Archives & Records Service established 1913

Newsletter No.114 Winter 2018

THE ROAD TO VOTE 100

In 1918 women over 30 who were householders or the wives of householders were given the right to vote in parliamentary elections for the first time. Although it would be another ten years before all men and women over 21 were able to vote the Representation of the People Act of 1918 is considered such a milestone in English history that, following the lead of the Parliamentary Archives, many organisations are celebrating it under the title Vote100. Bedfordshire Archives Service decided to join in by using this as the theme of their 2018 exhibitions. We start by looking at reforms to the electorate that took place before 1918.

From the 14th to the 19th century Bedford and Bedfordshire were represented by four members of parliament—two for the county—called knights of the shire, and two for the Borough of Bedford. The qualification for being able to vote in the county and the borough elections was not the same. Since 1429 the county electorate had been restricted to those men who owned freehold property worth more than 40s a year. The Borough electorate was restricted to freemen of the town until 1690 when this was widened to include all householders not in receipt of alms.

By 1790 there were already people calling for reform. Samuel Whitbread II, who was MP for Bedford for twenty-three years, was a supporter of reform by the parliamentary process. As letters in the Whitbread collection show he was anxious that the feeling for reform was general before he would put his name to it.

proventy. But water to the faling he graved, the attroops to conson any horoson their box fartison tarry hopose, with be protted unsumfoful,

Draft letter by S Whitbread to the Duke of Bedford, Reference W1/4430

However, in spite of his support in the 1790s and again in 1808, the calls for

reform came to nothing.

ELECTION

CLOSE OF THE POLL!

FOUR O'CLOCK

Whitbread 452

Barnard 435

Stuart 375

Smith 177

Finally public pressure won the day and the Representation of the People Act, 1832, also known as the Great Reform Act, was passed. The diary of Catherine Young, a widow living in Bedford, records that the town celebrated the passing of the Act with fireworks (reference AD1719). The Act changed the qualifications in both county and borough but they remained different.

Section Spire.

(TO WIT)

The LIST of PERSONS entitled to Vote in the Election of TWO KNIGHTS of the Shire for the Country of BEDFORD, in respect of Property situate within the Parish of SANDY, at Becston.

Christian Name and Surmane of each Vaire, at fall legth.

Vaire, at fall legth.

Wythoston, in the parish of Eaton-Scoon
Eaton-Scoon
Eaton-Scoon
Barden, in the country of Beaton-Scoon
Eaton-Scoon
Annuity adiaing out of house and land
Annuity a

Above: 1835 claims list for Beeston, Reference RC1.

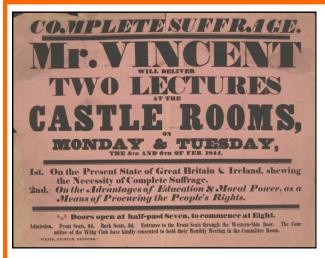
Right: Registers of Claims for the county. By 1911

the volume for the North Beds alone was huge!



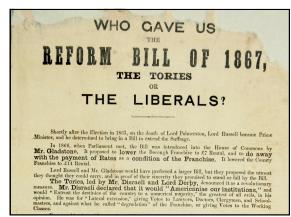
The 1832 act required overseers to produce registers of electors and with a few exceptions in times of war these have been produced at least annually ever since. Part of the process was to publish a list of claims and then check any objections before the final register was published. The claims can have interesting information but they are not easy to use and we only hold a partial set for the county, reference RC.

You can find Bedfordshire Archives's collection of registers of electors 1832-1986 online via www.Ancestry.co.uk



Calls for reform and complete suffrage continued as we can see from the poster of 1844 advertising Mr Vincent's lectures (BorBG10/9/5). Then in 1867, after a number of false starts, the 2nd reform act was passed. It extended the vote to a far larger

proportion than the Great Reform Act had. Now almost all working men in towns and cities could vote but not the rural labourers. It is estimated that 1



man in 3 could now vote. Which party was actually responsible for the extent of the 2nd Reform Act was debatable, as a poster from the 1868 election shows (BorBG10/1/215).

Two other changes are worth noting. In 1869 a right that some women had to vote in local elections before 1835 was returned to them under the Municipal Franchise Act, although there were disputes about who was included. In 1872 the Ballot Act brought in the ballot box and the right to keep who you had voted for to yourself. This was something that had been part of Mr Smith's campaign during the borough election of 1857 (BorBG10/1/182, 193).

The 3rd reform act of the 19th century was passed in 1884. Finally the qualifying conditions for the county and the borough were the same. The following year the Redistribution of Seats Act ended the two members per constituency: reducing Bedford to one MP and splitting the county into two single member constituencies of North and South.

If you are interested in how the voters cast their votes take a look at James Collett-White's volumes *How Bedfordshire Voted 1685-1784*, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society volumes 85, 87 and 89.

Pamela Birch, Service Manager

DISCOVERIES IN THE ARCHIVES

A big part of the joy in cataloguing documents and carrying out research is finding interesting stories that would have lain undiscovered if we hadn't chanced upon them during our work. Here are a few examples of items we've found recently and that more can be learnt about, if you'd like to attend our upcoming talks and workshops (see the back page.)

I've been cataloguing a small portion of the deposited collections of architect, lecturer and author Sir Albert Richardson (1880-1964), reference RGH. Richardson was in partnership with Charles Lovett Gill in London between 1906 and 1939 and from 1946 with his son-in-law, Eric Houfe, in Ampthill. I've been concentrating on RGH6, the drawings from the Ampthill office.

Richardson undertook commissions across the country. So far I've discovered plans from a distillery in Scotland to a house in Devon; from a church outside of Blackpool to a school in Southwold. Some designs were never carried out, such as a competition entry to redesign the Shire Hall in Bedford, a super structure hotel at Fort Hubberstone, Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire and alterations to Hawnes School, Haynes Park (right).





The drawings detail designs from candlesticks to housing estates, churches to a bank, schools and universities to private houses and stately homes. There are also a number of war memorials where Richardson either designed the memorial or the setting it was placed in (left, the South Porch at Old Warden church, in memory of Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth). In general the plans are an indication of the office at work. They are often annotated showing amendments to designs and some even have tea stains! The plans themselves range from site plans giving an overview of the location of the buildings being designed to sketches, which show Richardson's own artistic talents to the fine detail, such as the specifications for the hinges hanging the doors. If you would like to find out more about these treasures come to the talk at Ampthill library on the 5th March.

Carol Walden, Archivist

On 22nd February 1795, George Hooper, an attorney of Biggleswade, made his will [ref: AN7/56]. He died a few weeks later and was buried at Biggleswade church on 11th March. Most unusually, his will, in the first few sentences, suggesting it was of paramount importance to him, asked that his legitimate son John Hooper, an attorney of Dunstable, should make money available for George's 'natural' (illegitimate) son John Hooper Rains, who George had fathered with his former housekeeper, now deceased, Sarah Rains of Great Barford. It is rare for a 'natural' child to be mentioned in a will when there's legitimate children to account for as well.

We wondered whether John Hooper Rains was indeed given his education, not to mention the £200 he was due to receive or whether a Dickensian style plot to deny him his rightful inheritance took place! Some genealogical research soon showed that John Hooper, the legitimate son, died suddenly in 1813 and his will left everything to his wife Elizabeth. Their eleven children all

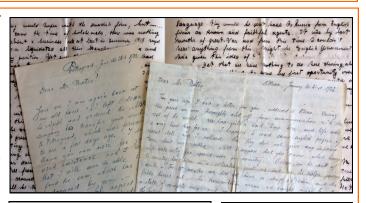
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George Hooper's will and his admission of a 'natural son'.

fared well and the two sons George and John ensured provision for their many unmarried sisters (unmarried daughters often signalled a well-to-do family as it's clear they weren't required to be married off for monetary or dynastic needs) but John Hooper Rains was trickier to locate. By chance he kept his full name and I found that he died in Bristol in March 1854 aged 70. The census returns show that he had at least four children, George, Hannah, Susan and Elizabeth and I found that he married Diana Jeffrey in 1812 in Bristol. How he came to be in Bristol I have yet to discover, but his occupation on the 1841 and 1851 census returns suggests that the money and education might not have fully materialised: he was a postman! For more advice on how to research family history, why not attend one of our workshops. Laura Johnson, Customer Liaison Officer

A small bundle of letters were deposited by Mrs Earey of Chelmsford in November last year (ref: Z1671). The letters belonged to Mrs Earey's grandfather Edwin John Bates who was born in Luton in 1863, the son of George Bates and Harriet Bishop. Edwin initially trained as a miller but he also spent two years in Russia working for the Consolidated Pneumatic Tool Company as an engineer at their St Petersburg plant. The six letters in this collection were written by two of his former colleagues at the plant, Ernest Kuplik and Roman Kornblit, a few years after he returned home and they paint a really vivid picture of what life was like for those caught up in the after effects of the Russian Revolution.

Administration offices in London.



Mr Bates, right, and his letters, above.

In 1919, when he wrote his letters to Edwin, Ernest Kuplik was in Tallinn fighting the Bolsheviks alongside the Estonian army. He had fled St Petersburg hurriedly to avoid arrest (for what reason he doesn't say) and had lost everything in the process. He now hoped that Edwin might be able to help him find a position in London so he could improve his English and find profitable work at the end of the war, possibly as an agent working for the British government in Russia. Roman Kornblit, on the other hand, had fled for Odessa but now found himself without money, work or friends in a city ravaged by famine and unrest. "Hunger and calamity have spread over our country," he wrote. His appeal for help was met with a swift response from his old friend in England who quickly despatched 10\$ in aid through the American Relief



In faltering English, Ernest and Roman's letters describe the widespread upheaval they witnessed around them: the civil war, the closure of factories, the rising cost of basic foodstuffs, the lack of fuel and the collapse of the transport system. They enquire after old friends with whom they've lost touch ("Do you know anything of Mr Ekland?") and pass on the rumours they've heard ("Mr Barsky, the director, has been killed and Mr Markow is said to have escaped to Sweden"). They're united in their best wishes for Edwin's future in England and in their hope that the war will soon be over and Russian life will return to normal. We don't know what happened to Ernest and Roman after 1923, when the letters stop, but Edwin eventually returned to Luton and lived there with his family until his death in 1949.

To learn more about other letter collections in the Archives, come to the talk at Ampthill Library on the 26th February.

Esther Bellamy, Archivist

WHAT'S ON

We are pleased to announce our winter programme of workshops and talks in Central Bedfordshire libraries. There are three talks at Ampthill Library and six workshops (two each per library) running at Biggleswade, Flitwick and Leighton Buzzard.

AMPTHILL LIBRARY 10.30-11.45 AM £2.00

Talks by Bedfordshire Archives to introduce you to some of our unexpected treasures.

MONDAY **26 FEB**

WRITING HOME **Letters from Bedfordshire**

people abroad

MONDAY 5 Mar

MANY MANSIONS

Cataloguing drawings from an

Ampthill architect's office

MONDAY **12 MAR**

SPEAKING OUT Women of Bedfordshire in

their own words

To book call Bedfordshire Archives 01234 228833

INTRODUCTIONS TO FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORY SOURCES

Bedfordshire Archives are running two workshops, which will introduce you to sources in the library, online and at the archive service. 10.30am-12.30pm Family History sources 1.30pm—3.30pm Local History sources Join us for one or both sessions. £5pp/per session

MONDAY

BIGGLESWADE

5 FEB

MONDAY

FLITWICK

19 FEB

MONDAY

LEIGHTON BUZZARD

19 Mar







NEWS



At the end of December we said goodbye to Vicki Manners, our conservator since September 2014. Before becoming our conservator, Vicki had been a valued volunteer at the archive service. We are glad to know that Vicki is not far away as, having juggled two part-time jobs for a while, Vicki has now extended her hours at the Panacea Trust.

We are seeking a new part-time archive conservator.

Thanks to funding from the Bedfordshire Family History Society we have recruited a temporary placement to begin the creation of an index to our wills collection on our online catalogue. We receive many questions about whether we hold particular wills and having even a brief catalogue online will enable people to find whether we hold the will they want. We hope that this will also open up the potential for future digitisation of the collection. However, as the wills collection consists of approximately 22,500 wills and administrations eleven weeks will not be long enough to complete the task and therefore we would be happy to hear from any volunteers who would like to assist with the project.

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: <u>archive@bedford.gov.uk</u> Online at: www.bedford.gov.uk/archive





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