

THE ROAD TO VOTE 100

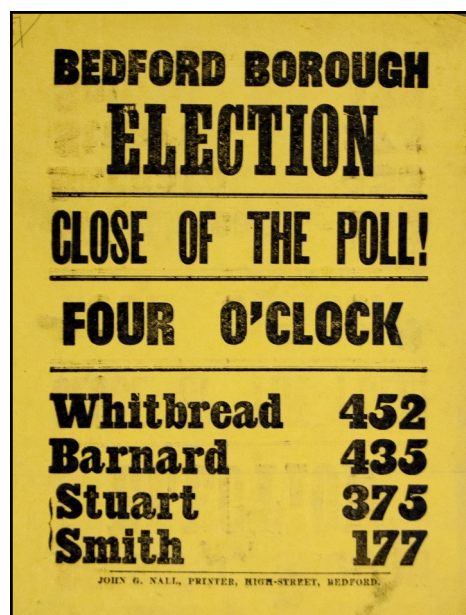
In 1918 women over 30 who were householders or the wives of householders were given the right to vote in parliamentary elections for the first time. Although it would be another ten years before all men and women over 21 were able to vote the Representation of the People Act of 1918 is considered such 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.

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.



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.

1835

Bedfordshire. (TO WIT.)

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

Christian Name and Surname of each Voter, at full length.	Place of Abode.	Nature of Qualification.	Street, Lane or other like place, in this Parish (or Townships) where the Property is situate, or Name of the Property or Name of the Tenant.
1 Ayres, Thomas	Wythoston, in the parish of Eaton	Annuitant arising out of house and land	Beeston, occupied by Bone
2 Ayres, Jacob	Eaton-Socot	Annuitant arising out of Freehold house and land	Occupied by Bone, at Beeston
3 Harrington, Thomas	Beeston	Freehold house and land	In North Seddington held in the occupation of my son and his heirs
4 Berry, Kingsmill	Beeston, in the county of Huntingdon	Freehold house and land	Occupied by Ann Tilcock, Beeston, near to Clifford Bridge
5 Brown, John	Peterborough	Land	Beeston Cross, parish of Sandy
6 Bean, Thomas	Beeston, parish of Sandy	Rent of house and land, amounting at £50 a year	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
7 Branson, Thomas	Conington, near Siltan, in the county of Huntingdon	Freehold Land	Occupied by Ann Tilcock, Beeston, near to Clifford Bridge
8 Barker, Robert	Beeston	Freehold land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
9 Brewer, James	Everton	Freehold land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
10 Bowers, John	Beeston	Freehold house and land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
11 Cooper, John	On the west side of Beeston Green	Freehold land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
12 Cooper, George Osborn	On the west side of Beeston Green	Freehold land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
13 Cocking, William	Road Farm, in the parish of Biggleswade	Freehold houses and land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy
14 Cocking, James	Beeston	Freehold house and land	Beeston, in the parish of Sandy

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!

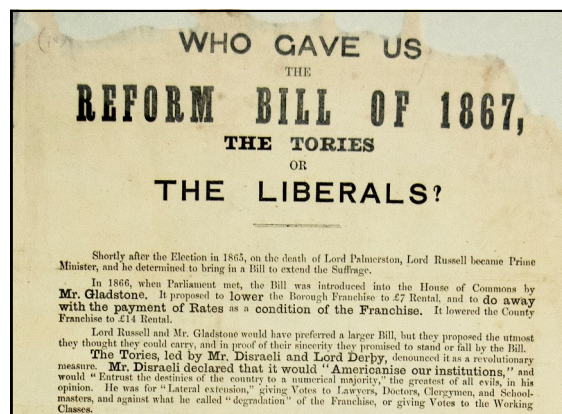


The 1832 act required overseers to produce registers of electors and with a few exceptions in times of war these have been produced at least annually ever since. Part of the process was to publish a list of claims and then check any objections before the final register was published. The claims can have 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.

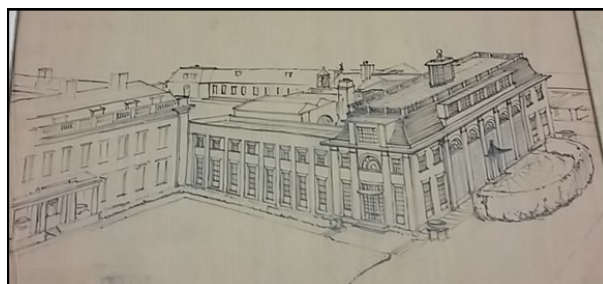
Pamela Birch, Service Manager

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.

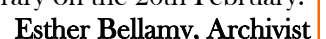
Richardson undertook commissions across the country. So far I've discovered plans from a distillery in Scotland to a house in Devon; from a church outside of Blackpool to a school in Southwold. Some designs were never carried out, such as a competition entry to redesign the Shire Hall in Bedford, a super 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

Laura Johnson, Customer Liaison Officer



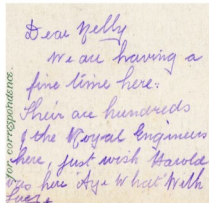
WHAT'S ON

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

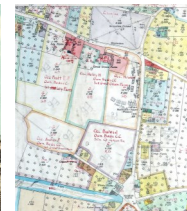
1.30pm—3.30pm Local History sources

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.

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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: [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk) Online at: [www.bedford.gov.uk/archive](http://www.bedford.gov.uk/archive)

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**Luton**

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