

### BEDFORDSHIRE AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR: THE LUTON TOWN CLERK'S A.R.P. FILES

The last exhibition in our “War and Peace” series is now on display in our reception area, with items from our collection illustrating the experiences of Bedfordshire immediately before and during the Second World War. We are fortunate to have in our holdings extensive files kept by the Town Clerk of Luton during the war relating to the Air Raid Prevention service. These show just how wide a remit the A.R.P. enjoyed. A large part of the collection is made up of correspondence files, which include information relating to preparations made before the war, evacuation, transport, home defence, black out and lighting restrictions, personnel, warning systems, emergency billeting, deaths and injuries due to bombing, damage to property, unexploded bombs, shelters, and many other matters. Alongside this correspondence are emergency committee minutes, instructions to be followed if there was an invasion, A.R.P. controller's reports, and files relating to casualty services (including First Aid posts and ambulances) and the auxiliary fire service.

The contents of this collection provide a window in the day-to-day life of a town at war, and show just how much work was carried out in Luton to ensure that the residents and workers were kept as safe as possible. It is fascinating to see some of the small details: for example, in November 1939 the Town Council had to ask the Ministry of Health to stop sending camp beds, as they had received 1,260 in the course of a few days; at the same time a letter from Cadbury's to the Town Clerk said that they were arranging for a representative to deal with “a quantity of chocolate which has been returned to you by the local Evacuation Authority as being surplus to their requirements”.



Churchill Tank produced by Vauxhall at Luton (X214/7/1)

Luton enjoyed an unusual (although not unique) status in being categorised as both a reception area for evacuees and a vulnerable area for the purposes of providing shelters. The town's Member of Parliament sought an explanation from the Minister of Home Security for this confusing designation and was told that there simply were not enough places of “absolute” safety in the country to take the number of children who needed to be evacuated, but that the Ministry were “satisfied that all the towns used as reception areas, including those in which free steel shelters are provided, offer a far better chance of safety in the event of air attack than those from which the children have been moved”. This largely proved to be true. Although Luton suffered far worse casualties than the rest of Bedfordshire, these were still not large by national standards. The worst bombing raid took place on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1940, in which 194 bombs fell on the Luton area, killing 59 and injuring 141, with the majority of the victims at the Vauxhall factory. The second worst incident was a V2 rocket strike on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1944 which hit between the

Commer Cars factory and Biscot Road, leaving 19 dead and 196 injured; a number of houses were destroyed and 1,500 suffered some damage. The Town Clerk's files include a detailed report on this raid, and the effective response of the emergency services.

The Luton Town Clerk's A.R.P. files are catalogued under reference BorL/CA. A search for this reference in our online catalogue will provide the opportunity to browse the contents and give a more detailed insight into the information they contain.

**Kathryn Faulkner**  
Archivist



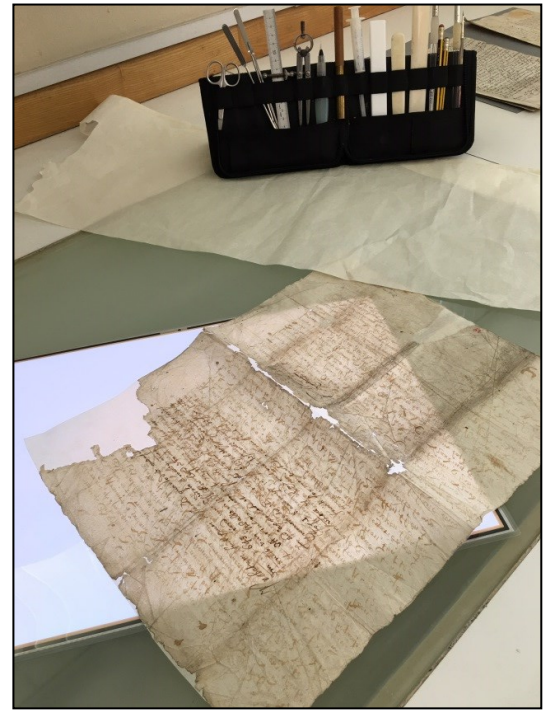
Air Training Corps on parade outside  
Waller Street School, Luton (X941/1/11)

## WHERE THERE'S A WILL—CONSERVATION CORNER

The Archdeaconry of Bedford wills collection at Bedfordshire Archives consists of over 20,000 wills spanning 300 years from Tudor to Victorian times (1536-1857). The survival of these documents makes an understanding of ordinary Bedfordshire lifestyles, occupations, customs, farming and society more accessible.

Most of the wills are written on hand-made rag paper using Iron Gall Ink. Some have been damaged during their history usually by rodents or just because being folded and unfolded caused the paper to break; many have at least some dirt in areas that have been exposed. The project to list the wills on our online catalogue is being done by direct reference to the wills rather than by relying on previous indexes. This means that we have also been able to reassess the condition of the wills and carry out repairs in order to make the documents safe to handle and in preparation for future digitisation.

This will, by John Harding of Henlow dated 1643, was cleaned and repaired using very fine 5gsm Japanese paper to support weakened areas and a 23gsm Japanese paper to make infills where there were losses. The adhesive was conservation grade starch paste.



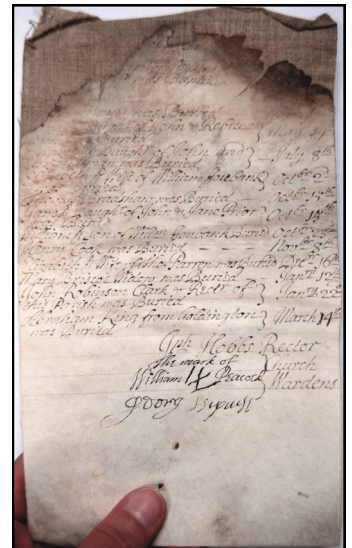
**ABP/W1643/53 – repairs in progress**

**Alison Faden, Conservator**

## WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT THEM

Our volunteers are wonderful. They give us their time but also bring enthusiasm and experience and help keep us on our toes with their questions. Currently they are: identifying photographs, cataloguing wills, quarter sessions, letters, charities, postcards, plans and drawings, making folders, transcribing gaol entries, researching and writing community archives pages. Their efforts help us to achieve things that we simply could not do otherwise. At the moment we are celebrating two particular triumphs - the completion of the cataloguing of the Luton Rural District Council planning application plans 1893-1954 (RDLP) and the discovery of a little, but very important, piece of parchment.

The parchment is an archbishop's transcript (ABT) of burials but because the top is damaged the parish and the date were unknown. When the ABTs were sorted by a party of genealogists between 1908-1914 it was identified as being from Elstow because of a mention within it of the burial of John Robinson, rector of this parish and the signature of Joseph Hobbs but as no date was written on it the volunteers who are now cleaning, listing and repackaging the ABT collection checked it against the published parish register transcript for Elstow. The burial of John Robinson was nowhere to be seen. Puzzled the search turned to our lists of clergy (FASTI/1) which are fortunately available on the online catalogue. These revealed that not only had Robinson and Hobbs consecutively held the parish of Elstow but that they had then consecutively held the parish of Colmworth. Checking the published parish register transcript for Colmworth showed that John Robinson was indeed buried there in 1706. Problem solved! But this comparison with the published transcript revealed that due to the parish registers for Colmworth not surviving until 1735, damage to the Bishop's transcript held at Lincoln and the absence of this ABT the transcribers had been unable to fully identify all the people buried in Colmworth in 1706. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers we can now fill those gaps and finally anyone wondering where Abraham King of Goldington is buried will have their question answered.



1706		Burial		Burial	
May 1	Jayes	Wm			
May 19	Smith	Mary	d	Jn & Rebecca	
Jul 8	Coleman	Ellis	d	Jn & Eliz	
Oct 2	Poubank	Ellis	w	Wm	
Oct 15	Bradshaw	[...]			
Oct 15	Prior	[...]	d	Jn & Jane	
Oct 23	Poubank	[...]	s	Wm	
Nov 8	.....ok	[...]			
Dec 16	Farren	[...]	s	Thos	
Jan 12	.....goe	[...]			
Jan 22	[Robinson]	[John]			widow
Mar 14	[ ]	[ ]			clerk and rector of
					this parish
					from Goldington

**Pamela Birch, County Archivist**



## LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF JOHN RHIND

At last I can announce that I have completed the cataloguing of the photographs and slides taken by Mr James 'John' George Rhind, reference Z1691. Thanks to the generosity of Mr Rhind's daughter the collection was gifted to Bedfordshire Archives at the end of August last year and I have been cataloguing the material on and off since November. Finally on 13 September 2019 I was able to print the catalogue. The final list is of 766 photographs. You can find the catalogue online at <http://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk/search/advanced> by searching for the reference Z1691.

We took a lot of the photographs to an event at Luton Library in November 2018 where much fun and discussion was had identifying the locations and reminiscing about how things had changed. I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who turned up on the day as well as colleagues and volunteers at Bedfordshire Archives in helping me identify the Luton and Bedfordshire locations.

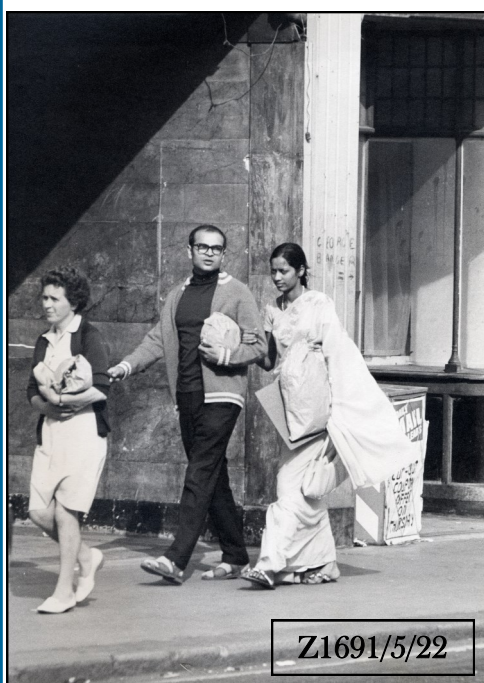


Z1691/5/23a

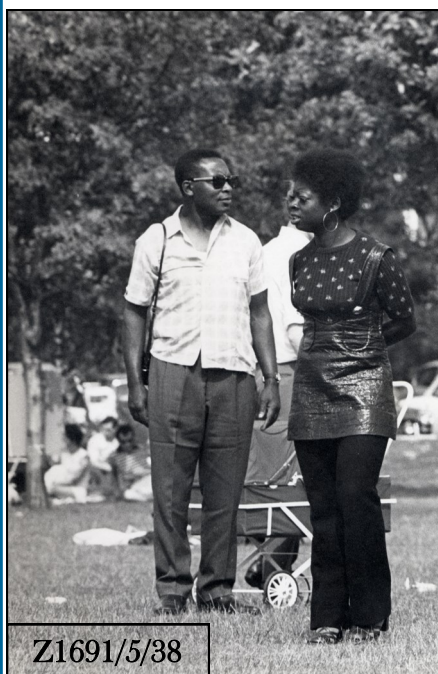
It has been great to work with such a fabulous collection of images that cover the county from the 1950s through to the 1990s. The bulk of the images record the changing landscape of Luton, not only buildings now demolished, but the fashions and the people. This can provide challenges when you are trying to describe the more artistic shots or variations on a common theme such as shoppers going about their business in front of the same row of shops.

I still have quite a few images that I can't identify so feel free to make an appointment to come in and have a look. You may even find someone you know such as the two fine looking gentlemen in the picture below right. We also think this would make a great caption competition. I wonder what the man in the background is thinking!

Carol Walden, Archivist



Z1691/5/22



Z1691/5/38



Z1691/5/112



Z1691/5/92

## CALLING ALL TEXTILE ARTISTS—WEAVING NARRATIVES 2020

In 2016 Bedfordshire Archives ran a project called *Weaving Narratives* in which both amateur and professional textile artists created pieces of work inspired by our archives. This was such a success that those involved still speak of it fondly and those who were not here then to enjoy it have asked if we could do it again.

Now we are delighted to announce *Weaving Narratives 2020*.

The format will be the same as last time. We will hold an initial workshop at the archives to introduce our service and show a selection of archive materials to spark the imagination. A second workshop allows participants to pursue their own interests and follow threads of research under the guidance of archive professionals. The third and final workshop gives participants an opportunity to share and discuss their work in progress. The project culminates in the autumn with a series of exhibitions. Last time work was exhibited at: Borough Hall, Luton Central Library, Flitwick Library, Bedford Central Library and Bedford Hospital and we hope to be able to arrange similar venues for autumn 2020.



The workshops are free and will be held at Bedfordshire Archives on Saturdays 7th March, 4th April and 13th June, from 10am to 12pm. The project is open to all but places at the workshops are limited and will be first come, first served.

We recommend the workshops because we know what fun they are but if you cannot attend and are already familiar with the archives why not book a visit to the searchroom to seek inspiration for your work and keep us updated of your progress through the Weaving Narratives private Facebook group or by email or Twitter. Participants need to provide their own craft materials. As long as there is a link to something we hold in the archives any form of textile art is acceptable and provided textiles are included somewhere mixed media is OK too. Just keep in mind that space may be limited when it comes to the exhibitions.

If you would like to register your interest in taking part please email [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk) or telephone 01234 228833.

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Thursday 5th December 2019** – Luton Central Library – ‘Plays and Pastimes: Leisure in Luton’

Our next Bedfordshire Archives on Tour event at Luton Library will be on Thursday 5 December. There will be the opportunity to discuss with an archivist your research queries and a talk ‘Plays and Pastimes: Leisure in Luton’. This talk will explore how the people of Luton have been entertained over the last century, featuring Luton’s silver screens, rich music past, and other leisure pursuits. The talk will be at 2.30pm until 3.30pm and the Q&A sessions with the archivist will be 10.30am-12pm, 1pm-2pm and 3.30pm-4pm.

If you missed our 2019 exhibitions on the end of World War One, Between the Wars and the start of World War Two do not despair. Next year’s Bedfordshire Local History Association conference, to be hosted by the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, takes for its theme ‘Life on the Home front in Bedfordshire During the Two World Wars’. There will be a packed programme. Booking opens early in the new year so put the date in your diary now, Saturday 20th June 2020, 10.00–16.00.

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)

 [twitter.com/Bedsarchives](https://twitter.com/Bedsarchives)  [facebook.com/BedfordshireArchives](https://facebook.com/BedfordshireArchives)



**Luton**

Jointly funded by Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council & Luton Borough Council