

Community Histories Relaunch!

On the 24th October we'll be relaunching our Community Archives as Community Histories. As a team we felt that Community Archives didn't reflect the fantastic resource it had become and the many contributions made to its pages by volunteers and staff members.

Our Volunteer Holly Coulson shares her review of the community histories pages below.

As someone who knows less about local history than I would like, delving into the Community Histories pages of Bedfordshire Archives is like discovering a treasure trove of information. Having never used the resource before, it was almost overwhelming to see pages and pages of local history.

Each parish has a selection of dedicated pages, often split into sections like Education, Religion and Licensed Properties. It is particularly useful if you're looking for information on historic buildings, with many of the public houses around the county having a long history of ownership, licensing and historic description. There is also plenty of information on religion and nonconformity, with church records offering an abundance of information.

Hidden amongst the pages are honestly some amazing gems. Having worked with pamphlets before, the pamphlet transcription describing the great storm of 1672 in Bedford was a particular highlight. The subtitle reads 'A True Relation of what hapned at Bedford, on Munday last 19 Instant, while Thundering, Lightning, and Tempestuous Winds tore up the Trees by the Roots, the Gates off the Hinges'. There is also details of numerous grisly crimes that happened over the centuries, going as far back as the medieval period. Wherever you live in the county, there is certainly something to learn about your parish!

It is important to note that this is not a



Flooding outside Midland Railway Inn, Church Street, Luton, 1897. Unfortunately extreme weather didn't remain in the 17th century as this postcard attests. [Ref: Z1306/75/19/1]

complete resource, and some of the smaller parishes have less information than the likes of Bedford and Luton. The parishes of Lidlington, Sutton and Pavenham, for example, do not have any detailed information besides a break down of related records held at the Archives. Volunteers are welcome to help produce material for the pages not yet complete. More local history can be found at the Archives, but the Community Histories page provides a great starting point for anyone wanting to learn about local history. I have certainly learnt more about Wootton in half an hour of browsing the pages than I have done during the 20 years I've lived here. I recommend anyone with a spare few minutes to take a browse and discover something new!

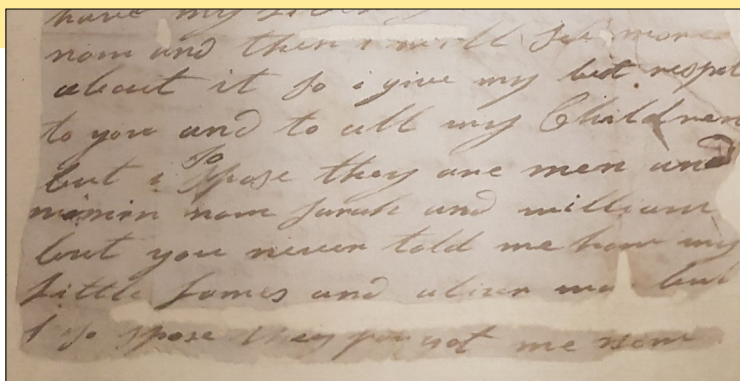
Compiling a Community History Page

Here we discuss some of the sources encountered when researching for a Community History. You can read more about Charles Cartwright's story on the Millbrook Community History page <https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/Millbrook/Charles-Cartwright.aspx>

By Helen Bates, Archivist

Back in April I was working on compiling pages on Millbrook for the Community Histories. Unfortunately, I didn't get very far before I was seconded to the Community Hub to assist with the Council's Covid response. In preparation, I had scanned some pages of our County Record Office Transcripts (CRTs) for Millbrook. This collection, arranged by parish and subject, consists of transcripts, newspaper cuttings, and articles. The CRT provide an excellent introduction to local history. It was amongst these papers that I came across a transcription of an article taken from the Northampton Mercury in 1826 detailing malicious damage to Millbrook Parish Church. The article only gave the offender's name as 'Cartwright'. Intrigued, I checked our Bedfordshire Gaol database and found the respective entry, where I discovered that he was later charged with setting fire to parish wheelbarrows in 1829, participated in riots at Millbrook and Ampthill in 1835, and highway robbery, before he was sentenced to transportation for life in 1837.

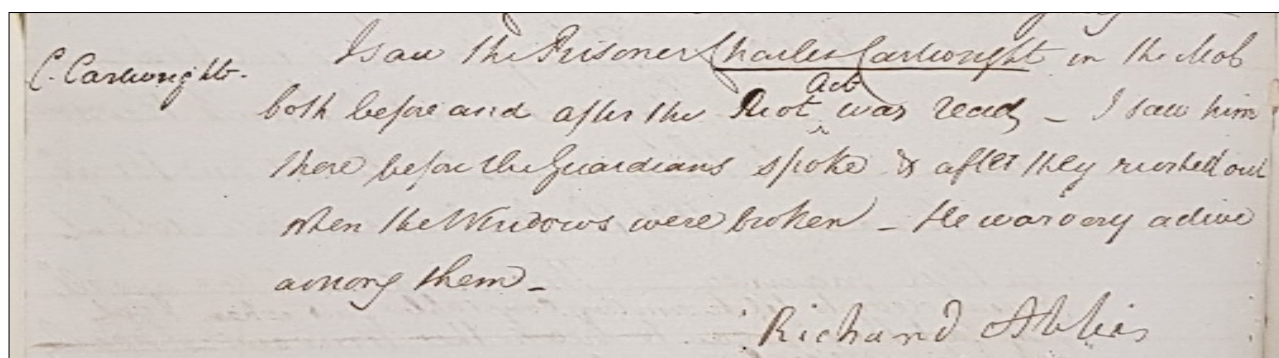
One of the most helpful things when compiling Charles' page, was the availability of online resources at a time when the archive was closed. The Bedfordshire gaol register especially can give a real sense of the individual as some



Extract of letter written by Cartwright, 1844 from New South Wales, lamenting that his children have forgotten him. [Ref: X256/3]

entries contain details about their hair colour, height, scars and literacy skills. For example, Charles was around 5' 8" - 5' 9", had brown hair and a 'fresh complexion'. Similarly, many of the depositions in the Bedfordshire Quarter Session Rolls have been summarised in great detail on the online catalogue itself. As witness accounts, they are a valuable source in attempting to understand events.

It's evident from the depositions in the Quarter Session Rolls that Charles didn't act alone. He was routinely apprehended with two other men by the name of Edward and Job Underwood, whose stories haven't yet been delved into. There's still so much more that could be done with Charles' story and the Millbrook community, both before and after that period.



Deposition of Richard Abbis, 1835 [Ref: QSR1835/3/5/AR]

Conservation Corner

Often containing the details of court sessions, births, marriages, deaths, and local events historical local newspapers are an invaluable resource for researchers, especially when archive material may be lacking. Bedfordshire Archive has a good collection dating from 1751, both original newspapers and microfilmed copies.

By Alison Faden, Conservator

Newsprint - a cheap, mass-produced type of paper made from woodpulp first introduced in 1844 - was, and is, the normal choice of paper in newspaper production. Unfortunately newsprint does not usually survive for long. Due to materials and methods of manufacture it is prone to rapid acid deterioration, discolouration and eventually disintegration. This process can be slowed down by keeping the newspapers cool and dark and under gentle compression, in a binding for example. We also aim to keep page-turning and handling to a minimum, every time an old newspaper is touched, bits seem to fall off!

But even under optimal conditions newsprint will decay rapidly compared with a good quality handmade rag paper. At the Archive we often find 400 year old manuscripts written on handmade rag paper to be in far better condition, and with a far better future outlook, than a newspaper printed only a few decades ago.

Making a surrogate, is one way of preserving historic local newspapers into the future. Producing surrogate images has two advantages, it makes them more accessible to the public, and it reduces the amount of handling of the original documents.

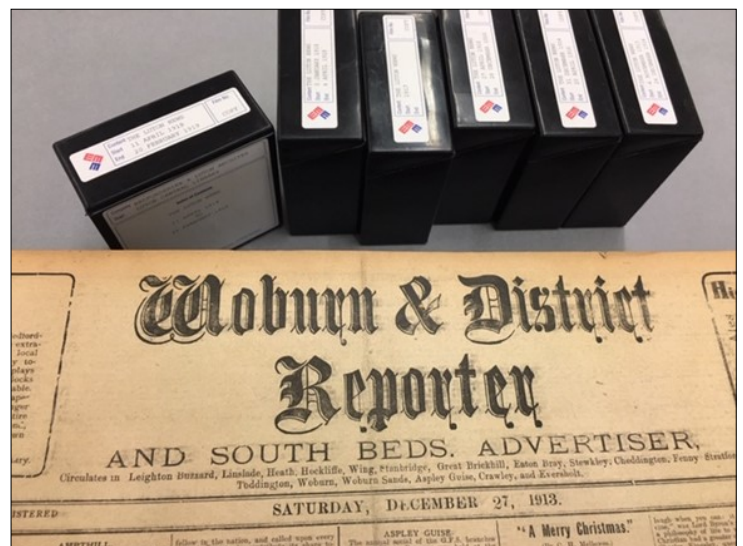
But imaging has its own problems, for example, at Bedfordshire Archives, we have surrogates on microfilm, made in the 1980s. This in itself is fast becoming 'old technology' with conservation issues of its own including degradation of the microfilm due to chemical deterioration and repeated use, not to mention obsolescence of the microfilm reading/printing

machines.

Nowadays digital imaging is used to make surrogates, but at the current rate of technological change, apparently the concept of 'forever' is defined as 5 years. In the world of historical archives we like to think much longer! 500 years is more our timescale.

An invaluable resource is The British Newspaper Archive, which has made hundreds of historical newspapers from all over Britain and Ireland available online. This work continues as more and more digital images from national and local newspapers are added every day

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
Thanks to Bedford Libraries, the archives service is usually able to offer access to this resource via the public access computers in the searchroom.



Community Histories Need You!

Each pin in this map <http://apps.bedsford.gov.uk/archives/BedsMapCA.html> represents a community but not every community is covered on the website. We need your help to fill in the gaps.

- Do you have an interest in local history but have never known just how to start? Researching and writing a page for the Community Histories could be just the thing to get you going.
- Is there a community that you feel is under represented? Help us to gather information and show that community to the world.
- Already have some information on a community that you wrote up years ago that deserves a wider audience? We may be able to tweak it for the Community Histories so do get in touch.

Taking part is a great way to: learn new skills, engage with your community, explore the archives.

Interested? get in touch with us at archive@bedford.gov.uk



Other ways to be involved

To celebrate the relaunch of the Community Histories, we have compiled a list of activities to help you to explore your local area, by either getting out and about or from home. Take a look at

<https://bedsarchives.bedsford.gov.uk/ArchiveEvents/Local-History-Activities.aspx>

Share with us on social media using the hashtag #communityhistory

Tag us on Twitter as @BedsArchives

Find us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/bedfordshirearchives>

Follow us on Instagram @BedsArchives

Upcoming Events

Join us via our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/bedfordshirearchives/> as we present a new series of introductory videos.

Week beginning:

09 Nov 2020 Community Histories: Find out more and advice on compiling a page for the website.

16 Nov 2020 Tips and tricks to get the most out of our online catalogue.

23 Nov 2020 Reveal stories from the archives with these Local History Sources.

Bedfordshire Poor Law Union Records on Ancestry

146,926 new images have been added to Ancestry. You can discover the details of individuals who received aid from the Bedfordshire Poor Law Unions from about 1835-1916. Details vary, but can include an individual's name, date of admission, parish, reason discharged, occupation, gender, marital status, religion, birth date, age, address, disease, name and address of person liable for maintenance. The images are not fully indexed but we are promised that indexes will follow soon.

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: <https://bedsarchives.bedsford.gov.uk/>

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