

### LUTON TITLE DEEDS

*by County Archivist Pamela Birch*

We are regularly made aware, either by The National Archives or private individuals, of documents relating to Bedfordshire that are coming up for auction. We then have to make the difficult decision whether or not to use our limited donations fund to bid for them. In January we were notified by several people of a particular lot of Luton documents that were about to be sold via a London auction house.

I sought advice and tried to establish something of the provenance of the documents in order to determine whether they would be an important addition to our holdings. A search of our own catalogues revealed they were part of a larger collection of deeds found in a chest by L S Leigh esq. of Luton Hoo, which in 1857 Leigh sent to W E Knobel, a solicitor of Whitehall. Knobel sorted and reported on these documents. In 1960 many of the deeds that Knobel had seen were deposited with Bedfordshire Archives under the reference DW; a further seven were deposited in 1978 under the reference LHE. It was clear that if we were able to purchase the deeds now coming up for sale, they would supplement our existing collections and would reunite documents which had been separated for at least 80, and perhaps 166 years.

Thanks to the generous support of a member of the public, Bedfordshire Archives was successful in bidding for the 34 title deeds. After my nerves had recovered from the excitement of the auction, I collected them from London. Since then we have begun to analyse them in more detail. Almost all date from the reign of Henry VI (1422-1461) and 25 of them are gifts of land. They record the



The deeds as they arrived at the office

permanent transfer of property from one person to another. The word 'gift' does not imply a free gift, but is the technical term contrasted to a grant of anything other than property. They tell us the people and the land involved in the transaction; this makes them useful to family and local historians.

Deeds of gift start with the words 'Sciant presentes et futuri...' which means 'Know all men present and future...'.  
*(Note: The original image shows a close-up of the parchment documents, with the text 'Sciant presentes et futuri...' visible on one of the pages.)*



The documents are in excellent condition and are beautifully written; one is in English the rest are in Latin. They have given the archivists a good opportunity to practice their palaeography and also their Latin and we hope to be able to share this, and the stories we uncover, with the public later in the year.

## SAM WHITBREAD—a tribute by James Collett-White, archivist at Southill Park

Readers will, I am sure, have been sorry to hear of the death in January of Sam Whitbread. His family came from Ion in Gravenhurst to Cardington in 1630 and bought the Southill Estate in 1795. His grandfather, Samuel Howard Whitbread, was the first Chairman of Bedfordshire County Council's Education Committee and his father a key figure in setting up the NHS locally and also Chairman of the County Council. Like them Sam devoted a large section of his life to Bedfordshire serving as Lord Lieutenant for 21 years and actively supporting a large numbers of trusts and charities in the county. This was in addition to his being chairman of Whitbread's Brewery 1984-1992

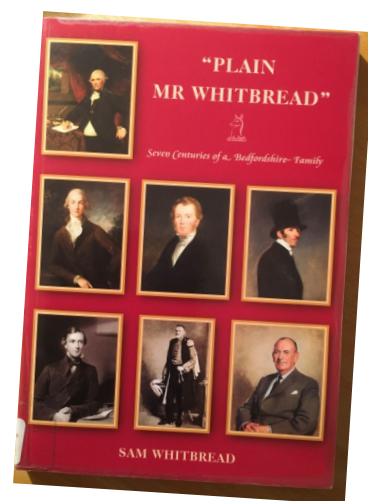
In the 1960s Sam was co-opted onto the Record Committee of Bedfordshire County Council, as a major depositor of documents in the Record Office. Following Council reorganisation, in 1975 Sam became Chairman of the Leisure Committee, which oversaw the Arts and Recreation Department including the Record Office, supporting Miss Bell and her staff during the sometimes difficult transition from the old County Council to the new.

In 1979 Sam followed his father and grandfather to become president of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society. His chairmanship of the AGMs was brilliant. Everyone felt that they had a chance to speak, no one felt rushed, but the speed at which he got through the agenda was astonishing. His chairing the Orlebar Appeal helped to secure this very important archive for the Record Office. The archive (Beds Archives reference OR) gives a detailed picture of northwest Bedfordshire from the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

As Lord Lieutenant, 1991-2012, he became Custos Rotulorum, the custodian of the official records (Beds Archives reference Q), a task he delegated happily to the Record Office. On his retirement he was appointed KCVG by the Queen's special command.

Titles previously had been anathema to the plain Whitbreads, descended from friends of John Bunyan and worshippers in his chapel.

Sam had always wanted to write a history of his family, so he decided to appoint me as a part-time archivist at Southill in 1997. I put in a scheme of records management for his modern files - the older documents having been deposited with the record office in 1936 and 1985. A year or two down the line, I found what he really wanted and started adding my research to what he already had. The result was his beautifully written 'Plain Mr Whitbread.' My contributions to the finished book were the footnotes, and the suggestion that it was too good to be just for the family and needed to be published.



Sam loved showing his home, Southill Park, to groups of visitors. He and his wife had spearheaded the restoration of this magnificent house, remodelled in 1795-1808 by Henry Holland. In 2012 the launch of the centenary celebrations for the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society and Bedfordshire Archives Service was held on the lawn at Southill Park followed by tours of the house. Sam's tours were always historically accurate and pepped up with an amusing anecdote or dry comment. In the 1970s a journalist visitor from Bury St Edmunds described Sam as 'the dishy Mr Whitbread!'

Having worked for Sam and his son for 25 years I am naturally very sad at his passing. He was a delightful man, modest, unassuming and genuinely interested in my work. He used to ask me; 'Have you found anything interesting in the archives?' Sadly I often had to disappoint him!



## MIKE PRATT OF CARLTON *by Pam Hider*

It was with sadness that Bedfordshire Archives learnt of the death of Mike Pratt, for many years a stalwart of local history in Carlton.

Mike was born in Hitchin Hertfordshire in 1937. He was educated at Hitchin Boys' Grammar School from where he went up to St. John's College, Oxford, to read Physics.

From Oxford, he moved to the College of Aeronautics, Cranfield, Bedfordshire, to pursue a further degree in Aeronautics. Following this, he was employed by the college to teach Mathematics to its post-graduate students, eventually becoming Head of Department. He was awarded his Ph.D. from Cranfield and was given a Personal Chair in Computer Aided Engineering - an area in which he had become an internationally recognised authority. He co-authored a number of books in this subject and also in Mathematics.

In 1992, he began work in America as a Research fellow for the National Institute for Standards and Technology in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

On retirement in Carlton, Mike became very interested in the local history of the area and its genealogy. He joined the Carlton & Chellington Historical Society committee in 2003; contributed articles on family history to its newsletter from 2004; and became newsletter editor from 2005 onwards. In addition, he became vice chairman in 2006 and then served as chairman from 2008-2017. He applied his meticulous research methods to everything he wrote and both Bedfordshire Archives and BLHA are indeed fortunate that he has left behind a tremendous legacy of scholarly work.

Mike died on February 18th 2023 and leaves a wife, two sons and two grandchildren.

## CONSERVATION CORNER *by conservator Alison Faden*

### Clerk of the Peace's Enrolled Inclosure Awards, 1808-1844

The Award Books A-S are a collection of 19 large parchment bound volumes. They contain official copies of land inclosure awards for Bedfordshire parishes. After many years of heavy use these volumes were showing signs of wear and tear and it was decided it was time to clean and repair them to preserve them for future use.

The majority of the volumes are hand written in iron gall ink on rag paper. All of the volumes required paper repairs throughout. Fine Japanese paper and conservation grade wheat starch paste were used to support damaged paper. The book bindings on several of the volumes required structural repairs to prevent further losses and other damage.

The photograph shows Award Book A (Toddington and Chalton) being re sewn using a

traditional bookbinder's sewing frame. The existing parchment and board coverings - which had become detached from the body of the book - were also treated and then reattached to the repaired and re sewn text block.



## WORK EXPERIENCE WEEK

In the last week of March we hosted three students from Bedford 6th Form College on work experience placements.

The students started the week by each cataloguing small collections from our backlog. These included: photograph albums of Bedfordshire Lace Morris (Z1713); Programmes of the Chameleons Amateur Drama Group, Aspley Guise (Z1780); records of the Bedford Film Society (X1002).

They each spent a day with our conservator learning about how we preserve material and cleaning and repackaging items.

Other activities involved: using microfilm and microfiche printers and finding items for customer enquiries in the archive stores.



## FOR YOUR DIARY

- 15 April 2023** Visit our stall at Dunstable market—Markets and History day  
Play games and find out about an enormous pudding!
- 19/20 April 2023** Bedfordshire Local History Association Spring Event—join our  
archivist, Natasha Kikas on a walking tour of Woburn more details  
available from <https://www.bedfordshire-lha.org.uk/>
- 9 June 2023** Bedfordshire Family History Society AGM when the county  
archivist will give a talk on 19th century crime in Bedfordshire.
- 24 June 2023** Bedfordshire Local History Association Annual Conference

Published by Bedfordshire Archives, Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP. Tel: (01234) 228833  
E-mail: [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk) <https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Archives-Service.aspx>



Luton



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



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



[instagram.com/bedsarchives](https://instagram.com/bedsarchives)

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