

In Step with History—come with us to explore Central Bedfordshire

Bedfordshire Archives is delighted to have been awarded an engagement grant by The National Archives to enable us to run a project in Central Bedfordshire this year.

The Engagement Grants Programme offers grants to archive organisations to run outreach and engagement projects that ‘connect archives with their communities’. This year’s theme is place.

In Step with History will run guided walks starting in May and ending in September, in four places across Central Bedfordshire—Stotfold, Barton-le-Clay, Langford and Houghton Regis. The walks, led by an archivist with previous success in leading guided walks, will provide people with the opportunity to see and explore local areas and get to know the history behind some of the interesting buildings, locations and events that took place there. With the focus on the theme of ‘place’ we will be using the archives to bring history to life and highlight the collections we have on the places we explore. Information from the quarter sessions, parish, manorial, estate and business records, as well as maps, will illustrate the tours for the participants.

The collections held at Bedfordshire Archives will be used as key sources for our research in developing the tours. Parish records hold vital information on local people through the baptism, marriage and burial records. They may also have accounts of charitable and poor law administration and records of repairs to church property. Our criminal court records will no doubt provide an interesting case or two, providing us with social details for both victims and perpetrators from the 1800s. Maps will be an invaluable source in showing us how the land was distributed and how roads, pathways and buildings have been developed over time.

As well as leading tours, we will also be creating a range of resources such as maps and quizzes for people to undertake their own walks in their own time and learn about some of the local areas in Central Bedfordshire. The final part of the project will take place in September when we will celebrate the completion of the project with a display for Heritage Open Day.

The research undertaken will be made available to the public via our Community History pages on the Bedfordshire Archives website. These pages are a widely used resource appreciated by our users. The particular areas we are focusing on in Central Bedfordshire currently do not have any Community History pages, therefore any and all updates to these pages will be greatly appreciated by our users and our archivists!

As we undertake this project we are looking to engage and collaborate with Central Bedfordshire Council, local history societies and walking groups. We hope they will have been interested in the project and be a useful source of knowledge to help us on our way. By engaging with these groups we plan to create

**Central
Bedfordshire**



View of Church Road Stotfold in about 1910 and in 2024. Can you spot the differences?

interesting, educational and fun-filled walking tours suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities.

We will aim to make the walks wheelchair friendly and adaptable for anyone with walking aids. Due to the amount of walks we will undertake, we will be able to ensure that there are walks suitable for all needs and that they are as inclusive and accessible as possible. The walks will be of varying lengths to suit a range of walking abilities and age groups, with some walks including interaction such as sensory involvement, signing, and visual cues to support any users with disabilities or physical/sensory needs. To provide an element of interaction there will be quizzes and games available, especially on walks aimed at our younger audiences.

As well as learning about the history of places, we hope that people will benefit from the physical activity of walking, which greatly benefits wellbeing. We also hope they will be inspired by what they learn and be motivated to use the archives for further research or to develop their knowledge of the areas.

Walks will be on Thursdays, but we will vary the time of day in the hope that gives people more opportunities to join us.

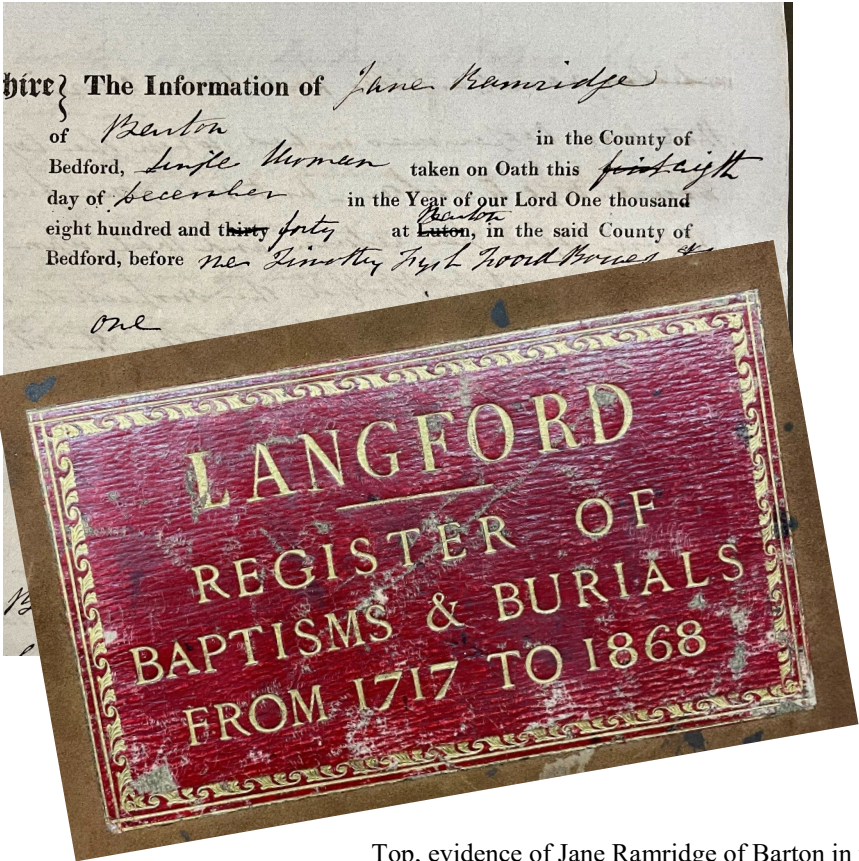
A full timetable of walking tours will be available shortly, but **now is your time to let us know what would suit you and whether there is anything we can do to make a walk accessible to you.** If you are interested in joining us on one of our walks, contact us by emailing: archive@bedford.gov.uk



Map of Houghton Regis made in 1762 (B553)

Timetable of Walking Tours—2024

30 May	Stotfold
06 June	Barton-Le-Clay
20 June	Langford & Broom
27 June	Houghton Regis
04 July	Stotfold
11 July	Barton-Le-Clay
18 July	Langford & Broom
25 July	Houghton Regis
01 August	Stotfold
08 August	Barton-Le-Clay
15 August	Langford & Broom
22 August	Houghton Regis
05 September	Stotfold
12 September	Barton-Le-Clay
19 September	Langford
26 September	Houghton Regis



Top, evidence of Jane Ramridge of Barton in the case against Ann Cooper, 1840. Bottom: label from a Langford parish register.

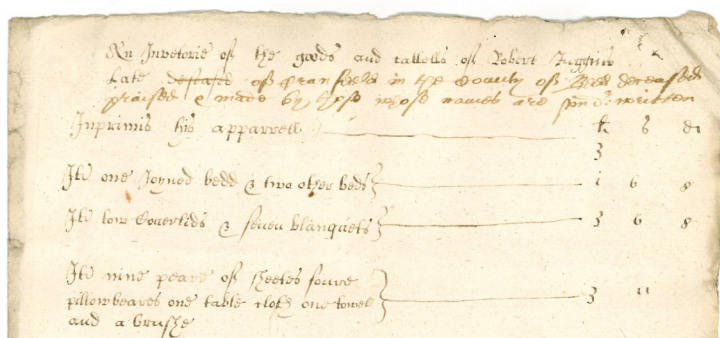
Bedfordshire Probate Inventories before 1600

Barbara Tearle, editor of Bedfordshire Historical Record Society's new book

What were probate inventories?

They were the priced list of a person's goods submitted to the church courts as part of the process of obtaining probate or letters of administration. Their heyday was the mid-16th to the mid-18th centuries. Theoretically, there should have been thousands for Bedfordshire people. No doubt there were, but few survived and it has long been thought that most were published in Bedfordshire Historical Record Society's volumes 20 and 32. Originals are in Bedfordshire Archives.

Ten years ago I stumbled upon more in Lincolnshire Archives - an obvious place for them because Bedfordshire was an archdeaconry of Lincoln diocese. Further delving uncovered about sixty-five more in Bedfordshire Archives (mostly after 1600) and a few in other archives. 432 are now published in the new Bedfordshire Historical Record Society volume.



Inventory of Robert Juggins of Cranfield, 1617

What did inventories contain?

They usually focused on household goods and agricultural produce and equipment. The amount of detail provides rich snapshots of everyday life at many social levels of society. Some wealthy farming households had many tables, stools, chairs, cupboards, chests and beds with bedlinen of varying quality - fine or coarse, linen or hemp - and many blankets and other bed coverings. Kitchen equipment was similarly listed in detail, including two items - *treddes* and *bayards* - which may be local Bedfordshire terms as I have not found them elsewhere. Brewing, malting and farm equipment are similarly detailed.

At the other end of the social scale, several inventories offer a rare glimpse of the material poverty of the very poor - scarcely any clothes, a bed and a sheet and blanket and few cooking or eating utensils.

Other people also had few possessions, valued at only a few pounds, but were owed far more. What was

going on? It is probable that some of these people were old, had sold up, were living with family and had a small 'retirement' income from the interest on this money.

Land was excluded from inventories but crops were not and nearly a third of inventories described the acreage of wheat, barley, oats, peas etc. giving a *minimum* land holding for those people. Most had between 5 and 29 acres; but three had more than 200.

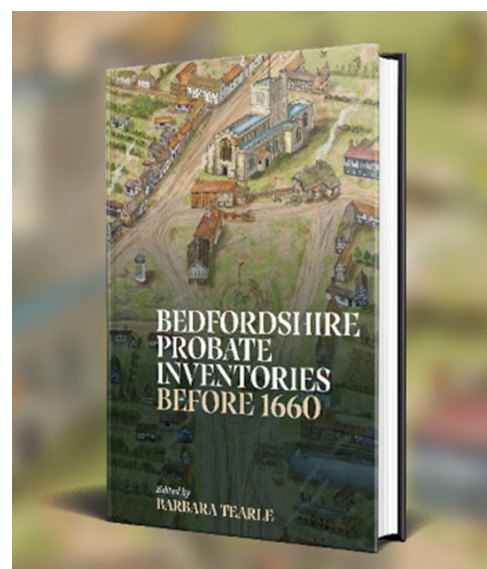
Do I have favourites?

Yes, I do: the luxurious inn at Dunstable; the £70-worth of books (a huge number) owned by the rector of Wilden, who, I discovered, was one of the translators of the King James Bible; the servant of Sir John Burgoyne who had fashionable (but old) clothing and not much more; and the vicar who died on a visit to London. These and other people not only had interesting inventories but interesting stories, where they can be uncovered with the help of documents at Bedfordshire Archives and elsewhere.

Thanks

Of the many people who helped with the project, my special thanks go to Pamela Birch and the staff at Bedfordshire Archives for practical help and encouragement and to Alan Higgs for permission to use his modern interpretation of Agas's map of Toddington in the 1580s for the cover.

Bedfordshire Probate Inventories before 1660, edited by Barbara Tearle. Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, volume 98. Published by Boydell & Brewer in March 2024. <https://boydellandbrewer.com/9780851550855/bedfordshire-probate-inventories-before-1660/>



WOMEN IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Bedfordshire Archives has contributed to a major new academic resource. In February, publishers AM launched a new resource called *Women's Voices and Life Writing* 1600-1968. The resource is available on subscription to academic libraries. It brings together digital images of diaries and transcripts and recordings of oral histories by women from regional and national archives across the UK and Ireland.

The material from Bedfordshire ranged from the letters of Catherine Talbot written in 1745, to oral history recordings made as part of the Greensand Trust Sands of Time project in 2010. In total, 94 diaries, letters and notebooks and 113 oral history recordings from Bedfordshire Archives have been included in the publication. Bedfordshire Archives benefits from the payment of royalties and by receiving copies of the 9,000 digital images. The publication will enable researchers to access everyday experiences of women of diverse backgrounds over nearly 400 years across England and beyond - one of the diaries from Bedfordshire Archives was the diary of a member of an ex-patriate Greek family living at Turvey in Bedfordshire recording their holiday in Norway!



X928/1/3/7/4/3 Henrietta and Marigo Argenti holding onto their hats on the steam yacht Vectis on their trip to Norway in 1910.

ALAN HUNTER

We were sad to hear of the death of Mr Alan Hunter of Haynes. Alan was one of our volunteers during the 1990s, something that he combined with his duties on the reception desk for County Hall. He mainly worked on indexing local newspapers. His

handwritten green index cards are still useful for finding odd snippets of information from the newspapers that would otherwise be missed. After retiring Alan remained a firm supporter of the Archive Service.

FOR YOUR DIARY

May-Sept

Guided walks in Central Bedfordshire see inside and website for details!

22 June

Bedfordshire Local History Association conference, Linslade

20-21 July

Bedford River Festival—come and find us on the Heritage Bedford stand and have a go at besieging Bedford Castle with our new activity to mark the 800th anniversary of the castle siege.

Published by Bedfordshire Archives, Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Bedford MK42 9AP. Tel: (01234) 228833
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