

## STORIES FROM THE STACKS AT LUTON LIBRARIES



We're looking forward to doing some more outreach work in the south of the county with our new exhibition 'Stories from the Stacks'. The exhibition will be taking place at Luton Central Library throughout May in their Heritage Room and will be looking at the themes of Housing & Home, Leisure, Health, Transport & Work. We will be using documents from our collections to illustrate life in Luton and showcasing what collections we hold. The exhibition is part of a larger project being undertaken by Luton Libraries, centred around the theme of storytelling. The exhibition will be available to view during usual library opening times and we hope it will be interesting and insightful for all those who see it.

We will also be offering a free talk at Luton Central Library on 22nd May which aims to take a closer look at some real-life experiences and events of people in Luton. Focusing on the themes of the exhibition, the talk will look at how and why these events have been documented in the archives and what the records tell us. If you would like to attend the talk, please let us know in advance by booking through the Luton Libraries event page <https://www.lutonlibraries.co.uk/>

**DATES:** 1-31st May – *Exhibition* - library opening hours  
22nd May – *Talk* – 11am

*Please see Luton Central Library website for their opening hours.*

## IN STEP WITH HISTORY RETURNS TO CENTRAL BEDS



Last year, we received an engagement grant from The National Archives and undertook a project called *In Step with History*. The project focussed on engagement in Central Bedfordshire by providing archivist-led guided walking tours in Stotfold, Houghton Regis, Barton-le-Clay and Langford to 'connect archives with their communities'. The walks undertaken every Thursday were a great success; well attended by locals and people from further afield. In order to develop these walks lots of research was undertaken and this information has now been added to our Community History pages making these a valuable resources for members of the public (and our archivists!) to access via our website.

Unfortunately some people were unable to attend due to the day and time that the walks were taking place. So this year we will carry out a set of walks in May and June that will run on Saturdays, which will hopefully give those previously unable to attend the opportunity to join us. If you are interested in coming on one (or all!) of our walks, contact us by emailing: [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk) for further details and to book a place.

**DATES:** 10th May – *Stotfold* – 10:30am & 1pm  
24th May – *Barton-le-Clay* – 10:30am & 1pm  
7th Jun – *Langford* – 10:30am & 1pm  
21st Jun – *Houghton Regis* – 10:30am & 1pm

## NEW ENQUIRY SYSTEM

Last year we received over 900 enquires that we logged into our enquiry system to keep track of the correspondence between us and the enquirers and to make sure that we had responded to each enquiry in good time. The system we used was a passive system that required archive staff to copy correspondence into a storage system and log the progress e.g. payments received. The system was also useful for providing us with statistical information about the enquiries and enquirers such as the type of enquiry and where our enquirers were based. This information helps us to ensure that we are targeting our cataloguing so that we are able to respond to enquiries efficiently, and to target our outreach to raise awareness of our service to those we think might benefit from knowing more about what we can offer.

In autumn 2024 Bedford Borough Council needed to make changes to the way we received enquiries by form. It also began to decommission the old system we were using. This gave us the opportunity to introduce a new system that has the ability to be more interactive and gives the potential for enquirers to monitor progress for themselves.

We have two online forms—one for enquiries and one for requests for copies. We ask that you use the online forms for these if at all possible. The form automatically creates an enquiry on the new system and seeks to ensure that we receive all the information we need in one go. If you have, or create, a Bedford Borough account you can use this to check progress of your enquiry. If you do not have an account you will be able to reply to emails sent from the system and these emails will automatically be gathered into the system. The emails the system sends come from archives@host3.bedfordborough.gov.uk rather than our general email address, if you don't think you have received a response to an enquiry in good time please ensure you check your junk. Please do not use this email address for anything other than the particular enquiry it relates to as it will not work.

## COMMUNITY HISTORY PAGES

Bedfordshire Archives Community History pages are our online resource for the parishes and communities of Bedfordshire. The pages include research on properties, churches, manors and licenced premises, as well as many other topics. Much of this research has been contributed by staff over the years, but we have also been very lucky to have some fantastic volunteers who have carried out research and contributed additional pages to the ever growing collection. We have had quite a surge of new material added recently, with over 370 brand new pages added.

The recent surge has been down to a few projects that are currently underway. Our volunteer John has been busy making his way through the individual buildings along Bedford's High Street, looking at their previous uses and occupants. Many of these are now uploaded and available to view on the Bedford Street Index. As well as the High Street, seven parishes have had their pages added to. These are: Houghton Regis, Barton-le-Clay, Langford, Stotfold, Dunton, Sharnbrook and Haynes. These parishes previously had no Community History pages, so it has been exciting to have them as new additions. Some of the research that has been added has come from the In Step with History outreach project undertaken last year by our archivist, Natasha Kikas.



As well as adding new pages, we are also updating our previous ones. This includes adding new photos, updating the research to reflect any new collections that have come in, as well as adding reference lists at the bottom of the pages to make it easier to see what documents we have regarding particular topics. This is an ongoing project, so please bear with us as we make our way through all the individual pages. We still have plenty of communities to research, so please feel free to get in touch if you would like to contribute to any of our communities. If you have any additional information on any of our pages or, indeed, information on aspects of the community that are not covered, we would love to hear from you and could publish your research online, giving credit, of course, where it is due.

## THE BACKLOG

This January the archives took a much needed closure week to check up on our cataloguing backlog. We have been very lucky to receive many deposits of archival material from individuals, families, businesses and societies over the years, but the amount of material received far outweighs the amount of people we have to catalogue it. That is why we have our backlog, this is a space we have to process and organise the collections we receive, safely store them prior to cataloguing and be accessible for archivists who may need to access them.

The first job we undertook was to make sure the backlog database matched what was on the shelves and that everything was in the correct location. Luckily, this wasn't too daunting a task and almost everything was where it should be [phew!] As we made our way through the shelves, we checked inside some of the boxes to see if we could identify some quick wins for the archivists to fulfil; whether that would be a small cataloguing task, matching up collections or weeding through material that had not been looked at. These will provide us with some much needed space, which will no doubt be filled very quickly!



We also identified any collections which could be catalogued by volunteers and work experience placements. Bedfordshire Archives is very lucky to have a large group of volunteers who work on a wide variety of collections. In addition we provide work experience placements for people who are interested in becoming an archivist and need experience prior to starting a certified course. Having identified collections, we can now more easily assign suitable cataloguing projects to our volunteers and have tasks ready for those joining us for work experience.

Our next big task was to make some space for potential upcoming deposits. This meant moving boxes to different locations and amalgamating some boxes which were sometimes half full. Making room for the archives we collect is a constant task, with space being a premium. With new additions to our collections being received each week, it is important to keep up to date with the backlog to ensure it is manageable for our archive staff. That is why this closure week was so useful to us. Overall our closure week was a great success!

## LEIGHTON BUZZARD MARKET FAMILY EVENTS

This April and May we will be heading to Leighton Buzzard Markets family events. We were lucky enough to join them at their Halloween event last year, with over 100 children helping us name our pumpkin—Ziggy! This April we will be there for their Easter event which will feature an arty party theme, which ties in with the new planters being decorated by local artists during this week.

Bedfordshire Archives will be holding a stall featuring a small exhibition about the tradition of Easter eggs and a look at the archives of the confectioners Meltis which are held in our collection [ref: X853]. Meltis became one of Bedford's best known employers and their confectionery was known across the country featuring the delights of glacé fruits, peppermint creams, Turkish delight and much more.



Ladies packing Easter Eggs in the Meltis factory [ref: X853/30/4/2].

## STAFF NEWS

In November, archivist Thomas Larner left our service for a new job as a Museum Access Officer at Bolton Library and Museum Services in Greater Manchester. Thomas joined Bedfordshire Archives in November 2021 and has been a great member of our team. We wish him well in his new role.

Thomas, moving north, left one of our full-time archivist posts vacant and we also had our part-time archivist position vacant as well. Thankfully, both of these roles have now been filled. Rachel Bates joined us in November as our part-time archivist and Rebecca Marsh joined us in January to fill the full-time archivist position. Both Rachel and Rebecca have previously worked for Bedfordshire Archives and it is fantastic to have them both back with us.

On Monday 10th March staff at Bedfordshire Archives were treated to a lovely buffet lunch by one of our former colleagues. James Collett-White wished to mark his 50 year association with the office and so shared a delicious repast of bread and cheese, homemade flapjacks and chocolate cake with staff and volunteers. James first came to work as an archivist for us in March 1975. He left in 1997, later returning as a part-time archivist. Since his retirement in 2012, James has continued to be a regular user of the searchroom. As a researcher he has studied many different subjects and was one of the authors of *The Turner Letters*, published in 2022 by Bedfordshire Historical Records Society and based on our collections, reference Z629 and Z1656/7. His support for the service is much appreciated by the current staff and it was lovely to know that he not only enjoyed working for it but feels we offer a friendly, welcoming and knowledgeable service that he is proud to be associated with. In turn we are happy to consider him a colleague and friend, especially when his wife, Ann, bakes such exceedingly good cakes!



## FOR YOUR DIARY

- 15 Apr 2025**      **Leighton Buzzard Arty Party at Leighton Buzzard Market** 10am–2pm  
We are delighted to have been invited to take part in this event, which promises a free day for local families with activities and crafts.
- May-Jun 2025**      **Guided walks in Central Bedfordshire** see front page and [website](#) for details!
- 7 & 14 May 2025**      **Display at Flitwick Library** as part of Flitwick—A Living History Project
- 1-30 May 2025**      **Exhibition** at Luton Central Library
- 22 May 2025**      **Talk** *Stories from the Stacks* at Luton Central Library, see front page.
- 27 May 2025**      **Leighton Buzzard Family Fun Day at Leighton Buzzard Market** 10am–2pm  
We will be back at Leighton Buzzard Market, come and say hi!
- 12 Sept 2025**      **Heritage Open Day at Luton Hoo Walled Garden**
- 12-14 Sept 2025**      **Bedfordshire Steam Rally and Country Fayre, Shuttleworth Park**  
Come and find us at the Heritage Tent.

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>



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