

### OUTREACH AT BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHIVES

Firstly, we must apologise, almost a whole year without a newsletter! 2025 was a very busy and productive year for Bedfordshire Archives, so we thought it was only fair we shared what we have been up to. Last year was a great year for outreach, and it is something our archivists are particularly passionate about. Making our service and documents available to members of the public is always special and it is great having more people know about us. All of our archivists have participated in a wide variety of events in the past 12 months.

Throughout the year we have had a hand in a variety of exhibitions. Our first was in May at Luton Central Library and was called *Stories from the Stacks* which also included a talk at the library around the themes of: work, health, home, transport and leisure. We also provided exhibition panels to the *Flitwick: A Living History Project* and supported their events at Flitwick Library. Our reception area also had a new lease of life with an exhibition on *Crime & Punishment*. We are hoping to update this exhibition every six months, so keep an eye out for the next one if you are a regular visitor.



We always love to attend events and have been to plenty. Throughout the year we went to Leighton Buzzard Family market, which takes place during the school half terms. This family friendly event is very popular and usually features a game to keep the little ones busy. Another event we also love to participate in is Heritage Open Day. On the 12th September we joined Luton Hoo Walled Garden for their Heritage Open Day event reusing our display originally created for Luton Central Library. Around the same time we also attended Bedfordshire Steam & Country Fayre at Old Warden, a three day event that was jam packed with things to do and saw us engage with over 400 people. Many enjoyed our display and also rose to the challenge of our traction engine themed game based on a representation of 'Dorothy' a Clayton & Shuttleworth traction engine owned by the Shuttleworth Collection. As well as introducing lots of people to Bedfordshire Archives the event resulted in: two new volunteers, three bookings for talks, searchroom bookings and helped us to network with people from the Shuttleworth Collection for whom

we hold a significant collection of records.

Talks are always incredibly popular, especially when we can tailor them to a particular topic or theme. We delivered nineteen talks to groups and organisations across the county, with some hybrid by Zoom. One of our archivists also contributed to an online training event run by the Society of Genealogists about records of gypsies and travellers, using our hawkers licences as part of her talk. Groups and organisations came to visit us and enjoyed tours of our stack rooms as well as a sneak peak at collections which interested them. Towards the end of the year we gave a talk at Luton Central Library about the history and identification of photographs.

To find out more about what we have been up to, see our annual report, now available online at: <https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Archives-Service.aspx>. If you would like to arrange a talk, group visit or would like to arrange some outreach with us, please get in contact via email: [archive@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:archive@bedford.gov.uk) or give us a call on: (01234) 228833. For our latest events, see the back of this newsletter.

# CATALOGUING PROJECTS

## The Campaign to Protect Rural England [CPRE]

Since November 2025, our part-time archivist has been sorting, listing and cataloguing records deposited by the Bedfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). The national charity is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year and next year is the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CPRE Bedfordshire. With the help of volunteers, so far over 200 records of have been catalogued, including minutes, developer reports, responses to planning applications and photographs of the Bedfordshire countryside, taken by the late Eric Meadows. A separate collection of newsletters published by the charity (*Bedfordshire Matters*) can be found under reference **Z1178**.



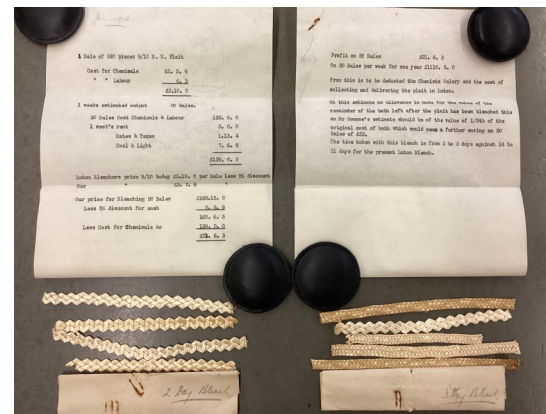
## North Bedfordshire District Council Deeds [DC/NB/E]



This year one of our archivists began tackling a large cataloguing project of North Bedfordshire deeds. The collection referenced DC/NB/E are deed packets to properties owned by North Bedfordshire District Council at the time of their registration with the Land Registry. Many of the properties were acquired for redevelopment work within the town and therefore the deeds often relate to property boundaries and to a landscape much altered by subsequent development of roads and housing within Bedford. The deeds were considered archives once the land had been registered. The packets were arranged alphabetically by place and a box list was produced to enable discovery and use prior to full cataloguing being carried out. So far, 19 of the 54 boxes have been fully catalogued with over 3,800 new item level entries being added to date.

## Franklin, Deacon, Briars [FDB]

In January four new volunteers started work on a project to make a list of the contents of the boxes of business papers and project files of Franklin, Deacon, Briars, architects of Luton (FDB). By the end of the year 90 of the approximately 150 boxes had been listed onto a spreadsheet. This will enable us to understand the collection and prepare a scheme for the final cataloguing. The volunteers have made some interesting and unexpected discoveries including; files on the selling off of army surplus from Biscot camp and a camp in Devon, when the camps closed at the end of World War One; some samples of bleached straw plait, and 1930s brochures on the use of concrete and asbestos as building materials.



## Parish Rate Books [RB]



One of our wonderful volunteers, Carla, has powered through a major project. She has catalogued and re-packaged 1,408 parish rate books! These 19th century volumes, dating from 1837-1926, are invaluable for family, property and local historians. Parish rate books are historical tax ledgers used to record local property taxes such as poor relief, highway, lighting, sanitation and special expenses. The books at Bedfordshire Archives were mainly received from the Poor Law Unions of each parish. The numbers surviving vary considerably from parish to parish. They are valuable for genealogy and local history purposes, often acting as census substitutes to track exactly where and when an ancestor lived. To see what we have search **RB** on our online catalogue.

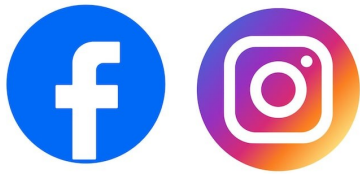
## VOLUNTEERS' TRAINING EVENT

On Thursday 23rd April we were delighted to welcome 20 of our wonderful volunteers to a dedicated training session and talk on maps. We wanted to hold an event especially for our volunteers, who contribute so much to the accessibility and preservation of our collections. We currently have 25 volunteers (three of whom work remotely), and it is estimated they contribute an additional 100 hours a week and 4,200 hours a year in time! The event was an opportunity to meet other volunteers, meet all staff and find out what everyone is working on (and in some cases discover crossovers!). We also wanted to communicate ongoing work to improve our indexing of names, places and subjects i.e. the keywords we use to help describe our collections, and to go through the crib sheet we have put together to help everyone catalogue consistently.

Our archivist, Natasha, did a whistle-stop tour of the searchroom and the easily accessible resources available on the shelves to help with research and/or fact checking. Pamela rounded off the session with a talk on the printed and manuscript maps in our collections, why they were created and the sorts of things they do (and don't!) tell you. As with any record, knowing who created it and what it was created for, is key to understanding the strengths and limitations of county, estate, tithe and enclosure maps.



## SOCIAL MEDIA



In 2025 we kickstarted our social media presence by developing a schedule for posts about the archive service and our collections. We also began to use it as a way of connecting with The Higgins and the Library Service and cross promoting. Social media is a great way for us to reach out to current, past and potential visitors, as well as promoting our outreach events. We have also been able to give people sneak peeks into little used collections as well as promoting newly catalogued items and brand new finds. Pictures of Bedfordshire always

seem to be a big hit and usually have the most amount of comments and likes due to people reminiscing. We love hearing all about your stories on our posts, so please do keep engaging with them. By the end of the year we had increased our Facebook followers by 45%. As always our website and email still remain the best way to get in contact with us. If you don't already, please give us a follow on your social media platform of choice (see our social media handles on the back page). It is a great way of seeing what we're up to!

## ELSTOW MANOR CARE HOME

For the last six months, two of our archivists have been hosting monthly history talks at Elstow Manor Care Home. The topics chosen have ranged from life in the 1960s, the history of medicine, crime and punishment, the industries of Bedford and many more. Each presentation features documents from our collections. These talks are open to members of the public but spaces are limited and booking is essential. Join us on the last Thursday of every month until November for an informative and relaxed afternoon.

To book a space:

**Email:** [Valerie.foley@hamberleycarehomes.co.uk](mailto:Valerie.foley@hamberleycarehomes.co.uk)

**Call:** 01234 676766 (option 2)

**Dates:** 28 May | 25 Jun | 30 Jul | 27 Aug | 24 Sep | 29 Oct  
26 Nov 2026



## STAFF & VOLUNTEER NEWS

At the end of last year Bedfordshire Archives said goodbye to conservator Alison Faden, who had decided to retire. Alison first came to Bedfordshire Archives for work experience in 2009 when studying for her MA in Conservation specialising in books and paper. Conservation was a second career for Alison who had previously been a school librarian. After qualifying in 2010 she went on to be an intern at the British Library and the Leather Conservation Centre before becoming a freelance conservator. In November 2018 Alison gave up her freelance practice to work three days a week as our conservator. Alison's well-honed skills and excellent focus made her years with Bedfordshire Archives extremely productive—thousands of documents passed through the conservation studio each receiving Alison's tender care. Alison also rose to the challenge of finding new methods of working with damaged glass-plate negatives, designing packaging for difficult collections, and provided training and advice to all the staff and volunteers. We all wish Alison a very happy retirement.



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY VIC!

Two of our archivists spent the morning of 16th May helping celebrate the Visitor Information Centre's first birthday. Games and competitions were organised by the staff and the birthday was celebrated with an excellent birthday cake. On the day Bedfordshire Archives set up an information stall alongside other local heritage organisations including Friends of Foster Hill Road Cemetery, Bedford Association of Tour Guides, Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership and John Bunyan Museum. The VIC is located on the corner of Silver Street and is a fantastic place to find out what's on in Bedfordshire and book tickets for events at the Corn Exchange.



## FOR YOUR DIARY

- 10 Jul 2026**      **Ask the Archives** at the Visitor Information Centre – 10am-1pm
- 18-19 Jul 2026**      **Bedford River Festival** at the Embankment, Bedford.
- 28 Aug 2026**      **Pop Up Archives Family Event** in at the Visitor Information Centre – 10am-1pm
- 5 Sep 2026**      **Stewartby 100. Remembering 100 years of Stewartby** at Stewartby Village Hall – 12pm-4pm
- 18 Sept 2026**      **Heritage Open Day** at Luton Hoo Walled Garden
- 18-20 Sep 2026**      **Bedfordshire Steam & Country Fayre.** Come and find us at the Heritage Tent.

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