

IN STEP WITH HISTORY - OUR ENGAGEMENT SO FAR!

We have reached the halfway point in our National Archives engagement grant project *In Step with History*. The project is focused 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'. Each archivist-led walk has given people the opportunity to explore which archives we have on the communities we visit, providing an insight into the history of the local area.

Preparation for the walks was a big undertaking! Routes had to be devised which would be both interesting and accessible, not too long and also not too short. Research had to be done on each parish we were visiting to ensure we would be providing plenty of information to participants; and the archives were delved into so we could identify the collections most relevant to each parish.



The records we had to choose from were vast, and narrowing down what we would be talking about was a tricky challenge. The parishes of Bedfordshire are awash with amazing history and fascinating archives, so that to choose just a handful was a hard decision. Once all the preparation had been undertaken, we then spent our time advertising in the local community—via social media, in print and through events such as Stotfold Steam Fayre. The outreach has been fantastic and we have been greatly supported by local magazines such as Stotfold and Arlesey News.

The walks have been a big hit so far and well attended by locals and people from further afield. So far, we have undertaken 11 walks with 104 participants joining us. People from the walks have been inspired to contact the office either to carry out their own research or about undertaking

research for our website pages. The walks will continue throughout August and September with places still available if you would like to join us! Alternatively, if you would like to join us, but Thursdays are not suitable for you, please let us know and we can accommodate on different days.

So what's next? The research undertaken for these walks is now being added to our community history pages, making it available for any one interested in the areas we are visiting. These pages will be continually added to and become a vital resource for researchers and archivists. At the beginning of September we will also be celebrating our engagement project by participating in Heritage Open Days - England's largest festival of history and culture. For 10 days every September, Heritage Open Day brings people together to celebrate the history and heritage of local areas and communities. Bedfordshire Archives will be holding a two day event at Barton Library on the 12th and 13th September. Our event will involve a display of the archives used for the walking tours, as well as maps of the routes we undertook, walking maps and leaflets to take with you, plus some games to play and trivia questions to answer—let's see if your Bedfordshire knowledge is up to scratch! Make sure to pop by: 9am-1pm on 12th September and 9am-1pm and 2pm-6pm on 13th September.

Still to come!

22 Aug—Houghton Regis—10:30am & 3pm

05 Sep—Stotfold—1pm

12 Sep—Barton-Le-Clay—10:30am

12-13 Sep—Heritage Open Day Event, Barton

19 Sep—Langford—10:30am

26 Sep—Houghton Regis—10:30am

GRADUATE WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE ARCHIVES

We no longer have the capacity to take year-10 work experience students, but we do still take undergraduates and graduates who are considering a career in archives. Placements are for a minimum of two weeks during the summer. This year we have hosted three such placements. During their time with us, Josie, Willow and Amy discovered how a collection is accepted into the archives and they have sorted and catalogued some collections from our backlog. They also tried their hand at: conservation, retrieving documents from the stacks; palaeography, identifying photographs, and choosing material for an evening group visit. We cram a lot into a fortnight!

From the service's point of view, hosting work experience placements is quite intensive, but there are benefits. Finding suitable collections for them to work on means we review some of the material that has been on our cataloguing backlog for rather a long time and it finally gets catalogued and made fully available to researchers. This year these included: Printed ephemera to do with Vauxhall Motors (reference Z1409); the papers of Regimental Sergeant Major Lawrence Dunham of the 5th Battalion Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment (Z1295); and negatives of Anderson Ltd photographers of Leighton Buzzard (Z40). The Z40 collection was catalogued in response to an enquiry. Due to complications over the deposit, the collection had been on our backlog since 1972.

WORK EXPERIENCE IN THE CONSERVATION STUDIO

Alison Faden, Archive Conservator, interviews Georgia Spriggs, one of the students doing work experience at Bedfordshire Archives this summer. Georgia is currently working on a project to conserve the PRIS2 collection. Georgia has just graduated with a degree in Ancient History and Archaeology from Reading University. She is now considering a career in conservation, possibly embarking on an MA in Conservation or Museum Studies later this year. Alison asked:

1. Georgia, what is PRIS2? Can you describe the collection?

The PRIS2 collection is part of the Bedford Prison Archive. The 19 large registers contain information on inmates, their crimes and their sentences between the years 1879 to 1945. The most common crimes are directly linked to poverty, and often consist of thefts of food items.

2. You began the PRIS2 project by carrying out a survey of the collection. Can you describe the condition of the material?

Damage is mostly focused on spines and covers, the leather was seriously deteriorating. The sewing was also very loose on some of the volumes. Pages were mostly clean. They were wrapped in brown paper and string which did not provide much protection. The later volumes are subject to data protection laws as people mentioned within them are still within their assumed lifespan of 100 years.

3. Please describe your Treatment Plan.

To better preserve them I planned to use smoke sponges and brushes to clean them. I also noted down any further repairs needed, for example rips in pages or loose bindings for future conservation. I then learned to construct archive quality folders from thick board to house the collection safely in the archive.

Thank you Georgia! And many thanks for your hard work making PRIS2 much better protected in storage. The volumes are also cleaner, repaired, safer to handle, and therefore more accessible to researchers in future.



[Note: the registers PRIS2/2/1-9, up to February 1906, are transcribed on our online gaol [database](#) so will not be produced to researchers. The most fragile volumes PRIS2/2/1-6 are also available on microfilm]

WE CONQUERED THE CASTLE - RIVER FESTIVAL WEEKEND

Bedford's River Festival took place on the 20th and 21st July. Held every two years, the festivities spread out across the river, the Embankment, Russell Park, Mill Meadows, St Mary's Gardens and into the town centre. Bedfordshire Archives was there as a member of Heritage Bedford—an informal group of heritage and cultural sites and organisations that come together to share resources and to promote heritage on Bedford's doorstep.

Our theme this year was the 800th anniversary of the Siege of Bedford Castle. To that end, our staff and volunteers had great fun building a child-friendly model of the castle with targets in the outer bailey, inner bailey and the keep for people to aim weapons at. The bean bags used for our version of the siege did less damage than the materials used in the one 800 years ago. All the materials used to make the castle and its surrounds were recycled; the castle keep itself was a Panettone tin! After the River Festival the game was lent to The Higgins, Bedford, for their programme of summer-castle-themed activities and it may put in an appearance at Luton Hoo Walled Garden when we are there in September (see back page) before being retired.

We handed out over 400 'I Conquered the Castle' stickers across the two days of the festival, including one to Bedford Borough Council Chief Executive Laura Church (seen in action below)! Inside the Arts and Culture tent, replicas of medieval equipment and models of the castle and a mangonel—a type of siege engine used at the siege of Bedford castle in 1224—helped us to engage people with the history of the siege in more detail.

We also had leaflets from the many different groups represented and engaged with people as they wandered past. The weather was perfect, thankfully two dry days meant our fabric and cardboard castle wasn't subjected to flooding!



STAFF NEWS

In June, archivist Helen Bates left our service for a new job as an archivist in Tameside, Greater Manchester. Helen had joined Bedfordshire Archives in 2018 and has been a great asset to the service, particularly in taking a lead on such things as digital preservation proposals, the survey of records of adoption and looked-after children, and supervision of our 2023 interns. We wish her well in her new role.

Helen, moving north, left one of our full-time archivist posts vacant. Thankfully, our part-time archivist, Natasha Kikas, was willing and able to step into this role and became full-time from July. This leaves our part-time archivist position vacant and we intend to recruit to this position soon.

Congratulations are also due to our digitisation technician, Kirsty McGill, who has just had her graduation ceremony for her PhD. Kirsty is also currently engaged on our Three Counties Asylum case books indexing project, which is being funded by the Bedfordshire Family History Society.



Amongst all this happy news we received very sad news of our colleague, Mark Humphreys, who died on 11th August after a long illness. Mark had worked for Bedfordshire Archives as a part-time casual and later relief cataloguing assistant since May 2007. Over the years he had been responsible for adding thousands of catalogue entries from our old paper catalogues to our online database, for which we and our researchers are much indebted to him. Mark was generally a quiet person to have around the office, although we miss his little asides and exclamations to himself as he discovered new things during the course of his work. His general knowledge, with particular strengths in music and football, will also be much missed at the annual Christmas quiz. Our thoughts are with his partner, family and friends at this time.

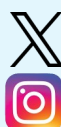
FOR YOUR DIARY

- Aug-Sept 2024** **Guided walks in Central Bedfordshire** see front page and [website](#) for details!
- 11 Sept 2024** **Heritage Open Day at Luton Hoo Walled Garden**
We are very pleased to have been invited back to the Walled Garden as part of their Heritage Open Day. We will be in the conservatory where we will be taking a look at various archives in line with this year's HOD theme of routes, and giving you one last chance to lay siege to our castle. More details can be found [here](#). <https://lutonhooestate.co.uk/event/heritage-open-day-2/>
- 12-13 Sept 2024** **Heritage Open Day 'In Step With History' celebration at Barton Library**
(see front page for details)
- 29 Oct 2024** **Leighton Buzzard Family Fun Day at Leighton Buzzard Market 8.30am–3pm**
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.

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