

**MARRIAGE REGISTERS; A THING OF THE PAST**

*With new legislation meaning changes to the paperwork associated with a wedding, Laura Johnson, our Customer Liaison Officer and ardent family historian, takes a look at the changes being brought in and how they reflect our modern society as well as taking a look back at the many registers we hold in the Archives and how they have changed over the years.*

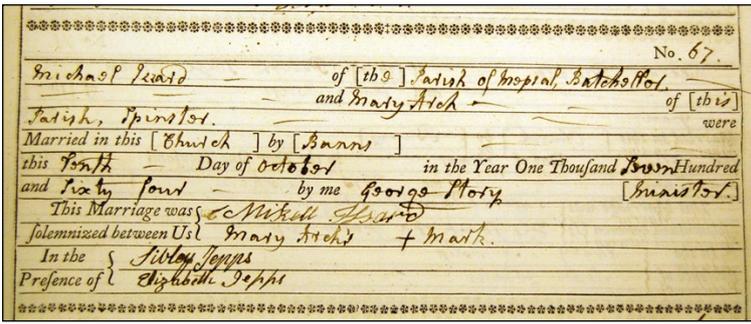
In 1538, Thomas Cromwell, chief minister to King Henry VIII and architect of the newly founded Church of England, decreed that all baptisms, marriages and burials that took place in every church in the land should be recorded. Whilst it was intended to root out any dissenters who didn't practice infant baptism, it turned out to be of enormous benefit to historians.

The baptisms, marriages and burials were originally all listed together in date order in church books, simple volumes in which the Churchwarden or any other Church official who could read and write would note the names of those involved and the date of the event.



The marriage by banns on 30 April 1736 of Michael Eppard (Izzard) to Sarah Collip recorded in the Henlow parish register is mixed in with the burials and baptisms [ref: P39/1/2]

Church books continued to be used until Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, aka "The Clandestine Marriages Act or An Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriages." It was the first statutory legislation in England and Wales to require a formal ceremony of marriage. Too many young ladies of good fortune were being spirited away by morally dubious young men who wanted to marry them and secure their inheritances without the girls' families being informed, so something had to be done. The new format ensured that the parish



The marriage by banns on 10 October 1764 of Michael Izzard to Mary Arch in the Shillington parish register shows the pro-forma certificate completed by Vicars from 1754 onwards [ref: P44/1/3]

of residence of the bride and groom was recorded, along with witnesses to the marriage and if either party were between the ages of 16 and 21, the register was to note that they had permission from their guardian. Most married by banns which had been published for three consecutive Sundays in the respective parishes of the bride and groom but you could apply for a marriage licence if for any reason you needed to get married quickly, didn't want the public knowing your private business via the publicly read banns (aristocrats often married by licence), or if the Vicar thought that someone from outside his parish or someone under 21 needed further 'vetting' before he was willing to marry them.

Of course, these marriages were only held in Anglican (Church of England) churches. The only other faiths permitted to have their own marriage rites were Jews and Quakers. Any other religious denominations or atheists would have to marry in the Anglican church despite not being of that faith. This was to change with the 1836 Marriage Act which introduced Civil

Marriage, allowing for non-Anglican marriages to take place or even non-religious marriages. Now, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists and even Atheists could have a wedding in a place that suited them, although in the case of religious houses of worship, they had to apply for a licence that would allow them to hold marriage ceremonies. These rules commenced on 1st July 1837, and also introduced the requirement that all births and deaths be registered as well. The Register Office was born.

The format of the register changed again. This time, in a move much loved by modern-

1913		Marriage solemnized at <i>the Parish Church</i> in the <i>Parish</i> of <i>Bedford</i>		of <i>St Mary Bedford</i> in the County of <i>Bedford</i>				
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
72	March Twenty second 1913	Charles Alfred Middleton	25 years	Bachelor	Labourer	11 Hawkins Road	Alfred Henry Middleton	Labourer
		Lizzie Izzard	32 years	Spinster	- - -	11 Hawkins Road	Thomas Izzard 'Deceased'	Labourer
Married in the <i>Parish Church</i> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the <i>Established Church</i> by <i>George Alfred Middleton</i> or after <i>Form</i> by <i>me</i> , This Marriage was solemnized between us <i>Lizzie Izzard</i> in the Presence of us <i>Alfred John Middleton</i> <i>George Alfred Middleton</i> <i>Percy L. L. L.</i>								

The marriage by banns on 23 March 1913 of Elizabeth Izzard to Charles Alfred Middleton at St Mary's parish church in Bedford [ref: P81/1/26] shows the format we are most familiar with.

day family historians, it asks for the age and occupation of the bride and groom and their father's name and occupation of each father.

These certificates were used for years for both religious and civil ceremonies and in more recent years adapted versions were used when new legislation permitted civil partnerships and same-sex marriages.

From 4 May 2021, some 21st century changes due to new legislation means the way marriages are recorded will change for the first time since 1837. After many years of lobbying for it, the name of the mother of each participant will appear on the certificate as well as that of each father. The marriage registers that used to be completed by Vicars, Ministers, Registrars and Celebrants will be replaced by a marriage document or marriage schedule which will be organised prior to the date of the wedding, completed by the participants on the day and submitted to the Register Office for electronic registration. The Register Office will then issue the certificate to the happy couple. There will be space on the certificate/schedule for the names of up to 4 parents to take into account biological, adoptive and step-parents and space for six witnesses.

The Archives Service will receive the closed registers from the parish churches, so we are waiting with bated breath to see exactly how many registers are heading our way.

Whilst it is understandable that something as intrinsic to our lives as the registering of births, marriages and deaths should be reflective of society as it is now, I do feel a certain something will be missing in future. The obligatory 'photo whilst we're signing the register' will now be a signing of the A4 piece of paper which doesn't have quite the same ring to it!

### *Bedfordshire Parish Register Series is it time to move on?*

For decades, those with Bedfordshire ancestors have been fortunate to have information from Church of England parish registers for the county widely available through the published Bedfordshire Parish Register Series of transcripts. These have been available as printed volumes and on the two series of Bedfordshire Family History Society CDs. Sales of these formats have been hugely important in supporting the work of Bedfordshire Archives service and the BFHS, but in recent years sales have begun to slow and the expectation of many family historians is that the registers should be

available online. However, the decision to license the parish registers to one or more of the major subscription publishers is not one to be taken lightly.

At this year's BFHS AGM on the 4th June, County Archivist and BFHS president, Pamela Birch, will briefly consider the pros and cons of licensing and will look to members of the BFHS for their thoughts and advice.

Not a member of BFHS—why not join?  
<https://www.bfhs.org.uk/membership.html>

**CONSERVATION CORNER - *Our conservator Alison Faden looks at repairing a small pocket book from one of our family estate collections so that it's ready for digitisation.***

**OR2192 The Ladies New and Elegant Pocket Book 1794. Printed for T Axtell, Cornhill, London.**

This small pocket book is one of several journals from the Orlebar Collection at Bedfordshire Archives Service. Charlotte Orlebar nee Willing (1759-1820) was 35 years old when she kept this journal. She had married into the wealthy Orlebar Family 14 years earlier.

OR2192 came into the Conservation Studio to be prepared for digitisation, which means that this little 227 year old book needed to be robust enough to withstand the handling required to make an image of every one of its 144 pages.



OR2192 - The Ladies New and Elegant Pocket Book, 1794.

A full tan leather binding with fore-edge flap and cotton fabric ties, this book has little pockets built inside the front and back covers. The leather cover was originally stuck directly to the spine of the book, 'Tightback', but the leather has since lifted along the length of the spine exposing the sewn book structure, which was consequently becoming loose. The first

section of the book was hanging, literally, by a thread and required structural and paper repairs, unlike the main body of the book which is made of good quality laid rag paper, handwritten in Iron Gall Ink.

Reflecting a popular craze for Gothic Horror at the time, the pre-printed first section of the journal contains an excerpt from *The Castle of Wolfenbach* by Elizabeth Parsons (1793) This was one of the 7 'Horrid Novels' famously listed by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* (1817).



A gruesome foldout illustration of the novel's heroine, Mathilda, discovering the Countess's maid-servant lying sprawled dead across a four poster bed in the castle, was in a very poor condition. The illustration was carefully flattened and repaired using conservation grade paste and 5gsm Japanese paper.

The small size and light weight of this little journal meant that tears and holes in the leather covers, particularly along stress points such as corners and folds, could be supported and strengthened using patches of Japanese paper dyed and polished to match the original leather.

A stout box was made to protect and house the repaired journal.

# FILL THE ARCHIVES GAP– GREENSAND COUNTRY VIRTUAL EXHIBITION

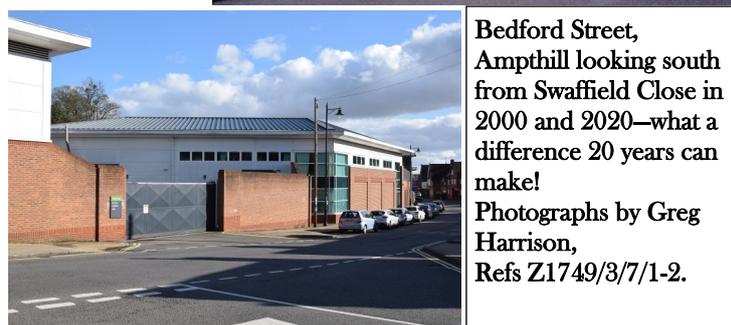
1 May–20 June 2021



photographs submitted may have been narrower in subject matter than we had hoped, but they made up for that in the quantity of the images submitted and date range.



Running any project during 2020 was a challenge. Many conferences, festivals and other events were put completely on hold in the hope of running them in 2021 or beyond. The Fill the Archives Gap photography project had been launched and two workshops had been held just prior to the country going into what became the first lockdown. Our volunteer photographers couldn't go out and about to gather the photographs as we had expected and the exhibitions we were planning as part of the Greensand Festival of May 2020 were cancelled.



All was not lost. In the autumn of 2020 contact was made with the participants and in early 2021, those who wished to contribute images to the archives made their submissions.

Due to the problems of getting out and about to take new photographs, we widened the brief so that participants could submit photographs that they already had. The

Now, to celebrate the project, we have produced a virtual exhibition to run throughout this year's Greensand Festival. <https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/ArchiveEvents/Filling-the-Archive-Gap.aspx>

We would like to thank all the participants, the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership and Heritage Fund for their support for this project. We hope that it will inspire others to help us to continue to fill the archives gap.



We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our customers for their support and patience during the last year.

Hopefully we are nearing the end of lockdowns and the need to stay at home. However, we expect to continue the current visitor system until at least mid–July 2021.

Keep an eye on our website, where we will announce any changes.

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