



The Bedford Society

Having been Chair now for six months I've had some time to settle into the role and am very pleased to be introducing our October Newsletter. I'm excited to share with you some ideas for the future of the Bedford Society.

If you value being a Bedford alumna/us, I urge you to consider playing an active part in helping to support our society. There are many ways you can do this, for example, we would like to encourage more articles for the newsletter contributed by alumni. You could get involved in transcribing and digitising historic letters from the archive, contribute an oral or written history and you may even consider joining the committee so we can better represent the membership, particularly those more recently retired. Please click on the links below to find out more about each of these initiatives.

We serve a dual purpose, firstly to ensure that Bedford College will be remembered in perpetuity through our scholarships and the archive, and secondly to support the interests and needs of our membership. It is 40 years since the merger of Bedford and Royal Holloway colleges into Royal Holloway and Bedford New College of the University of London, now a university in its own right. Therefore, our youngest members are in their early 60's and the majority of our members are in their 70's, 80's and more. It is time to reflect on our achievements and look realistically at our role going forward into the next phase of our time-limited existence.

Our rich archive is being explored, cared for and digitised so that it forms a lasting legacy available to a wide audience. Bedford College made a unique contribution to the higher education of women, being the first in the UK to grant them degrees and paving the way for the opportunities women now have. Our Bedford project archivist post, funded by donors during and since the 175th anniversary year, is helping to move this work forward. More details about progress in the archive project and how you can be part of it is available in the link below.

Until now, no painted portrait of Elizabeth Jesser Reid, founder of Bedford College, existed only a rather dark and grainy black and white photograph. She was an amazing character, a philanthropist and anti-slavery activist, who fought for women to receive higher education and gain degrees. We are so pleased that two major

donors came forward to fund the production of a posthumous portrait of her which should be ready for unveiling within the next few months and will then be displayed in a major national exhibition before returning to the Egham campus for permanent display in the Victorian corridor where she can proudly take her place alongside other dignitaries. We are hoping to have a copy made to display in the Bedford Room.

We are delighted that a Bedford alumna, Hedda Bird, has written a play about Elizabeth Jesser Reid, which is being developed with a view to it being published and thus available to a wider audience. Click on the article below about a recent performance that some committee members were invited to attend.

In response to a suggestion by an alumna, in addition to our usual in-person events, we are offering an online event in January. This will be a talk about George Eliot who attended Bedford College. Please look out for the invitation to this event and support our new initiative. I look forward to meeting you at one of our events or perhaps reading your newsletter article later in the year.

Yours sincerely,

Betty Hales

Chair of the Bedford Society

Physics 1973

News

The committee is looking for new members and offers of support with specific projects

Betty Hales (Physics 1973)

The committee works hard to support members alongside the alumni team at the University, producing the newsletter, organising events and becoming involved in other relevant issues. We are now looking for new members to join us. [Read more here.](#)

The development of the newsletter

Betty Hales (Physics 1973)

The newsletter has a high opening rate and click rate on the articles, but we would like to make it even more relevant to you. We would really welcome your comments. [Read more here.](#)



Remembering and celebrating

Claire Daunton (History 1974)

In June, alumni, friends and family gathered at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College to celebrate Bert Kennedy's (Geology 1971) generous gift supporting the Bedford Project Archivist post in memory of his wife, Christine (Botany 1972). The evening was a wonderful opportunity to reconnect, celebrate the rich legacy of Bedford College, and raise further support for the preservation of the Bedford archives. [Read more here.](#)



Review of The Elizabeth Reid Story

Jennifer Glastonbury (French with German 1969), Dinah Nichols (History 1965) and Claire Daunton (History 1974)

The Bedford Society Committee was delighted to attend a recent reading of 'The Elizabeth Reid Story', Hedda Bird's (Philosophy & Mathematics 1982) play about

Bedford College's pioneering founder. With growing interest from theatres and publishers, the future looks promising for this inspiring production. [Read more here.](#)



Announcing the launch of The Archivist's Hub

We are delighted to introduce The Archivist's Hub, a new digital space designed to bring our unique historical collections to the public. This platform serves as a shared bridge between academic research and public curiosity, making our archival treasures accessible to everyone. Bedford's history is a major focus of this space. We warmly welcome all Bedford alumni to contribute to this growing digital repository. [Read more here.](#)

A call for memories of the merger of Bedford and Royal Holloway in 1985

Professor Caroline Barron

Were you a student or member of staff affected by the merger of Bedford and Royal Holloway colleges? Many universities are having to consider merging at present due to financial considerations. We wonder if 40 years on we may be in a position to offer our reflections, to assist others in a similar position. Looking back, there have been positives that have emerged, which were not always obvious at the time. Here are the merger memories of one member of staff. [Read more here.](#)

Bedford Society Scholarship Fund

The Bedford Society Scholarship Fund offers opportunities to students who otherwise may not have been able to continue their studies and really does change the lives of students and that of their families. If you are able, please consider donating today and help us continue to build the fund to support Bedford Society

Scholarships, emulating the work of Bedford College founder, Elizabeth Jesser Reid. [Read more here.](#)

We would like to kindly remind you that we offer all Bedfordians a complimentary Will-Writing service with Octopus Legacy. If you live in England or Wales, you can write your Will online today. It is completely free and takes about 15 minutes to complete. [Find out more here.](#)



The London WhatsApp Group

Betty Hales (Physics 1973)

The Bedford alumni WhatsApp group continues to bring alumni together through regular social events and shared interests. Recent highlights included a visit to Rochester, with upcoming gatherings planned at the Bedford Archive and Bedford Square. [Please click here](#) if you would like to join us for our trip to the archive at Egham on 15th October, or perhaps you would like to consider starting a Bedford WhatsApp group in your local area.

Submit your own Memories of Bedford College

Many Bedford alumni have submitted their Bedford stories and memories to the Newsletter. [You can read them here.](#)

Special thank you to Michael Black (English 1969) and Caroline Willbourne (Philosophy & Greek 1976) who have submitted their memories since last newsletter. If you would like to submit a piece for future newsletters, please email the [Alumni Engagement Team](#). We warmly welcome such contributions.

In Memoriam

We remember the Bedford College [alumni and former staff](#) who have recently died. (Some of the notices listed here have appeared in previous issues of the Newsletter).

If you are aware of any fellow alumni or former members of staff who have passed away recently and are not included in this list, please contact us so that they can be included in future commemorations.

Events

Online George Eliot Talk

Professor Ruth Livesey, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) and Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature

Monday, 18 January 2027, 5.15pm

We would like to invite you to the online event focused on life and achievements of English novelist and poet George Eliot. [Read more and book here.](#)

Annual Bedford Lecture

Monday, 9 November 2026, 6.15pm, Egham campus

At this annual Bedford Lecture, sponsored by the Bedford Centre for the History of Women and Gender, Professor Kate Williams will be speaking on 'Writing a New History of Women and Power'. Professor Williams will reflect on her remarkable career as a historian of powerful women from Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, through to Tudor queens Catherine of Aragon and Lady Jane Grey, via Queen Victoria's contemporaries Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana and Queen Lili'oukulanani of Hawaii, and the powerful women of our own day. [Read more and book here.](#)

Read more [College news](#) and explore the calendar of upcoming [College events](#).



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