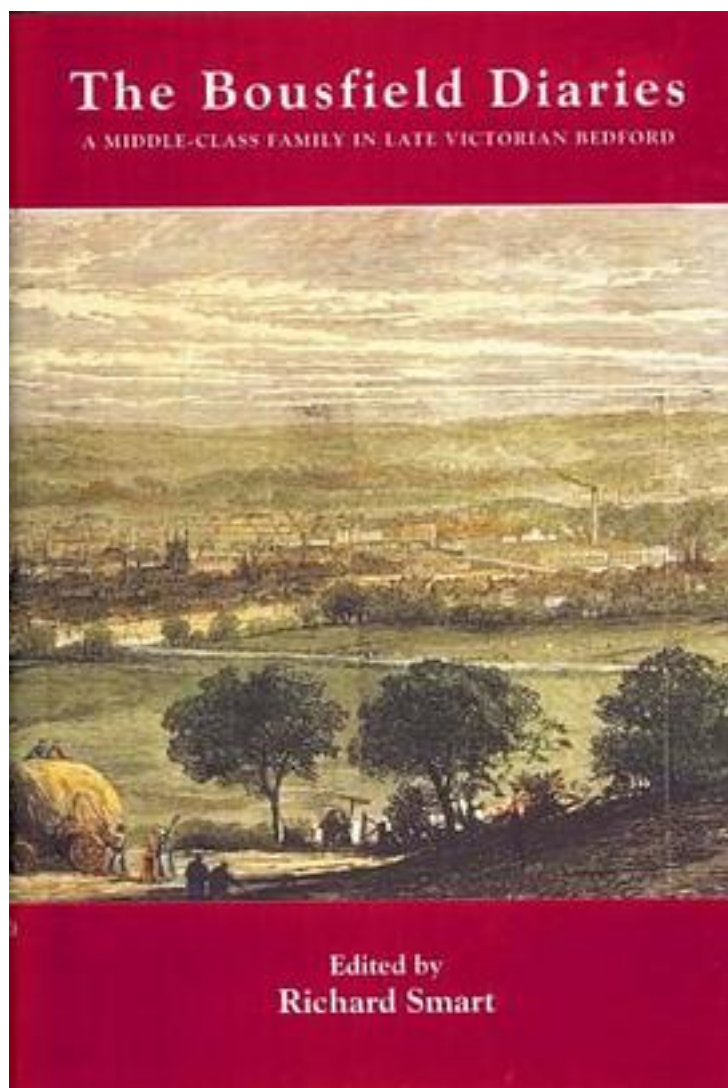


The Bousfield Diaries



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The diaries of Charlotte Bousfield, extending from 1878 to 1896, paint a vivid picture of the activities of a multi-talented Bedford family, led by a strong-minded matriarch. They were prominent in local life: Charlotte's husband Edward was an influential figure in developing agricultural machinery at the Britannia Iron Works, Bedford's successful exemplar of a modern iron foundry, and important as a factor in the town's growth, while Will, the ablest of the children, became a QC and Conservative MP, whose election campaigns are described in lively detail. Charlotte, meanwhile, was also active, both in the town and further afield: her concern for the underprivileged in the town, a practical expression of her fervent Methodist beliefs, emerges clearly in her lifelong work for the temperance cause, locally and nationally. She founded a home for 'inebriate women', which was ground-breaking for the time, and whose work she describes in fascinating detail. She was also a Poor Law Guardian, and a leading figure in the Bedford Workhouse scandal of the 1890s. Throughout, the diaries bring out some aspects of Victorian social life which are not always obvious: the dependence of the family on their servants; the ease of travelling using railways and horse-drawn transport; the frequency with which family members would spend time staying with friends and relatives. Edited here with notes and introduction, they bring the past vividly to life.

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