



BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo

October 2021

- The container of the future: Milk a la slug, or in a plastic bottle?
- An unacceptable sausage
- How to make biscuits in vast quantities
- New to the archives

WHAT'S ON

From the Editor

Welcome to the latest edition of the Berkshire Echo which looks at the topic of food. This year's Heritage Open Days (HOD) theme is 'Edible England' and its culinary heritage. If you haven't seen it yet, do take a look at our [You Tube Channel](#) where we had a go at making the 'Berkshire Pie' for HOD. To tie in with the Edible England theme for this Echo, we look at aspects of food production in Berkshire.

Many people may start the day with milk for their tea, coffee or cereal and in '**The container of the future: Milk a la slug, or in a plastic bottle?**' we discover more about the history of Clifford's Dairies Ltd in Bracknell. The title may give it a way, but there was an occasion when more than just milk was found in the bottle. From being a supplier to Marks and Spencer to introducing plastic bottles - a contentious issue even in the 1970s - Clifford's is a fascinating history.

We discover in '**An unacceptable sausage**' that food production could also lead to some dubious goings on. Did you know that there was a legal amount of meat required to be classed as a sausage for sale in the 1920s?

You might be shocked by just how much one butcher decided to cut out in order to increase their profits!

In '**How to make biscuits in vast quantities**' we look at the technical side of producing biscuits at Huntley and Palmers of Reading. From the delivery of ingredients, to methods of production, quality control and even checking what rivals were up to – an awful lot of work was undertaken to produce a tasty biscuit.

Don't forget to check out the New to the Archives section where we reveal the latest records now available for access.

Finally, we'd like to give many thanks and praise to Giles Taylor of With Brand for helping us produce the traditional four-page PDF format of the Berkshire Echo over the years. This will be our last edition in this format as we make a move towards a more digital experience for our readers in the form of links to our stories on our website.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and look forward to sharing our news with you.

Ivone Turnbull
Senior Archivist

Where Smooth Waters Glide

Our online Thames exhibition 'Where Smooth Waters Glide' is still available to view. It looks at 250 years of caring for the River Thames. Why not take a look? thames250exhibition.com

Top: Packaging cream for M&S (D/EX311/8/1/28)



ACCREDITED
ARCHIVE SERVICE

The Berkshire Echo October 2021
berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk

 The Berkshire Record Office
 @berksarchives

arch@reading.gov.uk





The container of the future: Milk a la slug, or in a plastic bottle?

Daily doorstep deliveries of milk will be a familiar memory to many readers and has taken on a resurgence of popularity in recent years. Such deliveries are dependent on large centralised dairies, one of those in Berkshire's history was Clifford's Dairies Ltd in Bracknell.

The firm started in 1874 in Hounslow, Middlesex, when William Clifford, a gardener's son, sold milk from his own two cows, delivering them by pails joined with a yoke. By the 1920s it was an enormous regional operation with all the milk being purchased from farms in the Wokingham and Bracknell areas, brought to Hounslow by rail. Bracknell was picked for the site of the firm's HQ in 1947, with a large modern dairy building and state-of-the-art testing laboratory.

In the 1960s the firm secured a contract with Marks & Spencer to supply them with double and single cream, packaged as the store's own brand, St Michael, in heat-sealed plastic containers. Many shops at this time sold only long-life cream in bottles, which was highly processed and deemed to be far inferior to fresh cream. A representative of Marks & Spencer visited the factory in 1965 and was most impressed by the standard of hygiene. They were 'more interested in Top Quality rather than just cheap prices', and Clifford's could provide the former.

An unsolicited letter from a customer in 1968 paid tribute to the high quality of their milk. Dr J G Davis of Reading, a consultant bacteriologist and chemist, told Clifford's that they had left a bottle of milk in the fridge for 16 days while they were on holiday, and it was still 'in sweet and good condition without any unpleasant flavour, the only change being a few specks of free fat'.

Food safety has been an object of concern since the middle ages, when assizes of bread and ale ensured that foodstuffs were safe and consumers not short changed.

But the industrialisation of food processing in the 19th and 20th centuries brought new concerns about quality. Clifford's was not immune, with allegations in the 1960s that milk had been supplied to customers in dirty bottles. On one sadly memorable occasion in 1966, customer Mr Krzczunowicz of Silwood Park Nurseries, Sunninghill, made a cup of tea but detected an unpleasant flavour. Throwing it away and preparing a second cup he spotted something at the bottom of the bottle; draining out the remaining milk he found a dead slug! Slugs were well known to be attracted to milk residues in used bottles awaiting collection. Experts were clear that the slug was in the bottle before it went through Clifford's bottle washing machinery (designed by themselves), as detergent traces were found on its skin. The washing process involved seven separate washes in hot caustic soda and several manual checks but had failed in this instance. The firm had no choice but to plead guilty to "selling milk adulterated with a slug" and were fined £25. In 1962 some jagged pieces of broken glass were in the bottle given to a 10-year-old at Loddon Primary School – something the firm was at a loss to explain.

These problems were what led the firm to pioneer the sale of milk in disposable plastic bottles in 1971, the first dairy to do so for regular doorstep deliveries, using Henley as a pilot area. Henley had been picked because Clifford's had a monopoly there. Announcing this move, they told customers, "We are convinced this must be the container of the future for milk". The early plastic bottles, which were manufactured in-house, looked very similar to the glass ones they replaced, with aluminium caps which had to be opened by making two holes with a sharp implement. They were not very green: customers were cheerfully told the bottle "crumples up to throw away. Will burn easily in Local Authorities' incinerators". Environmental campaigners (referred to by Clifford's rather scornfully as 'the pollution people') were unimpressed.

Top left: Milk delivery in the 19th century (D/EX2311/8/2)
Top right: Testing milk (D/EX2311/8/1/47)





American-born antique shop owner Mrs Reichhold led the protests, using her shop to display ‘a long and inflammatory notice, the general gist of which is that [Clifford’s] are trying to bury Henley under a mountain of plastic, and probably the rest of the middle Thames Valley as well’. Even local resident and former Beatles member, George Harrison, was recruited to the anti-plastic cause.

Although two thirds of customers actually liked the new bottle, others complained about milk spurting after the top was punctured, and also about not being able to collect foil lids for charity. Friends of the Earth, then a fairly new organisation, also got involved. In the end, glass bottles were reintroduced in 1973 due to a worldwide shortage of the polyethylene used to make the plastic ones.

Difficult trading times led to a series of amalgamations and takeovers from 1978 onwards. The Bracknell headquarters were shut down in c.1996 and in 2015, the dairy business was sold to Muller.

Source: D/EX2311

An unacceptable sausage

One case involving unacceptable food adulteration which came to court in Reading involved pork chipolata sausages produced by the butchers Frosts of Union Street, Reading, in 1954. They contained 43% meat, 20% filler and 37% water, but they were being sold at the same price as other butchers’ sausages which contained more than twice as much meat. Sausages were supposed to be 65% meat, and the magistrates pointed out that this minimum had been dictated in 1929 when meat was in shorter supply and were of the opinion it should be higher. They noted also that the 1950s consumer was much more “nutrition-conscious” than that of the 1920s, “and has a right to expect that food for which she pays a reasonable and generally accepted price contains the normal or generally recognised amount of nutrition”. The sausage manufacturer was frank in his admission that he used less meat to increase his own profits and was fined £20.

Source: D/EX1485/16/12

How to make biscuits in vast quantities

The main archive of legendary local biscuit manufacturers Huntley & Palmer is held at the University of Reading Special Collections ([see website](#)), but the BRO holds some material including papers of laboratory assistant Celia Edwards, which shed light on the technical side of work there.

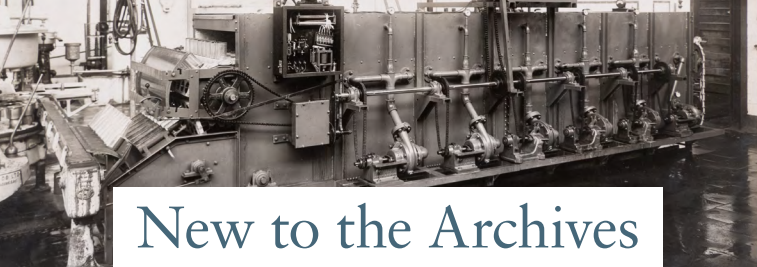
The Ingredients Store Department prepared materials ready for use in the mixing rooms. According to a 1954 article by the manager, flour was delivered by rail and lorry in large bags. At the factory the bags were transported by mechanical elevator and a series of chutes to the five-floor storeroom. Flour was tipped into blending hoppers to be sifted and blown by air compression through a pipe 300 feet to large silos in the mixing room. Liquid vegetable oil was delivered by tanker, blended on site and processed in plasticising and chilling plants to produce a textured fat for use in the mixing. Dried fruit was washed and de-stalked by machine, then checked by hand by a group of female staff. They were stoned by being washed over a series of barriers.

Almonds were sifted to remove dust, then softened in hot water before defective nuts were removed by hand. White sugar arrived granulated (20 tons a day) and was turned into various finer grades of caster and icing sugar at the factory. Raw brown sugar was imported from Barbados, ideally in wooden barrels to retain the natural flavour. Eggs, butter (imported from Ireland, Australia and New Zealand) and cheese were kept in seven chilled rooms. Over 100 other ingredients were also used, including ginger, chocolate, coconut, cherries, and fruit pulp. The Technical Department carried out laboratory tests on both ingredients and finished products. Regular checks to ensure products remained consistent, new product lines were researched, and recipes developed, and rival products were also analysed. Who knew that so much work went into creating the humble biscuit!

Source: D/EX1748/1/10, 14

Top left: Chocolate room at Huntley & Palmer’s factory, 1954 (D/EX1748/1/10)
Top right: Huntley & Palmer’s christening cake, 1940 (D/EX1748/1/3/1)





New to the Archives

A Berkshire polymath

The papers of William Smallcombe (1892-1992), director of Reading Museum 1926-1958, reflect his many interests and achievements (D/EX2387). He transformed Reading Museum, focussing it on representing the natural history, archaeology, and history of Reading and the surrounding area. He encouraged popular engagement, particularly with children, and in 1931 established the still-popular loan scheme for schools. He oversaw the expansion of the museum premises in the 1950s. After retirement he continued many of his professional activities, particularly with regards to education by contributing to Reading University's teaching of science for student teachers, including courses for teachers from Commonwealth countries. He also acted as honorary curator of the Calleva Museum at Silchester, Hampshire, c.1957-1972, and founded the Reading Pre-Retirement Association in 1968 to run courses to help people aged 55 and over to prepare for their eventual retirement.

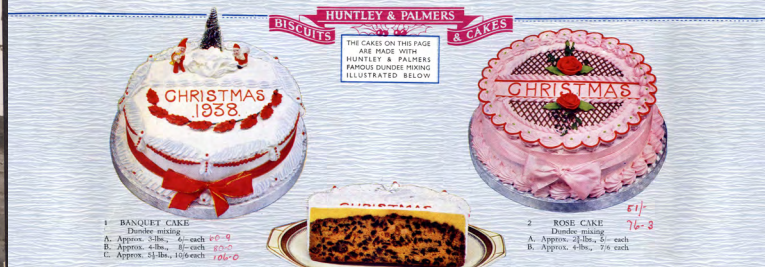
Great and small estates

We have completed cataloguing of the records of the Basildon Park and Yattendon estates of Lord Iliffe, 1369-2002 (D/EX2717). We also have received a substantial addition to the records of the Iliffes' Bradfield Estate, 1655-1935 (D/EIF). All three estates have complex conveyancing histories. The oldest item is actually a stray court roll for the manor of Hampstead Ferrers (later known as Hampstead Norreys), 1369-1374, which was discovered rolled up inside court rolls for Basildon, 1552-1565; none was previously known to survive. We have also acquired a map of the Aldermaston estate, early 20C (D/EX2575); and a small collection of papers (mainly financial) of the Robins family of Grove and Wantage, 1881-1922 (D/EX2639). They were originally farmers, with later generations moving into business as ironmongers and chemists in Wantage.

Fun and games

Material has been added to the archives of Progress Theatre, Reading, 1947-2004 (D/EX1151), and Wokingham Theatre, 1947-2014 (D/EX2083). We have also received a small collection of printed ephemera relating to various cultural events in Reading, 1953-1999 (D/EX2371). The papers of the Hunt family include records of Bear Wood Ladies' Hockey and Social Clubs, 1908-1920, and Bearwood Institute, 1887-1918 (D/EX2771).

Click here to recommend a friend



The Institute was founded in 1887 as the Society for the Promotion of Social Intercourse and Amusement and was a club for young men to meet, read books and periodicals, and play sports and games, chess and cards. Gardening is represented by tickets to exhibitions held by the Royal Windsor Rose and Horticultural Society, 1893-1896 (D/EX2384). Photographs and miscellanea relating to sports and entertainment in the Bracknell area, 1857-1930s, have been added to the papers of the Cave family (D/EX1690). We have also listed the records of the Royal Naval Association's Reading branch, 1976-2011 (D/EX2348). This was a social and fundraising group for current and former Naval personnel, their relatives, and supporters of the Royal Navy.

Fish and chips

An unusual recent arrival was the records of Reeves & Son, a small chain of fish and chip shops in Abingdon and Wantage, 1920-1955 (D/EX2472). Also of interest are photographs of the Regent Oil Company's petrol depot in 1956 (D/EX2383).

You can find out more about these records by searching our [online catalogue](#). Simply enter the collection references given above in the Catalogue Reference field.

Opening Hours

Tues 9-5, Weds 9-5, Thurs 9-9, Fri 9-4.30.
Closed Mondays, Weekends and Bank Holidays.
Please contact us for further details.

Contact Information:

Tel: 0118 937 5132 Fax: 0118 937 5131
Web: www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk
Email: arch@reading.gov.uk

The Berkshire Record Office,
9 Coley Avenue, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6AF

Funding Partners

- Bracknell Forest Council
- Reading Borough Council
- Slough Borough Council
- West Berkshire Council
- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- Wokingham Borough Council



Top left: The Clifford Bottle Washer (D/EX2311/8/1/4)
Top right: Huntley & Palmer's selection of ready-made Christmas cakes, 1938 (D/EX1748/1/2)