

The

Berkshire Echo



Berkshire Record Office Newsletter

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Dates for your diary

Introductory Visits for newcomers to the Office have been set for 2006 as follows: 23rd January, 10th April, 10th July and 9th October. If you would like to attend, please ask at Reception to put your name on the list, or call 0118 901 5132.

Ivone Turnbull

Grimsbury Castle a Strong Place

Grimsbury Castle is an Iron Age hill fort, saddling the north end of Cold Ash Ridge above Hermitage (Ordnance Survey grid reference: SU5110 7226). The works themselves are under the protection of English Heritage. At the centre of the hill fort adjacent to the road, lies an 18th century folly house (lodge) in the crenelated gothic style, close by there is an information board.



Map showing the location of Grimsbury Castle and Cold Ash Fort.

A plan in the Victoria County History of Berkshire shows an outer ditch to the west of the west gate, described as an outer defence of the fort. However, its isolation from the main works and its open ends, which allow for an enemy flanking movement, render this unlikely. Compare it with Blewburton Hill, which may have been a protection for the rear against a relieving army. Archaeologist and lecturer, Roger Goodburn FSA, suggested that it is more likely to be a Bronze Age stock enclosure.

About 2/3rds north along the outer ditch, there is a conical pit about 9ft across and 5ft deep, cut into the side of the outer bank. When it was dug, and what it was for is a mystery, but it is definitely later than the ditch.

There is no gap in these outer works on the plan to allow access to the west gateway, adding strength to the theory that it had a role to play in the storming of the gate and the destruction of the fort. Only the West and North gates are original, the other openings are later. A cross bank is shown on the plan in the middle of the North East section of the rampart, described on the information board as an aborted gateway.

The well shown in the vallum of the North rampart had some water coming from it. As a source of water for the house, it seems too far away, although the brickwork does look contemporary to it. Roger Goodburn tentatively suggested, "It might have been a grotto to go with the folly house".

In the Newbury and District Field Club (N.D.F.C) Journal, vol. VX1, 1960 p53, there is a description of the archaeological excavations in the Western gate by Peter Wood, M.A. Ph.D. Unfortunately, as he says in his general description, the area around west gate has been sadly mutilated, as has the north gate. The section drawings of the excavations are difficult to follow, though the plan is straightforward.

The hollow way bends north and runs downhill, parallel with the outer work. As to whether it peters out or merges with the outer earthworks is impossible to know without an archaeological investigation. The charcoal layer may indicate the burning of the gateway, and a subsequent rebuilding using flints. Roger Goodburn suggests that a modern survey would be of the utmost value.

Follow in the footsteps of iron age man and enjoy a perambulation around the woodland environs of this 2300-year-old hill fort; stout footwear recommended!

Mr J.W. Cochrane

Mr Cochrane would welcome comments and suggestions from readers. If you would like to contact him, please do so via his e-mail: s.cochrane3@ntlworld.com. A copy of the full version of this article can be found in the Berkshire Record Office Library.

The story of Battle Hospital

Battle Hospital, like many others started life as a workhouse built to serve the needs of the destitute. The Reading Poor Law Union was formed in August 1835, with a Board comprising 5 Guardians from each of the parishes of St Giles, St Laurence and St Mary.

Medical officers were appointed to care for the inmates. The diseases most frequently encountered were fever, smallpox and consumption (tuberculosis), although many children fell victim to influenza, diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, polio, tetanus, and typhoid. Life expectancy in the 1840s was low: 45 years for the gentry, 27 years for tradesman and 22 years for labourers.

In 1865, the Guardians obtained a loan of £11,700 and spent £5,000 on a site near Battle Farm on the Oxford Road. A competition was held to find an architect who could provide a workhouse to the standard required by the Guardians for no more than £6,700; Mr Woodman won the competition. The overall cost, including furniture and fittings, was £14,000.

The opportunity was taken to make life slightly more bearable for the inmates: flock mattresses replaced straw ones, the old double beds were cut down to make single ones and backs were added to the benches in the dining hall. Wool rugs were purchased for the floors and the day rooms had a fireplace at each end and suitable reading matter.

In 1870 fever wards were added, and extra two-storey wards for the infirmary. At this point the Infirmary started to train its own nurses. Initially they were sent to lectures and demonstrations at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, but later all the training was given on site. In 1909-11 an additional infirmary block was added to house 150 aged, infirm and convalescent patients.



The gatehouse of Reading No. 1 War Hospital. Reproduced courtesy of the Local Studies Collection at Reading Central Library.

In 1914 Britain went to war with Germany and the scale of casualties meant that extra medical facilities were needed. The inmates were moved out to other institutions and the workhouse was handed over to the military authorities in March 1915 to become Reading No 1 War Hospital. There were eventually 20 war hospitals in the county, all linked to Battle.

After the war, the Guardians decided to carry on using it as a hospital with a Medical Superintendent and Matron in charge, and when the Poor Law system was abolished in 1929, Battle Infirmary was handed over to the local authority and became a Municipal Hospital, adopting its present name: Battle Hospital. The functions formerly performed by the workhouse were taken over by the local Public Assistance Committee. The Guardians' records can be found under doc. ref. G/R 1/1 - 69: Minutes of the Board of Guardians 1835 - 1930.

Under the National Health Service Act, which came into operation in 1948, Battle became a General Hospital and as new medical procedures became available, and cases previously thought to be inoperable became treatable, the hospital expanded to meet the demand. In 1972 the single-storey Abbey Block was opened.

The two Reading hospitals joined together in 1993 to form the Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust, and a decision to amalgamate all the services in new accommodation on the RBH site was finally taken. Much of the Royal Berkshire Hospital has already been reconstructed or refurbished, and the last part, the aptly named Battle Block, is due to be completed by the end of 2005. All the remaining services will be transferred and the old Battle site will almost certainly be sold for development.

Neila Warner

Just catalogued

The long-term Methodist records cataloguing project has culminated with the completion of work on the circuits of the Windsor, Slough and Maidenhead area (D/MC 14-20). Recently discovered records include preaching plans for Windsor and Maidenhead Wesleyan Circuit, some dating as far back as 1824 (D/MC 14), and the first volume of quarterly meeting minutes for Maidenhead Primitive Methodist Circuit, 1844-1856 (D/MC 15). We also received the records of the Penny Bank run by Maidenhead Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1859-1919 (D/MS 10).

Dedworth Green Baptist Church (D/N 48) has placed its records in our care is. Unfortunately many of the records were severely damaged by a fire that destroyed the church in 2000, and are not in a fit state to be consulted at present.

Family historians will be excited by the arrival of the following parish records: Bucklebury, including registers of baptisms, 1865-1963, and marriages, 1837-1991 (D/P 28), Hurley (banns, 1798-2002) (D/P 72), Knowl Hill, including baptisms, 1910-2004, and burials, 1842-2002 (D/P 164), Marlston, including marriages, 1907-1996, and burials, 1925-1998 (D/P 28B), Pangbourne, including marriages, 1935-1957 (D/P 91), Sutton Courtenay, including burials, 1956-2002 (D/P 128), and Tilehurst St Mary Magdalen, including baptisms, 1978-2004, and marriages, 1983-1999 (D/P 132E).

Reading All Saints (D/P 168) has made its first deposit here. The church was built in 1865, but its archive includes the records of St Mary's School, Hosier Street, which date back to 1856, together with baptisms from 1904 and marriages from 1909. Other parish records have come in from Bracknell St Paul (D/P 165C), Littlewick (D/P 179), Stratfield Mortimer (D/P 120) and Swallowfield (D/P 129).

The records of Susanna Caroline Palmer's charities for the churches of Sonning, Woodley and Dunsden (D/QX 35) and log books of Letcombe Bassett National school, 1864-1926, are also now available for research (D/EX 1904). We are pleased to announce the cataloguing and microfilming of the earliest surviving poll books (the forerunners of today's electoral registers) for Reading Borough, 1679-1690 and 1820-1837 (R/AE1).

We have purchased an interesting collection of papers of local solicitor James Crowdy, 1791-1880, mainly relating to his client William Hallett of Faringdon and Denford (D/EZ 148). Hallett was a frequent, if unsuccessful, reform candidate for Parliament, and the records include bills relating to his election expenses. Incidentally, he achieved a form of immortality when he chose Gainsborough to paint him with his bride in 1785; the portrait, known as The Morning Walk, is now in the National Gallery.

Lisa Spurrier



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