

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo Issue 40

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### From the Editor

With summer upon us we have decided to allow the Echo to mess about on the river. The spark for this particular idea was the impending publication of the Berkshire Record Society's edition of early records relating to the management of the River Thames, our county's most famous natural feature and historic northern boundary. Today, being in the Thames Valley defines the county as part of England's most prosperous region, but in the eighteenth century the great river was ripe for improvement and that is where we have begun our insight into Berkshire's waterways. In this issue you can also read about the surveyors who helped to shape the rivers, and waterborne tragedies from across the years.

Speaking of the northern boundary, we had a great time at the Faringdon History Day in May, when along with colleagues from Oxfordshire we took over the Corn Exchange to celebrate the town's heritage. We felt very much at home and appreciated and are indebted to the Oxfordshire staff for making the whole event possible and organising the day. Over 400 people came through

the door and hopefully local history has had a real boost in the area.

Back at the BRO we have been pondering the refreshments we offer to visitors. After the excitement of updating the vending machine with more coffee options, we have decided to revamp our snacks by going Fair Trade. Inevitably this is going to make snack costs slightly dearer, but we hope you will support our efforts.

Enjoy the summer, and enjoy the Echo, and please don't forget to tell us what you think of it. We'd love to know whether we are getting it right in terms of content, and look. Is there anything you'd like to see included? You can always drop us a line at the arch mailbox. And please don't forget to click and recommend a friend!

Mark Stevens (Senior Archivist)



### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**EXPLORE YOUR FAMILY HISTORY**  
Discover your family history or look into the history of where you live with a visit to the BRO. Why not put your name down for one of the free BRO introductory visits. Dates for 2007 and 2008 are: 8th October 2007, 4th February, 14th April, 7th July and 6th October 2008. Just call us on 0118 901 5132 or ask at Reception for details.

**THE BRO OPENS TO HERITAGE**  
This year's Heritage Open Day will be on Saturday 8th September. The BRO will be open from 11.00 to 13.00. We will be providing tours of the office. To book a place on a tour, please call us on 0118 901 5132 or ask at Reception for details.

The BRO will also take part in a Family History Day with other organisations such as the Berkshire Family History Society at Reading Library. It will take place on Saturday 29th September. The exact time is unknown at present, but look out for more details on our website in due course.



Plan of pound lock at Parting Eyot, Bray 1815 (D/T C28)



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### DISCOVER MORE ABOUT LOCAL HISTORY

The Berkshire Local History Association has various events listed on their website including the Swallowfield Local History Society at the Swallowfield Show, White House Farm on 26th and 27th August. Visit their website for more details: [www.blha.org.uk](http://www.blha.org.uk).

### JOHN SOANE : READING'S ARCHITECTURAL HERO

An exhibition to celebrate the restoration of the Simeon Monument in the Market Place, Reading and the life and work of John Soane (1753-1837), is currently on at the Museum of Reading.

Soane is regarded as one of England's finest architects. He grew up in Reading and designed the monument. The exhibition features original paintings of his works as well as Soane's architectural drawings for his Reading commissions.

The exhibition runs until 2nd September. Please see the museum website for more details: [www.readingmuseum.org.uk](http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk).

## New book on the running of the River Thames

A new book due to be published this autumn by the Berkshire Record Society, will contain the complete text of the minutes of all meetings and of numerous reports for the Thames Navigation Commission. Edited and with an introduction by Jeremy Sims, for the first time it will be possible to read in the Commission's own words about the struggle to build a modern waterway.

Battles with vested interests, problems with barge-owners, negotiations with riverside landowners, struggles to raise the capital required (and problems caused by financial mismanagement), as well as the technical problems encountered in building the new locks, are all chronicled in the Commissioners' minute books (catalogue reference D/TC).

The Commission was appointed by Parliament in 1771 and it oversaw many improvements of the River Thames. Between 1770 and 1790 the navigation of the River was transformed. The old, cumbersome and inefficient flash locks were replaced by modern pound locks, weirs were replaced and the tow

path improved, and regulations were introduced to improve the safety of the barges on the river.

The work of the Commissioners did not always run smoothly, but their achievement was immense, and this book will provide a fascinating insight into a remarkable period in the history of the River Thames. To find out more about the book, please contact the Berkshire Record Society by email [info@berkshirerecordsociety.org.uk](mailto:info@berkshirerecordsociety.org.uk), or via the BRO postal address.

Are you interested in tracing your ancestors from near or afar?

Contact the  
**Berkshire Family History Society**  
Yeomanry House, 131 Castle Hill, Reading, Berks, RG1 7TJ  
**Telephone 0118 950 9553**

For more details about our Society and dates of Branch meetings in: Bracknell, Newbury, Reading, Vale of White horse, Windsor and the Computer Branch in Woodley see the website [www.berksfhs.org.uk](http://www.berksfhs.org.uk)

Our **Research Centre** is open  
at the address above  
Tuesday 10:00-16:00, 19:30-21:30  
Wednesday & Thursday 10:00-16:00  
2nd & 4th Sunday each month 11:00-16:00

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## Surveying the River Thames: the Treacher papers

The papers of the Treacher family of Sunning (D/EX1457) are one of our most useful collections for those researching the River Thames. The records include very detailed accounts, plans, specifications and estimates for work spanning the whole of the upper Thames.

The family served as surveyors to the Thames Navigation Commissioners for almost 90 years. The first John Treacher began work for the Thames Navigation in 1773 and from c.1786 he was put in charge of the lock-building programme for the river above Reading. In 1791 Treacher was appointed General Surveyor for the upper district of the Navigation, and in 1795 he also became General Engineer of the whole Navigation.

He was succeeded in both posts by his son, also John Treacher, who was appointed General Surveyor of the whole Navigation in 1821. Between 1813 and 1824 he was also the surveyor of bridges for Berkshire. His son George was appointed assistant surveyor to the Thames Navigation in 1824 and succeeded his father as General Surveyor in 1836. In 1856 he became General Receiver (of tolls etc) for the Commission and remained in post until 1862. His son John became a market gardener in Twyford and thus ended the Treacher association with the Thames Navigation.

## Man throws himself in canal after being 'crossed in love'

A tragicomic tale of thwarted romance was found among the depositions of witnesses at Newbury borough court of quarter sessions in 1871 (document reference: N/JQ 6/1). Thomas Nightingale was accused of attempting suicide (a criminal offence) in the Kennet and Avon Canal on 29 November 1871.

Witness PC Stephen Justice testified that as he tried to get the man out of the water he said "let go of me for I am distressed & upset in my mind & have been crossed in love I have missed a good chance and I have been deceived".

Thomas was discharged with a caution and happily his suicidal tendencies proved temporary as he appears to have found

love again. The 1881 census reveals that 'Tom' Nightingale had moved to Radford, Nottinghamshire, where he lived with his wife Rhoda and their 2 year old daughter Lucy.

## Death in the River Thames

Unsuspecting mothers allowed Amelia Dyer, the infamous 'Baby Farmer' of Reading, to foster or adopt their babies. She then killed them within a few days of pocketing money for their care and dumped the bodies in the River Thames. Baby farming was common in the Victorian period where unwanted babies were taken in for a fee and either kept in appalling conditions or killed.

We have several coroners inquisitions at the Record Office referring to infants found dead in the River Thames. One of these states "Found dead in Thames had been wilfully strangled by some person or persons unknown and the Annie Dyer alias Thomas alias Harding disposed of the body afterwards" (Amelia is given the name Annie here; document reference: R/JQ6/34/80).

Amelia was caught after a body was found in the River Thames wrapped in paper with her address on it. She was tried at the Old Bailey and hanged at Newgate on 10 June 1896. Further detail about the case can be found on the Thames Valley Police Museum website: [www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news\\_info/info/museum/dyer.htm](http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news_info/info/museum/dyer.htm)



## New to the Archives

### New registers

Recently deposited records of Slough Methodists include partial transcripts (names only) of the registers of baptism, 1850-2000, and marriage, 1934-2001, used successively at Herschel Street Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Slough Central Hall and St Andrew's Methodist Church, Slough (D/MS69). Also available are Hatford parish records (D/P65) and Wallingford St Leonard vestry minutes, 1819-1853 (D/EZ153).

The latest parish registers now available are:

East Garston - baptisms, 1942-2006, marriages, 1986-1999, burials, 1877-2005, and banns, 1886-2001 (D/P59)  
Reading St Agnes - baptisms, 1939-1983, marriages, 1939-1997, and banns, 1939-1992 (D/P167)  
Stanford in the Vale - baptisms, 1885-1984, marriages, 1950-1971, banns, 1983-2001, and burials, 1894-1946 (D/P118)  
Wantage - baptisms, 1942-1994, marriages, 1944-1988, burials, 1936-1964, and banns, 1947-1991 (D/P143).

### Property history

Records now available include deeds of Holly Spring, Bracknell, 1817-1898 (D/EX1996); photographs and papers relating to Lily Hill House, Warfield and Martins Heron, Winkfield (D/EX1997); deeds for Caversham and Tilehurst (D/EX1866); Hungerford and Twyford (D/EX2006); and Sunningdale (D/EX2019); maps and plans for north and west Berkshire (D/EX2010).

### Schools

A number of records relating to local schools are now accessible including the West Hendred School admission register, 1904-1966, (SCH1/11/1); St Bartholomew's School, Newbury admission registers, 1975-1998 (2004/SCH/1); Winchcombe Junior School, Newbury records, 1950-2005 (SCH2); Reading and Earley Board School (later New Town Board School and New Town Secondary Modern School) and Alfred Sutton Secondary Girls' School, Reading, log books, 1877-1895 and 1949-1973 (D/EX2015); plans for several Reading schools, 1851-1872 (D/EX2009); an album of early 20th century photographs of Berkshire schools (D/EX1964/1); photographs of Courtenay Lodge School, Sutton Courtenay and Maiden Erlegh School, Earley, 1930s-1950s (D/EX1914).

### Local government records

The records of Reading Borough Council, 1973-2000, are now available (DC/R) as well as those for Slough Borough Council, 1863-1974 (S/). The records of the Reading Paving and Lighting Commissioners and Local Board of Health, 1785-1880, are also



Drawing of the Town Hall, Windsor (ref: D/EX 1915/1/4)

available. These include details of appointments of Watchmen, and Board of Health maps used to survey sanitary provisions in Reading in 1853 (R/AS).

### Local aspects

Local records now accessible include records of East Garston Parish Council (CPC59); a nineteenth century print of Newbury Corn Exchange (D/EX1885) and miscellaneous prints and images of Newbury (D/EX1445). We have also received material from the Royal Borough Collection, held by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, 1656-1999 (D/EX1915). The collection includes records of Edgington and Spink, Architects.

### Opening Hours

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

### Contact Information:

Tel: 0118 901 5132  
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Web: [berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk](http://berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk)  
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### Funding Partners

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

