

BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo Issue 43

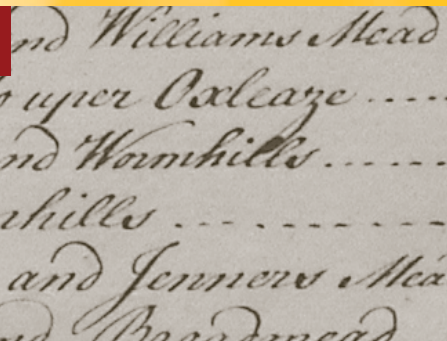
- ❖ [Manorial Documents Register Online](#)
- ❖ [Click here to become a Lord](#)
- ❖ [Rise and Fall in your Town](#)
- ❖ [Case Study](#)
- ❖ [New to the Archives](#)

From the Editor



This year sees us celebrating BRO's 60th birthday. Inevitably this sort of thing gets you thinking about firsts, such as our first document, or our first searcher, as well as things like what is the oldest thing we have (our 1153 Aldermaston deed) or the longest thing we have. The latter is a manorial document – a thirty-one foot long survey of the manor of Bradfield c.1680 – and we have a double reason to celebrate it this year, as we complete our project to put Berkshire's Manorial Documents Register online.

This edition of the Echo is all about manorial documents and why they are such an important local historical resource. Of course these days anyone with money to spare can buy a manorial lordship and earn the right to drive their cows through the multi-storey on alternate feast days, but in times of



yore the manor was a central part of a functioning local community. Read all about it here.

In the meantime we gear up to have our birthday party later on in the summer. We're very much looking forward to it and also to looking back over our own past. If you haven't visited before then maybe this is the year to start your family tree or research the history of your street or village. Maybe you will also be the first!

Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

EXPLORE YOUR HISTORY

Find out more about your family or local history with a visit to the BRO. Why not put your name down for one of the free BRO introductory visits? Remaining dates for 2008 are: 7th July and 6th October. Just call us on 0118 901 5132 or ask at Reception to put your name down on the list.

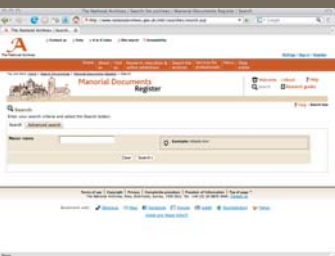
COME ALONG TO THE FAIR

BRO will have a stand at the Buckinghamshire Family History Fair taking place on Saturday, 26 July 2008. The fair will be held at the Grange High School, Wendover Way, Aylesbury, from 10 am to 4 pm. Come along and say hello to staff on the stall.



The Lord of all Manors: Berkshire's Manorial Documents Register

[Click here
to become a Lord](#)



The Register

The Manorial Documents Register began life in 1922 as an index to records scattered across the country, providing summary details and location. Seventy five years on, the Manorial Documents Register (MDR) is being updated and put online by The National Archives, and I have been working on the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire sections. It will come as no

surprise that most of the Berkshire records are at Berkshire Record Office, but a substantial proportion are at The National Archives and in public and private repositories.

Manor

At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 the manor was the basic unit of local government. The manor court evolved as the forum where all matters relating to the manor were dealt with, including property transactions, byelaws and local disputes. Records of these courts, surviving from the mid thirteenth century, tell us much about how society was organised at a local level. They can reflect the impact of national events and movements like the Great Plague or Tudor enclosure. They are arguably at their most informative in the medieval period, when the power of the manor was at its height. It was later supplanted by the parish vestry and local magistrate. However, the manorial court system survived officially until 1922 when the Law of Property Act abolished both the courts and the manorial land tenure called copyhold.

Manors in Berkshire

The first step has been to establish a list of manors which exercised a manor court. The existing index to manorial records at BRO has been added to over the years but it included borough and hundred courts, and is not entirely reliable. My remit was to start from scratch, working through all family and estate catalogues which might hold manorial records. Using the existing MDR, I have also trawled through catalogues at Berkshire and elsewhere locating and entering on to a database details of court rolls, rentals, surveys, accounts and court papers. Detailed guidelines provide a framework of what classes of records should be included, the notable exclusion for the register being title deeds.

In Berkshire (using the pre-1974 boundary) 350 manors have been identified and I have entries for 265 of them. The records are spread across 46 repositories with about half being at Berkshire Record Office. Court rolls of 81 manors are held at The National Archives.

Some may cover many years – for example Bray and Cookham which were royal manors – others may be a year or two only.

The project finished in mid April and hopefully the information will be online at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mdr sometime in May.

Sarah Charlton

Archivist, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

With just a click of the mouse, anyone willing to part with sums up to several hundred pounds can assume the right to use a manorial title with their name. An internet search reveals that for just under £1,000, one can also buy a 'seated title', which has land attached. This represents a tremendous change from the inherited noble titles handed down in landed families from the time of the Norman Conquest or granted by the Sovereign. But what do these new titles mean?

Some titles are being sold off from an estate or landed family which no longer requires that title, or which is trying to raise money from their assets. These would allow certain rights and privileges such as for hunting or to appoint the incumbent of the church, though not the right to sit in the House of Lords. These can be purchased through private solicitors or through auction houses.

The majority, however, are bought through businesses which provide a searching service for extinct titles for sale. These are seen by agencies such as Burke's Peerage as very dubious. Anyone with the cash to purchase these titles can then use them for the duration of their life, but most are not hereditary. These sites encourage you to choose from titles such as Sir, Lady, Baron, Duchess, etc, and then send you paperwork showing your new title. Some seated titles come with land measuring as little as 20 cm x 20 cm on the estate where the title is located.

One's money may not go far in terms of the land purchased, but the allure of better treatment in business and private life is compelling enough for some to part with their hard earned cash. Table for two by the window, Sir?

Screen shot from Manorial Documents Register
(www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mdr/)



Rise and Fall in your Town: Borough vs Manor

Berkshire is home to several ancient boroughs and to a few which assumed borough functions. In the former category are **Wallingford, Reading, Newbury, Abingdon, New Windsor and Wokingham**, and in the latter **Wantage and Hungerford**. These places definitely had at least one manorial court predating the borough's or running alongside it.

A borough court (not included in the MDR) dealt with things like fairs and markets, tolls and rents, as well as civic matters and petty crime. One might hope that records of manor and borough were kept distinct; expecting that one court might rise at the expense of the other. This pattern varied from borough to borough and the confusion of records suggests it was anything but clear cut.

- At **Abingdon and Newbury**, manor courts ran alongside borough courts: Abingdon had a Court Leet with View of Frankpledge (a specific type of court) by its charter of 1556, whereas at Newbury the inhabitants had successfully petitioned the Crown (lords of the manor from 1461) to purchase the manorial rights. Court rolls and books, rentals and lists of residents are common to both borough and manorial administration, so distinguishing the records for inclusion in the MDR was tricky.

- At **Reading** the Abbey and towns people struggled for pre-eminence in the centuries before the Dissolution, and the Abbey held both manor and market and fair. In 1560 the Corporation's new charter granted the View of Frankpledge but said nothing about manorial courts. Surviving court rolls and jury presentments for the seventeenth century at BRO are of a distinctly borough court nature.

- **Hungerford** was never incorporated, yet from about 1600 it began to exercise a borough-like jurisdiction. By the 18th century the Court Baron had become little more than a minor court of record for small debts, like a borough court. Presentments and other records which concur with the manorial tradition are generally headed "Hungerford Borough".

- **Wantage** seems to have taken the line of having one record for all types of court: the surviving court book 1764-1887 at BRO (D/EF/M6) contains the record of hundred, borough and manor, all intermixed. The reason seems to be that Fulk Fitz Warin, lord of the manor in the 13th century, considered Wantage hundred and its court as appurtenant to the manor of Wantage. He also held market and fair rights for Wantage, hence the intermingling when Wantage began to assert itself as a borough in the 18th century.

Case Study: Aldworth / Simmons Families in Manorial Records

In the Elwell papers held at BRO, there is a detailed rental showing who rented properties in Shrevenham Manor c. 1750 (D/EEL/M74). In the section showing Longcot, there is an interesting entry recording that a [Jo]hn Simmons rented a messuage and close for 5 1/2 shillings on Lady Day, and the same again at Michaelmas. The notes column for that entry states, "To Aldworth, who married Simmons Daughter at Lady Day 1779".

Could the house and close be a wedding present from Mr Aldworth's father-in-law? A generous, caring father-in-law giving a good start in life for his daughter and her new husband? Or did he need to sweeten the deal for his new son-in-law? The closest marriage found was in Faringdon between a Samuel Aldworth and a Mary Simmonds on 30 March 1777. This is pure speculation about the motive behind renting the

property, and an intriguing discrepancy in marriage dates, requiring further investigation. An exciting story with which to start research, however.

Manorial records can be a great way to find out information on individuals beyond their birth, marriage and death dates. Going back in time much before census, electoral register and civil registration, manorial records can fill in where other records are patchy or non-existent. With so many interesting notes of family relationships, abodes, occupations and life events in manorial records, what can you discover about your family in them? Consult the new MDR online or BRO staff to find out what manorial records are available for your research.



New to the Archives



D/MS 51/8/10

New registers

We are pleased to announce the following registers have now been deposited and microfilmed, and are available for research:

East Challow: register of burials, 1867-2006 (D/P 81B).

Denchworth: baptisms, 1909-2007, and burials, 1814-2007 (D/P 46).

Farnborough: baptisms, 1813-2006, and burials, 1813-2007 (D/P 54).

Leckhampstead: baptisms, 1904-2007, and burials, 1861-2007 (including local Methodists) (D/P 34B).

Britwell (Slough) Methodist Church: baptisms, 1956-1977 (D/MS 13).

Other parish records have come in from Brightwalton (D/P 24), Catmore (D/P 31), and East Garston (D/P 59).

Nonconformist records

We have made additions to the records of the Methodist churches in Cookham Rise (D/MS 36), Hungerford (D/MS 44), Maidenhead (D/MS 10), Newbury (Northbrook and Bartholomew Street Churches, D/MS 2, 51), Slough (St Andrew's, D/MS 69), and Thatcham (D/MS 73).

We have received some additional records relating to United Reformed Church and Congregational churches and organisations. These relate mainly to the fabric of chapel buildings, including: Castle Street Congregational Church, Reading (D/N 9); Broad Street United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church, Reading (D/N 11); the Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks Congregational Union (D/N 25); and Sonning Congregational Chapel (D/N 55).

Reading Rate books

House historians have an exceptionally useful new resource to consult, with the completion of our catalogue of the almost 500 rate books and valuation lists for Reading Borough, 1850-1963 (R/FR). Many of these volumes are extremely large and heavy, so it may not always be possible to produce these of Thursday evenings when there are fewer members of staff available for production.

Probate

Three probates for members of the Thorn family of Reading, 1831-1888, have been deposited (D/EX 1973).

Deeds

We have catalogued a small collection of deeds and papers relating to property in Wokingham owned by Thomas Manley Wescott (the first mayor of Wokingham in 1885), 1660-1921 (D/EWC). Also now available is an abstract of title to property called Guthridge in Blewbury, 1870 (D/EX 2050).

Council minutes

Also new are East Ilsley Parish Council minutes, 1971-1982 (CPC 74).

Need somewhere to hold a meeting?

Why not ask about our Wroughton Room for hire. Reasonable rates, great accommodation. Call on 0118 901 5137 for more information.



Opening Hours

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

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