

BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo Issue 42

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From the Editor



The New Year has brought lots of new visitors into BRO and it is always great for us to see people being bitten by the research bug. Get together at

Christmas provide a good opportunity to start thinking about your family tree or old buildings and features long gone. You probably know this well yourself - various relatives tell tales and stories which no one is entirely sure about. Might it be possible to find out the truth? Well of course it might...and before long those with Berkshire stories to check can find themselves at our door. Sometimes you can prove a story and sometimes you can't, but it is the finding out which is most fun.

I'm sure that plenty of bad things went on in the past but this edition of the Echo is going to revel in the more prosaic elements of horse poo and home ownership, to pick just two things from the articles which follow. Manure seems to have been the principal public nuisance in more innocent times for Reading, but possibly the locals just didn't want to spoil their lovely new pavements; maybe it was the Georgian equivalent of chewing gum. You can discover all in the archives of Reading's

Improvement Commissioners. Also, home ownership has been an incredible force over the last one hundred years and our new collection of local building society records gives a feeling for consumer power as it grew throughout the Thames Valley.

We've had plenty to celebrate since the last Echo. We retained our two-star rating in the annual assessment of local archives, which we were very pleased about, as it provides an external opinion of how well we do. We have also been awarded a further £90,000 by The Wellcome Trust for another project to repair bits of the Broadmoor Hospital archive. This latest sum will allow us to make repairs to individual papers in some of the Victorian patient files, an incredibly detailed and unique resource. The whole thing will take 3 years! In the meantime our first Broadmoor project is still on course to see the archive available for research at the end of this year. Keep an eye on the Echo for more details.

Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

NEW TO BRO?

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? Dates for 2008 are: 14th April, 7th July and 6th October. Just call us on 0118 901 5132 or ask at Reception to put your name down on the list.

LORD OF THE MANOR

A day school on using manorial records for family and local history research will take place on 29 March 2008. For further information, please contact the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford, OX1 2JA, telephone 01865 270368, or visit www.conted.ox.ac.uk.





left to right: The Revd J P Townend, BFHS chairman Jocie McBride, County Archivist Peter Durrant. Photo courtesy of Ivan Dickason.

Manorial Documents Project

A major project to put information about all Berkshire Manorial Documents online is nearing completion. In association with the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, The National Archives and Royal Holloway University of London, and with support from the Marc Fitch Fund, Berkshire Record Office has employed a researcher to gather details of manorial documents relating to Berkshire from Record Offices throughout the country. Later this year all this information will be accessible at the touch of a button.

A day school will be held in Oxford on 29 March celebrating the project. It will discuss the value and importance of manorial records for local and family research. Speakers will include Professor Nigel Saul of Royal Holloway and Professor Chris Dyer of the Department of English Local History at Leicester University, both very distinguished experts in the field. For details contact Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford, OX1 2JA, telephone 01865 270368, or visit www.conted.ox.ac.uk.



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.

New-For-Old Scheme

Thanks to the generosity of the Berkshire Family History Society, churches in Berkshire have been offered the chance to replace Victorian baptism and burial registers with brand-new books. As a result of this initiative, nine registers from six parishes, some dating back to 1812, have now been deposited in the Record Office.

The Society felt that this would be a positive way of helping preserve these vital records and of acknowledging the debt of all family historians to the

churches which maintain them. Society chairman Jocie McBride said, "The idea was to encourage small rural churches with Baptism and/or Burial Registers over 100 years old to deposit them in the Berkshire Record Office thus making these old records available for family history research".

The scheme still has some funds remaining. Churches which would be interested should contact the County Archivist.

Welcome and Welcome Back

Ellie Thorne and Andy Blake have joined the staff at BRO on a full-time basis. Both Ellie and Andy have worked previously in the office behind-the-scenes on a voluntary and/or short-term basis. Ellie joins the staff as an Archivist, and Andy as an Archive Assistant. They will become familiar faces in the searchroom to many before long.

Congratulations to Ivone Turnbull, Visitor Services Archivist, and her husband, who welcomed a baby boy on 23 December 2007. Their new accession, named Nathan William, weighed in at 7 lb 9 oz.



Borough Police Office
Reading 24 November 1863

Gentlemen,

I beg to report that I have this day visited North Court Oxford Street, and found that a Piggery has been erected there by Mr James Zuelch of No 15 Oxford Street Grocer and Pork Butcher.

The piggery contains 14 fat pigs, and is within 14 feet of the door of No 9 North Court. Occupied by Alfred Wheatley whose Wife is now ill, and I found upon enquiry that several other persons in the Court were also ill.

I may state that the Piggery is Brick built and tiled and has 8 Ventilators through which the inhabitants of the Court complain that a very offensive smell is frequently emitted and I have no hesitation in saying that pigs kept in such close proximity to dwellings are a source of

Reference R/AS 2/3/2

Two Pairs of Handcuffs: New Resource for Reading's History

Newly available at BRO are records of Reading's Paving and Lighting Commissioners, and the Local Board of Health.

Set up in 1785, the Commissioners were responsible for organising the paving of the streets, keeping them clean, and providing and maintaining street lighting. The paving of Reading's streets, complete by 1787, was paid for by private subscribers named in the records. A man called a scavenger was employed to clear away rubbish (including "night soil" – a euphemism for the manure left by cart horses). The street lamps were originally oil-fuelled and lit by hand, but in 1828 they were upgraded to gas.

From 1829 to 1836 the Commissioners also managed the Watch - the precursors of today's police force. The newly available records include details of the appointments of the Watchmen, which have been indexed by Record Office staff. The streets may have been dirty, but it seems that crime was not as much of a problem for our ancestors. The Reading Watch only needed two pairs of handcuffs, according to an 1829 inventory of equipment.

The Commissioners were unelected and met in the Upper Ship Inn, where one imagines meetings washed down with beer. In 1850 they were succeeded by the more democratic Local Board of Health, which had a slightly wider remit to deal with public health, including burials. Reading's churchyards were so full by the 1850s, the Government insisted they should all be closed for public health reasons.



Help wanted

Can you identify this photograph from the 1960s? It says it is a farm "on the Downs near Wantage". The photographer took photographs in Compton and Streatley on the same day, so we suspect it is somewhere in that area. Can you help us narrow it down further? Any suggestions (to arch@reading.gov.uk or the address overleaf) gratefully received.

The Interment Committee records are a potential source for family historians: people could apply to have a loved one buried in a family grave in a churchyard, rather than at the new Reading Cemetery.

A particularly valuable part of this archive is a set of 29 maps drawn up for the Board of Health in 1853. They show central Reading in remarkable detail, at a scale of 50 feet to 1 inch. The records include very thorough reports by the borough surveyor and inspector of nuisances regarding obstructions of roads, sanitary or public health issues, etc. One idea we can be glad the Board turned down was a proposal in 1855 was to build a public gymnasium in the Forbury.

Anyone wishing to use these newly-available records will find a full catalogue in the searchroom, collection reference R/AS.



New to the Archives

New registers

We have had some very exciting new deposits, with the following new registers now available:

Bracknell Holy Trinity, 1995-2005
Cranbourne: marriages, 1996-2007, and banns, 1977-2005
Peasmore: burials, 1813-2007
Remenham: baptisms, 1948-2006, and marriages, 1998-2004
Wallingford St Mary: baptisms 1920-1952; burials, 1939-1961;
plus the very exciting discovery of the churchwardens' accounts, 1667-1720, and vestry minutes, 1707-1722.

Other parish records (not registers) have come in from Hurley (D/P 72); Spencers Wood (D/P 194); Tilehurst St Mary Magdalen (D/P 132E); Winkfield (relating to the church of St Martin, Chavey Down) (D/P 151).

Nonconformist records

We can report the recent arrival of a number of records from nonconformist churches. These relate to Basildon Independent Chapel, 1852-1942 (D/N 51); St Paul's United Reformed Church (formerly Bracknell Congregational Church), 1813-1998 (D/N 50) (including baptisms 1814-1972 and burials 1822-1859); Rokeby (Congregational) Hall, Caversham, 1861-1975 (D/N 52); Stroud Green Methodist Church, Greenham (D/MS 15); Shellingford Congregational Chapel, 1828-1878 (D/N 53); Spencers Wood United Reformed Church, 1812-1949 (D/N 44); Thatcham United Reformed Church, 1811-2005 (D/N 37); Wallingford Independent Chapel, 1776-1905 (D/N 12). We have also catalogued membership records for the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Quakers, 1876-1956, and minutes of the Reading Monthly Meeting, 1910-1928 (D/F).

Property history

An extremely valuable resource for house history has been received in the form of the records of Reading and High Wycombe Building Society (D/EX 2018). Reading Building Society was founded in 1852 to help ordinary people save money and buy houses, not all of which were in Reading – some were as far away as Dorset! Some volumes are indexed, mostly by customer's name. The Society merged with High Wycombe and South Bucks Building Society in 1947, and was then taken over by Bristol and West in 1957. The minutes include details of properties on which mortgages were sought, with brief surveyor's reports to c.1928. These records should be of interest to house historians, family historians, those researching building development, etc.

New and unusual

An unusual new document is the 1886 repudiation by Mary Trotter, wife of the vicar of Ardington, of her marriage settlement, drawn up to protect her financial interests when she married in 1877 (D/EX 2034). We do not know why she later wanted this changed – perhaps she and her husband needed urgent access to the protected monies. Family historians may also be interested in the wills of Robert Clerk of Padworth, 1810-1815 (D/EX 2035) and Richard Wilkins of Windsor, 1849 (D/EX 2037).

If you have seen the display on the work on the WI which has been in our reception area this autumn, you will be especially interested to learn that you can now consult the records of the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes, 1919-1996 (D/EX 2007).

The accounts of Wallingford Rural District Council, 1873-1896 (RD/W), have been catalogued and are now available for consultation.

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.

Contact Information:

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Funding Partners

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