

BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo Issue 44

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From the Editor

What made 1948 a special year? For some people doubtless it was the London Olympics, for others the founding of the National Health Service. But among the many events of that year, one, little noticed at the time, had a special significance in the Royal County of Berkshire, and that was the opening of the Berkshire Record Office.

That Berkshire needed a Record Office had been recognised a decade earlier; but war intervened, and it was not until August 1948 that the first County Archivist, Dr Felix Hull, was appointed. In those days the Record Office was a very small affair, with one archivist, a part-time clerical assistant, one strongroom, and an average of 3 searchers a week. But Felix Hull got to work energetically, contacting churches, landowners, town clerks, local businesses, and many others, bringing in a wealth of historic records. His Guide to Berkshire Record Office, published in 1952, bears eloquent witness to his success.

The Record Office soon outgrew its initial premises and moved first within the old Shire Hall and Assize Court complex in The Forbury, then to the new Shire Hall at Shinfield Park, and finally in millennium year to its present purpose-built quarters in Coley Avenue, Reading. Collections and services continued to expand.

Today we have over five miles of shelving full of documents, between five and six thousand visitors annually, and several thousand more enquiries by telephone, letter and e-mail.

So this autumn we celebrate our sixtieth birthday – sixty years of collecting and preserving records, sixty years of welcoming visitors and encouraging research into the history of Berkshire and its people. Many thousands of people have passed through our doors; many hundreds of books, articles, guides and theses have been written based upon research in our searchrooms. Many lives have been enriched as a result. We are grateful to the work of our predecessors - staff, friends and depositors – who have helped make the Record Office what it is today, and we look forward confidently to the future. We are celebrating – and we hope you will celebrate with us. Visit us on Heritage Weekend in September; come and see our anniversary exhibition; and read more about our own history in this special anniversary edition of The Berkshire Echo.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

HERITAGE OPEN DAY

BRO will open its doors for tours of both the public areas and behind-the-scenes on 13 September, as part of the Heritage Open Days. If you would like to come along, please ask at reception to book a place.

CRIME FESTIVAL

Peter Bedford, Coroner for Berkshire, will be giving a talk in the Wroughton Room at BRO as part of Reading's Festival of Crime Writing. He will speak about the role of the coroner on 12 September at 11am. If you would like to reserve free tickets for his talk, please call 0118 960 6060 or visit the Hexagon or Town Hall receptions.

DAY SCHOOLS

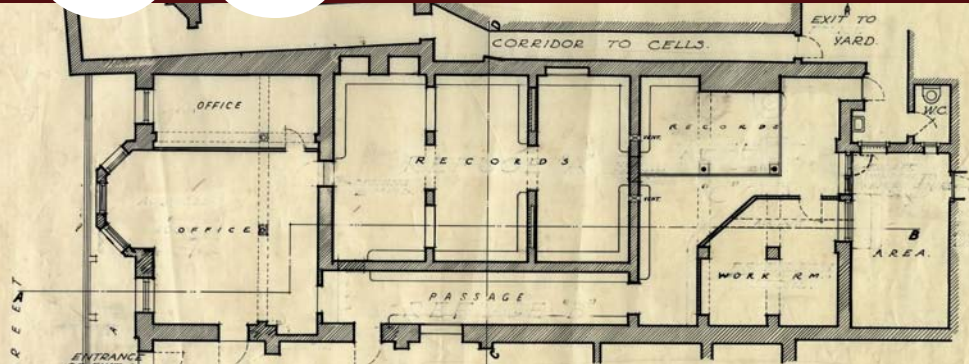
Joan Dils and Peter Durrant will be leading two day schools at BRO on the subject of 'Improving Berkshire Towns, 1780-1870'. They will be held on 25 October and 29 November. Places on the day schools can be booked through the University of Reading School of Continuing Education: email continuing-education@reading.ac.uk or telephone: 0118 378 8347.



60 years of BRO

ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

An exhibition celebrating the BRO's 60th anniversary will be open to the public this autumn. Stop by to see how the Berkshire Record Office has changed in the last 60 years. Open during office hours; no need to book.



Plan showing BRO in Assize Court basement (C/AR/P1/6/4)

Delayed beginnings

In the 1930s, many counties across the country were starting to establish county record offices. Berkshire was no different, and in 1939 established a County Records Committee to consider how to look after its official and deposited records. These were piling up in the Clerk's strongrooms at the then County Hall, the Forbury, Reading. The committee agreed to appoint an archivist shortly thereafter. However, WW2 put these plans on hold and Felix Hull, the first County Archivist, did not begin work until 1948.

Changing rooms

After a short stint in the caretakers flat in the basement of the old Shire Hall, the Forbury, Reading, the Record Office moved next door to the basement of the Assize Court and Police Station. By 1980, the Forbury site had a searchroom, 10 strongrooms, 3 offices and a repair room. The first conservator was appointed in 1971.

In 1981, the Record Office moved with the rest of the Council to the new Shire Hall at Shinfield Park, Reading. A Modern Records Centre was also created to manage the County's current records. The service moved to a bigger space within Shire Hall in 1994.

Following the abolition of the County Council in 1998, BRO began life anew as a joint service and moved to its present purpose-built premises in Coley Avenue, Reading in October 2000. It occupies the site of a former TA drill hall, museum store and meeting room for model car enthusiasts. There are seven linear miles of shelving installed in the strongrooms, five of which are currently full. It took six weeks and over 100 lorry loads to move all the records to their present home.



Purpose-built facility on Coley Avenue, Reading



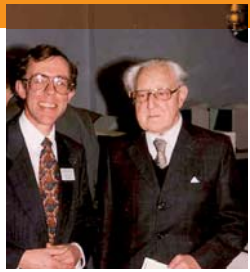
County Archivist hall of fame



1948-1952
Felix Hull



1952-1962
Peter Walne



1962-67
Will Smith (right)



1967-1979
Angela Green



1979-1982
Amanda Arrowsmith (right)



1983-1988
Adam Green



1988-present
Peter Durrant

Historic facts

First researcher: Sir Henry Benedict Linthwaite Braund (1893-1969), on 13 August 1948.
Oldest record: 1150s grant of Aldermaston church to a priory at Sherborne (D/EWP/T1).
Longest record: Detailed survey of the manor of Bradfield c1680 at 31 ft long (D/EIF/M8).
First accession: Manorial documents and deeds of West Hanney, c 1270-1621 (D/EX1).

L-R: Neila Warner, Mark Stevens, Andy Blake



Choosing Favourites

Since anniversaries are a good time for reflection, the Echo asked several members of staff to comment on their favourite record at BRO. Here's what they said:

- A favourite of mine is document D/P96/14/1/166, an apprenticeship indenture dated 1803. The overseers of Reading St Giles apprenticed a pauper child to a chimney sweep. They imposed a lot of conditions, including the provision of 'sufficient Meat, Drink, Washing, Lodging, Apparel', the last of which was to include clothes for climbing chimneys and another complete set of clothes for church attendance. The agreement also includes the alarming provision that the child was not to be forced by 'violent or improper means' to climb 'any chimney which shall be actually on fire'. The apprentice, James Leaver, was just eight years old. **Neila Warner**, *Searchroom Assistant*
- My favourite is the Agatha Christie 'Missing' poster (PS/FT/26/29). I can still remember unfolding this piece of paper, which was loose in a box of stuff which had been rescued from Wokingham Police Station. I doubt anyone had looked at it for 70 years. I had no idea how rare it was but we still get regular enquiries about it, so there can't be many copies around. I've often wondered who was the rather butch policewoman who had obviously been persuaded to be an Agatha look-a-like. I like the great drama of the word 'Missing', which makes the poster look as if it should adorn its own crime novel. **Mark Stevens**, *Senior Archivist*
- A particular favourite is the baptism entry in Speen recording the birth of a child given the unfortunate, but entertaining, name of Plainbill Duck, in 1831 (D/P116/1/7). Whether this name was bestowed intentionally by his, presumably loving, parents or as a result of a mishearing by the vicar at the christening I guess we'll never be able to say for sure. Unfortunately, the entry for Plainbill's untimely burial can be found in the registers only four years later. **Andy Blake**, *Archives Assistant*
- A favourite of mine is the Newbury St Nicolas Parish magazines, 1907-1913 (D/P89/28A/12). I recently studied the May 1908 magazine where the question of lighting the church was brought up at the Vestry meeting. The church was debating whether to install electric light or retain incandescent gas lighting. Which was better and cheaper? The cost then for gas was £28 a year. It seems rather reminiscent of the present time when tungsten light bulbs are being compared with mercury vapour bulbs against background of energy saving and escalating fuel prices. **Robin Elliott**, *Archives Assistant*



New to the Archives

BRO ref: SCH6/6/1/3

Manorial documents

Our manorial documents project (highlighted in the last issue) resulted in the discovery and cataloguing of a number of hitherto unknown records. These relate to the manors of Buckland Rectory (D/EHA); Chaddleworth, West Challow and Petwick, in Letcombe Regis, and Wantage (D/EF); Feens, in White Waltham (D/ECP); Letcombe Regis (D/ECO); Newbury (D/EPT); Wadley, in Faringdon (D/ECR); and West Woodhay, the manors and hundred of Kintbury and a group of manors in north west Hampshire (D/ELB). They range in date from the early 16th century to the 20th.

Also of particular interest is a volume kept by Anthony Morris Storer of Purley Park (D/EX2066) which comprises estate memoranda, copy letters, a survey relating to Purley manor, 1786-1796, and accounts of named servants and labourers' wages for Tilehurst, 1813 and 1822. We have listed deeds for Chilton Lodge Estate (D/EZ152); and property in Chieveley and Streatley (D/EX1923); Earley (D/EX2059); and Reading (D/EX1967, 2059). It was particularly exciting to acquire a deed dated 1408 for a toft (cottage) and land in West Street, Thatcham (D/EZ157).

School records

School records are among our most popular sources for family historians and others, and we are pleased to report the cataloguing of the records of Katesgrove Primary School, 1872-1987 (SCH6). Some of these had previously been available under provisional (and now obsolete) references, but they also include the newly-discovered log book for the boys and girls' departments, 1872-1875, and for the girls only, 1875-1893. We have also finished cataloguing the records of St Mary's Church of England Junior School, Thatcham, formerly Thatcham National School, 1883-2005 (SCH4).

Church records

Parish records have come in from Chaddleworth (including registers of baptisms, 1912-2007, and banns, 1912-1986); Hagbourne (baptisms, 1893-1962, marriages, 1908-1940, burials, 1905-1973); Hampstead Norreys; South Moreton (including banns, 1823-1929); Reading Christ Church (including papers relating to the building of St Agnes' and St Barnabas' churches; and Yattendon (including registers of marriages, 1933-2001, and banns, 1824-1934). We have also acquired the Wantage parish magazines for 1886 and 1887 (D/EX1929).

A series of meeting house licences, 1801-1840, has been added to the records of Newbury Wesleyan Methodist Circuit (D/MC7).

Parish Council records

We are pleased to announce the completion of cataloguing of the records of Hurley Parish Council (CPC72). These include records of several local charities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and information relating to footpaths and common land in the parish. Additional material has been added to the records of Barkham (CPC13) and Bucklebury (CPC28) Parish Councils.

Family papers

Finally, the papers of the Garrett family of Newland (D/EX2045) are of wide interest. The family ran a builder's firm, and the records include detailed estimates and accounts for work for a wide range of clients, mainly in Arborfield, Barkham and Shinfield. There are also rating records for Newland, 1897-1911.

Mystery Solved

The mystery photograph from Echo issue 42 has been identified as a view of College Farm, East Garston, from what is now known as Millennium Field. Thank you to East Garston Parish Council for ending the suspense.

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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