

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo

April 2020

- Nursery care: royally approved
- Better for children, better for mothers
- War prompts nursery expansion
- New to the Archives

### WHAT'S ON

### From the Editor

These days it is commonplace for children to attend a nursery in their first few years of life whilst their parents go to work, but today's nursery is perhaps seen more as a form of childcare than as formal learning. Children can attend nursery until they are ready to go to primary school at the age of 5, but many will go to a pre-school from the age of 3 which is often run by their local primary school. It was not always like this. Indeed, locally run nurseries were uncommon and there were only 9 in England by 1930.

The Nursery School Association (NSA) was established in 1923 to work towards providing nursery education. As we see in "Better for children, better for mothers", Reading's Phoebe Cusden was the Organising Secretary for the NSA. She felt that nursery education was important for the child as well as the parent. Something that is still true today.

We discover in "Nursery care: royally approved" that there was a form of nursery care in Windsor as early as the 1870s, but

that this became a training ground for nannies. The need for nursery care whilst mothers went to work became more urgent in the Second World War when women were increasingly required to work for the war effort. In "War prompts nursery expansion", we find out that the children could be in care all day as their mothers worked long hours for the war effort, but also that they had to pay for it too.

Nursery education and care is not a modern phenomenon as some might think, but it is interesting to see how it developed from a need to enable mothers to work, whilst providing some form of guiding education at the same time.

Don't forget to look at the New to the Archives section to see what has recently become available and check out What's On – there's a new exhibition in April for a start! Read on and find out more.

Ivone Turnbull  
Senior Archivist

#### Air Raids in Reading

27th April 2020 (time to be confirmed)  
Mike Cooper will be giving a talk on air raids in Reading during the second world war to tie in with our new exhibition. **FREE.** Full details will be available on our website nearer the time.

#### Through their eyes: a local perspective of the Second World War

29th April to 24th July 2020, during opening hours

Come along to this **FREE** exhibition and discover how the people of Berkshire prepared for conflict, adapted to change and celebrated the end of the Second World War. Available at the Berkshire Record Office during our opening hours: Tues & Wed 9-5; Thurs 9-9; Fri 9-4.30.

#### How to Read Old Handwriting Workshop

15th June 2020, time 10:15 to 14:45  
Always wanted to know how to read old handwriting, but don't know how? Then come along to our workshop! It will be held at the Berkshire Record Office where we will look at samples from 16th to 18th century documents held here. Cost is £20 per person. There are 10 places available and booking is essential. Please email [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk) or call 0118 937 5132.

*Continued on page 2*

[arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk)

Top: Children learning through play, Chilren Nursery Training College, c.1969 (D/EX1485/17/17/1)



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## Nursery care: royally approved

Until the 20th century, the majority of babies and young children were either cared for at home, or by private arrangement. The only ones who were cared for communally were orphans and those in need.

An interesting local example is that of HRH Princess Christian's Training College and Infant Nursery in Windsor (later in Clewer). The nursery provided training for nursery nurses (nannies), who cared for unwanted infants as part of their training. It was founded as the Home for Babies in Windsor in the 1870s, and was initially a day nursery for the benefit of working mothers, many of them unmarried.

The name was changed to Princess Christian's Nursery after HRH Princess Christian (also known as Princess Helena, a daughter of Queen Victoria) became the patron in 1885, and it then became a residential nursery for babies and young children from families in difficult circumstances, where the mother was absent or ill; some but not all were illegitimate. It continued to operate until 1971.

Source: W1/D271-272

WHAT'S ON

### Behind the Scenes at the BRO

22nd June 2020, time 10:30 to 11:30

Ever wanted to know what goes on behind the scenes at the BRO? Then come along and find out! You will be shown some historical documents, where we store them and given an insight into how our conservator repairs them. It's FREE and there are 15 spaces available. Booking is essential. Please email [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk) or call 0118 937 5132.

## Better for children, better for mothers

Phoebe Cusden of Reading, better known now for her involvement establishing Reading's link with Dusseldorf, was at the forefront of the nursery movement in the 1930s. In 1928 she started a small private nursery school in Blagdon Road, Reading, and after having her own child, she resumed paid employment as Organising Secretary of the Nursery School Association of Great Britain in 1934. The Association campaigned for the provision of nursery school sites on all new housing estates. Phoebe was convinced that nursery education was essential for 'the physical well-being of the child [and] the right development of its spiritual and social instincts'. She was interested in the benefits for working class mothers.

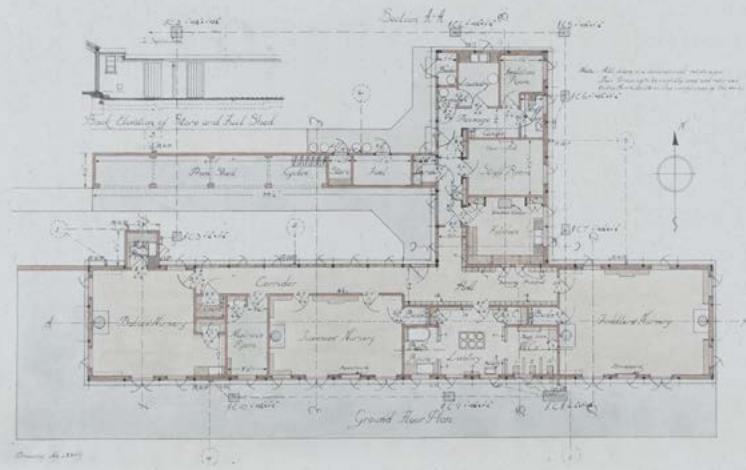
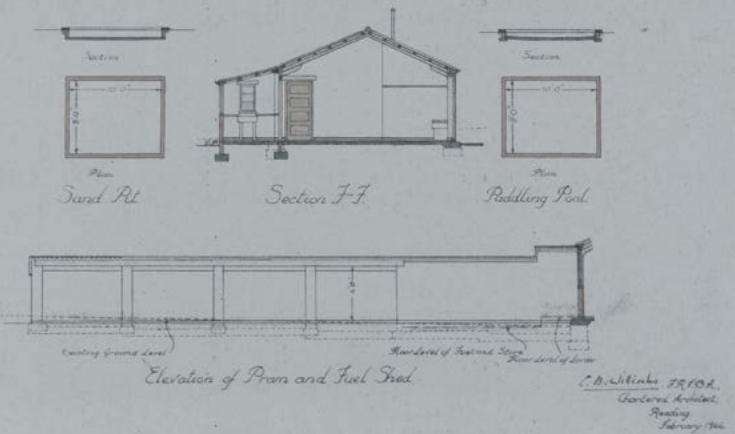
In 1937 she published a book on 'The English Nursery School'. In the same year she was asked to run a 'demonstration nursery' in Prospect Park, Reading, as part of the local celebrations of the coronation of King George VI. She secured teachers and a class of 20 children, as well as the loan of a climbing frame, chute, sandpit and a selection of toys from a supplier of nursery furniture. Sadly the plan was halted when Reading Borough Council withdrew funding, to the disappointment of those involved, who had thought it would spark local interest in nurseries.

As a Reading Borough councillor at this period, Cusden encouraged the Education Department to establish separate nursery schools or classes rather than the existing haphazard arrangement whereby many under-fives were admitted to primary schools. As mayor of Reading in 1946 she also oversaw the takeover of some of the wartime nurseries.

Source: D/EX1485/17/3-19

Top left: Children having lunch at Children Nursery Training College, c.1969 (D/EX1485/17/17/1) Top right: Children learning through play, Children Nursery Training College, c.1969 (D/EX1485/17/17/1)





## War prompts nursery expansion

The need to increase the workforce during the Second World War led to the Government forcing mothers of young children to work, many in munitions factories, while their infants were cared for in one of the new 'wartime nurseries'. Set up by Berkshire County Council, accommodation included church halls and large homes which had been requisitioned, as well as purpose built huts. Thatcham parish hall was one such site. The building was used as a nursery during the day, and as a rest-centre in case of enemy attack on Newbury, in the evening.

The council made arrangements for redecorating, equipping and staffing the nursery, and for the supply of rationed food and school milk for the children. The children were mainly aged from 2 to 5 with a few younger than that, and all their mothers were engaged in war work; some were local and others evacuees. Mothers paid 1s per day, with a discounted rate if they had more than one child. The nursery was open from 7.30 am to 7 pm, and provided three meals a day. Transport was provided for children whose mothers had very long hours of work.

Items required to equip the nursery in 1941 included combs and toothbrushes for the infants, medical supplies, toys and games. Play equipment included sand trays, plasticine, beads, paint, jigsaws, and toy bricks, and there was even

a set of band instruments. The children were issued with overalls and clean knickers were available. Some of the setting-up costs were covered by the American Red Cross, while the toys were donated – some being made by London firemen from wood salvaged from bombed buildings. In 1943 the chairman of the managers of the local primary school reported that the nursery was 'very well conducted', but was concerned that there was no space for outdoor play, and the little ones had to take walks along the main Bath Road 'with all the military convoys thundering by'.

Not everything went smoothly. There was much local opposition to the scheme, because the hall was no longer available for evening entertainments or meetings. In 1943 a toddler fell and broke his leg, and there were worrying cases of infectious diseases, mainly measles and mumps. The bombing raid on Newbury in 1943 scared the mums, and several wrote to the council asking for an air raid shelter to be attached to the hall, noting that whenever an alert was sounded, 'our thoughts are for our babies' safety'.

The nursery eventually closed in 1945, as numbers had declined, and the contents were transferred to Woodley Wartime Nursery and Knights Close Hostel (location unclear).

Source: C/CL/E3/4/7

Top: Plans for wartime nursery, Woodlands Park, White Waltham, 1944 (D/EWK/B2/4/335/1/2)





## New to the Archives



### A local solicitor

The business records of the solicitors James and William Richard Hall of Hungerford, 1807-1833, and Broome Pinniger of Newbury, 1826-1851, offer a remarkable insight into the work of local lawyers in the first half of the 19th century (D/EPG). The Halls in particular kept meticulous accounts ready to send itemised bills, and as their clients included the Hungerford overseers, Hungerford enclosure commissioners, and Hungerford Town or General Association (relating to prosecution of crimes), among many other local bodies, the information adds significantly to our knowledge of the area in this period. One case even involved an appeal against an unfair conviction.

### New for family history

Newly discovered material from Wesley Methodist Church, Reading, includes marriage registers, 1873-1982, the earliest of which is a very rare example of a nonconformist church keeping its own registers of marriages, and the earliest known photograph of the interior of the church, c.1874 (D/MS60). We have also listed all the coroners' inquest papers for Abingdon district, 1901-1904, 1927-1944 (COR/A), and Wantage district, 1947-1951 (COR/WT).

We have also received many Anglican parish registers, including:  
Aldermaston: marriages, 1965-2008; banns, 1918-2009 (D/P3)  
Aldworth: marriages, 2005-2015; banns, 1913-2008 (D/P4)  
Bucklebury: marriages, 1942-2015 (D/P28)  
Cumnor: baptisms, 1958-1972; marriages, 1948-1968; banns, 1943-1982 (D/P45)  
Earley St Peter: baptisms, 1931-2013; marriages, 1940-2009; burials, 1916-1996  
Marcham: marriages, 1959-2012; banns, 1945-2004 (D/P84)  
Reading Greyfriars: baptisms, 1957-1965, marriages, 2009-2017; banns, 1965-2004 (D/P163)  
Shippon: baptisms, 1957-1973; marriages, 1975-2011; banns, 1938-2004 (D/P1C)  
White Waltham: marriages, 1998-2003; burials, 1937-2008 (D/P142)

### Berkshire families

Family photographs from the collection of the Hon Mrs Ernest Guinness (nee Marie Clotilde Russell of Swallowfield Park) include some photographs by pioneering society photographers from the 1870s to the 1910s (D/EX2410).

Papers of the Webb family of Tilehurst, 1656-1855, are most interesting for the inclusion of material relating to the provision for illegitimate offspring (R/D206). The hunting diaries of the Arrowsmith and Bannard families of Littlewick, 1863-1980, include details of the impact of the First World War (D/EZ192).

### Women's groups

Records of the Reading Branch (formerly Berkshire Branch) of the Embroiderers' Guild, 1948-2013, reveal local women's remarkable skills (D/EX2482). We have received records of a number of Women's Institutes: Twyford and Ruscombe, 1919-2008 (D/EX2647); and Warfield and the Pang Valley Group, 1942-2014 (D/EX1925).

### Wartime experiences

Papers of Victor Barton of Reading, 1942-1949, include his handwritten account of the bombing of Reading on 10 February 1943 (D/EX2742).

### Opening Hours

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

### Contact Information:

Tel: 0118 937 5132 Fax: 0118 937 5131  
Web: [www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk](http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk)  
Email: [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk)

The Berkshire Record Office,  
9 Coley Avenue, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6AF

### Funding Partners

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

Top left: Wesley Methodist Church, Reading, c. 1874 (D/MS60/8/64)  
Top right: Marie Clotilde Guinness with her daughter Aileen, c.1905-6, taken by Richard Neville Speaight, specialist in society children's photography (D/EX2401/1/8)

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