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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

April 2021

- Navigating the Thames
- Lifeline: saving lives on the river
- New to the Archives

The Berkshire Echo

WHAT'S ON

From the Editor

Welcome to April edition of the Berkshire Echo. This time we look at all things River Thames. In 2019, we received a cataloguing grant from the 'Archives Revealed' programme, which is supported by The National Archives, The Pilgrim Trust and the Wolfson Foundation. You can read more about the grant on our website: berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/news/article/liquid-assets-cataloguing-grant

The aim was to appraise, sort and catalogue the archive of the Thames Conservancy (the historical body responsible for the management of the river before the Environment Agency and Thames Water). Last year COVID got in the way of things, but our project archivist, Michaela, was able to virtually complete all the cataloguing. Sadly we're unable to provide an onsite exhibition, but we are providing an online one instead entitled "Where Smooth Waters Glide: 250 years of caring for the River Thames". Take a look at the What's On section for details.

In **Navigating the Thames** we discover how the River Thames was used and maintained through the centuries and just how connected to this the Treacher family was. Who would have thought that the General Surveyor of the upper Thames started out as a humble carpenter from Sonning? And in **Lifeline: saving lives on the river**, we read about the many stories of heroes of the Thames saving many lives from being lost to the river over the years.

The final catalogue should transform access to the vast collection of Thames records for researchers interested not only in the river, but also in topics such as water purity, biodiversity, land drainage and flood management. We'll announce when the final catalogue is ready on our website and social media feeds.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the Echo. Don't forget to look at the New to the Archives section for what is available and keep an eye on our website and social media feeds for all the latest news via the links at the bottom of each page.

Ivone Turnbull
Senior Archivist

What's On?

To celebrate the culmination of the 'Liquid Assets' project, we will launch a new online exhibition entitled: **Where Smooth Waters Glide: 250 years of caring for the River Thames**. Available online from 9th May 2021. A Link will be made available nearer the time via our [What's On page](#)

Whilst we're still unable to provide visits or talks in person, we do provide virtual talks in collaboration with libraries in Berkshire. Keep an eye on our events page for anything we may have on in the coming months: [What's On](#)

Top: Thames Conservancy Patrol launch, 1961 (D/EX1534/4)



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ARCHIVE SERVICE

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THAMES NAVIGATION.

Rules and Regulations

TO BE OBSERVED BY

The Pound-keepers, and by Bargemen and Others, passing through the Pound Locks.

- 1st. THE Pound-keepers are expected to keep a look out for the approach of Barges, and to prepare the Pound for their reception.
- 2nd. All the Sluices are to be down whilst the Barge is entering, and until the Gates are shut, and a proper hold made from the Barge to the Fast-Pile, and such hold to be sufficiently short to prevent the Boat swinging.
- 3rd. The Pound-keeper is to take the opportunity, whilst the Barge is

Navigating the Thames

The River Thames historically marked the northern boundary of the county of Berkshire. People used it to travel and transport goods from the Middle Ages onwards. The river was also used to power mills, and fisheries were created at various places, which created conflicts of interest as these could hamper the passage of boats. This was one of the issues brought up in the Magna Carta in 1215, and over the centuries several Acts of Parliament were passed to improve the situation. Localised diversions and alterations were made in the course of the river to make it easier to navigate, and locks were constructed to manage the water levels.

The 18th century was a period when many new canals were dug across the country, including the Kennet and Avon canal in Berkshire, which linked London and the Thames with Bristol. Straight, even canals threw the unpredictable nature of many rivers including the Thames, into sharp relief, and the creation of the Thames Navigation by an Act of Parliament passed on 22 April 1771, proved to be a turning point in the effective management of the river. The Commissioners were authorised to keep the river navigable, initially between Cricklade in Wiltshire and the City of London (after 1774 only down to Staines, Middlesex). They could also charge tolls for boats passing through each lock or weir.

The traditional flash locks, which used the release of naturally built up accumulations or 'flashes' of water, were gradually replaced by pound locks, which could be operated more often; and 'cuts', which diverted the course of the river to make it straighter, were made under the auspices of the Commission's surveyors. The river was dredged regularly to keep it deep enough for boats. Towpaths were built and maintained to allow barges to be pulled along, at first by gangs of men, but by the 18th century usually by horses.

Three generations of one family, the Treachers, held the important post of Surveyor to the Thames Navigation for almost 90 years of its commercial peak period. John Treacher (1736-1802) was a carpenter from Sonning, whose relative lack of education is evident from his handwriting and eccentric spelling, but who was instrumental in the work of the Navigation. His first job for them was to repair Sonning Lock in 1771; and in c.1786 he was put in charge of the lock-building programme for the whole of the river above Reading. In 1791 Treacher was appointed General Surveyor for the upper district of the Navigation, and in 1795 he became General Engineer of the whole Navigation.

He died in 1802, and was succeeded in these posts by his son, another John Treacher. In 1821 he became General Surveyor of the Navigation. His son George was a highly skilled builder and engineer, and when his father died in 1836, he was the obvious choice to succeed him. George resigned in October 1862 due to illness apparently caused by stress, and died early in 1863; his son Llewellyn said 'The family held tight to the Commission throughout its existence... Frankly it was disastrous to them'. The family's papers, plans and accounts supplement the official records.

The use of the river for freight declined precipitously after the Great Western Railway offered a faster and more efficient alternative the 1830s. The Commissioners were forced to reduce tolls, but by 1866 they could no longer finance operations and the Commission was wound up. Its powers and property passed to the Thames Conservancy.

Source: Thames Navigation and Conservancy records (D/TC); Treacher family and business papers (D/EX1457)

Top left: Proposed alterations of the Navigation of the River Thames between Eton and Windsor Belks, c.1792 (D/EX1457/1/188)
Top right: Regulations for the operation of pound locks on the Thames Navigation, 1829 (D/EX1457/1/135)





Lifeline: saving lives on the river

Under the auspices of the Thames Conservancy, use of the river became primarily one of leisure, with Conservancy staff helping at big events such as the Henley Royal Regattas. They continued to maintain the river and environmental management became increasingly important. During the Second World War employees formed a special section of the Home Guard, as the river was a potential military transport route across the country in the event of an invasion.

Over the years the employees of the Thames Conservancy saved many individuals who had got into trouble on the water, especially in the summers when the temptation to cool off by a quick dip was very tempting. They were given a small financial reward on each occasion (£2 2s in 1904).

An example is when lock keeper A Chambers saved two people who had fallen into Whitchurch Lock in 1894. In September 1905 T Gray rescued a drowning boy at Marlow. On 31 July 1910, H Tame, keeper of Marsh Lock, rescued a lady who fell off a punt, and on 15 August, D Shirley, assistant lock keeper at Teddington, rescued a child who had fallen in. On 6 August 1915, D. W. Davidson, acting lock-keeper at Shepperton Lock dived into the water to rescue a man who fell off a barge and could not swim. He was unable to attend the board to be presented with his gratuity of £2 2s. and a framed award of merit from the Royal Humane Society as he had enlisted with H.M. Forces.

It was not just the lock keepers who were instrumental in saving lives. In May 1904, Frederick Bagg, employed as the wharf constable at Windsor, saved a child from drowning. In August 1904 a workman, C Loyd, rescued two boys from Osney weir. Women's Land Army officer Miss A Turtle, who was driving an excavator while seconded to the Conservancy, went to the aid of the crew of a crash-landed US Air Force plane, extricating the men from the aircraft and rendering first aid.

A later incident is described in all its dramatic detail in the minutes:

“On 25th March [1964], a dinghy containing two boys was drifting out of control, with one scull broken, towards Boveney Weir, which was fully drawn. It was observed by Beesley H. E. and Walton D. H. Y., who were working on the lock side. They raced over the weir gangway and some 50 yards upstream along the riverbank. They were able to throw out a lifeline into the stream where it was caught by the occupants of the boat and they were pulled safely to the bank. The prompt action of our two men prevented what might have been a serious accident. But for the skilled and urgent steps taken by these men, the occupants of the boat may well have lost their lives.”

Source: Thames Conservancy records (D/TC)

Top: Leisure users of the Thames, 1961 (D/EX534/5/2)





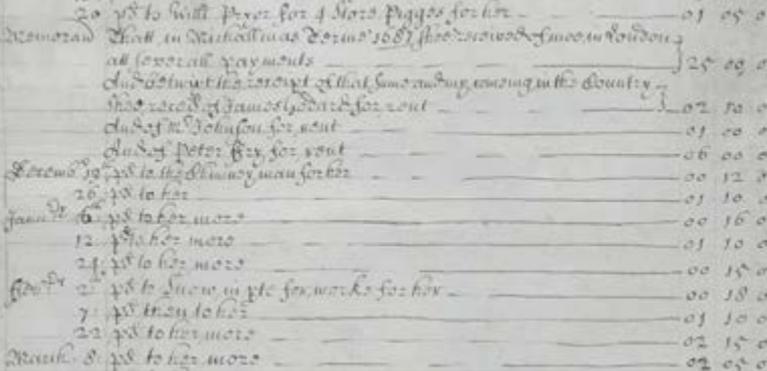
New to the Archives

Wine and the Bath

A collection of miscellaneous material in the Reading Borough deposited collections (R/D204) includes papers relating to a Chancery lawsuit over the Castle Inn, Castle Street, Reading, 1780-1786, as well as a detailed bill of sale of the contents in 1786. A particularly interesting item is an application to the Lord Chancellor in c.1712-1713, complaining that after the death of Mary Kendrick, daughter and co-heiress of Sir William Kendrick of Whitley, baronet, her executors had seized the property and refused to provide any details to her legatees and creditors, or to prove her will, and had failed to pay wages due to Mary's servant Hannah Cole. There are also agreements for the holding of the Royal Agricultural Society's Annual Show at London Road Farm, Earley, in 1882. The very detailed accounts of a sadly unidentified wealthy widow of Wokingham, 1670-1689, stretch across 10 parchment membranes, and include payments for shoes bought in London, 1671; wine distilled at Reading, 1672; mending a watch, 1686 and a pair of poll [wig] pieces, 1686/7. The total paid amounts to over £2000 – roughly equivalent to almost half a million in today's money (although exact equivalents are difficult). There are also deeds for various properties, including High Bridge Wharf, 1737-1802; a messuage called the Boot Boy or The Sanctuary, on a building lease to be demolished for the site of St Giles' National School, 1835; and the former St Giles parish workhouse, 1837. An interesting provision in a deed of 1742 is for the right to pasture 19 cows and 1 bull in Honey Leaze Meadow, Whitley.

Business and transport

A miscellaneous collection of business account books, 1724-1840, appears to have been presented in various bankruptcy hearings (R/D186). They include accounts for Sarah Wilson of Maidenhead, tailor (presumably a widow carrying on her husband's business), 1827-1830; Samuel Rose of Maidenhead, letter carrier, 1825-1826; Richard Giles of Newbury, shoemaker, 1821-1826; John Stevens of Reading, saddler, 1824-1839; Thomas Havell of Reading, brushmaker and turner, 1824-1826; James Siddall of Windsor, veterinary surgeon; and Thomas Hall of Windsor, bricklayer. They all had customers from a wide area, and the records reveal the kinds of goods they supplied.



Top left: Site for the Royal Agricultural Show, 1881 (R/D204/4/5/6)
Top right: Part of the accounts of a wealthy widow (R/D204/4/7)

The survey book of Abraham Dymock, 1831-1845, includes material relating to his work on the Lambourn enclosure and other surveys of the parish, and records of Isbury's Almshouses (D/EX2594). The records of Aldermaston Pottery, 1953-2013 (D/EX2422), were highlighted in the October issue of the Echo. Employee records tend to be rare survivals, so we were pleased to acquire the pay ledger for the Canal Goods Department, Newbury Railway Station, 1907-1921 (D/EX2406). We have also acquired an apprenticeship indenture for Henry Charles Newhook of Hungerford to Henry John Bell of Lambourn, coach builder, 1902 (D/EX2751).

New for family history

Finally, we have received some older parish registers: Brightwell: baptisms, 1860-1998; burials, 1902-2015 (D/P25) Sotwell: baptisms, 1813-2003; burials, 1813-2019 (D/P114) Steventon: baptisms, 1950-2004; banns, 1946-2011 (D/P119) Warfield: marriages, 2005-2012; burials, 1923-1988 (D/P144)

You can find out more about all these records and more, by searching our online catalogue: www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk/CalmView

Opening Hours

Tues 9-5, Weds 9-5, Thurs 9-9, Fri 9-4.30.
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