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From the Editor

It seems incredible to think that Berkshire was once a theatre of war, but so it was less than four hundred years ago. From the moment that Charles I raised his standard in 1642, the county found itself stuck snugly between the Parliamentarians in London and Charles's base in Oxford. There were battles around Newbury, skirmishes elsewhere, and sieges of Reading and Wallingford. Many local people lost their lives and their livelihoods during the breakdown of law and order.

This Echo seeks to offer remembrance for something that none of us can remember, and through which only our ancestors lived. It is difficult to connect with the wounded and the dead when we can see no sign of them now, and the Civil War has firmly passed from memory into history. Our modern county has enjoyed many years of peace, broken only by some agricultural rioting and the occasional bomb during World War Two. But the suffering of the Civil War was very real, and because there are archives that record it, we can be sure that it happened.

With stories such as these you begin to get to the heart of why archives survive, even in time of war. It was not for our interest that these records were created, nor that the authors wished us to write about them to recount their tales. Rather, we are the beneficiaries of their desire to ensure that something should never be forgotten. They wrote it down, and kept it, and so we have not forgotten, even now.

Away from the Civil War, we continue to offer our range of special events when you can come and take your first steps into research. These are very popular - the last Family History evening saw a queue of people snaking around the site at Coley Avenue, waiting for the doors to open. So please take a look at the dates to the right and overleaf, and we hope to see you soon.



Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CIVIL WAR

A small exhibition of documents illustrating the history of Reading in the Civil War is on display in the Wroughton Room at the Record Office from 13 April to 31 August 2010.

Discover what happened at Shaw House near Newbury during the war at a free exhibition ('Tradition Says...') at the house every weekend from now until 19 December. The exhibits include a portrait of Jacob, Lord Astley (Baron Astley of Reading), who was governor of the Reading garrison, 1643-1644 and commanded the Royalist Infantry at the Second Battle of Newbury in 1644. West Berkshire Museum is currently raising money towards the purchase of this portrait.

INTRODUCTORY VISITS

Just getting started in family or local history? Come along to one of our free introductory visits to see what's available here to help your research. The next dates are: 19 April, 12 July and 11 October. To book your place, telephone: (0118) 901-5132 or email: arch@reading.gov.uk.



Wallingford Castle surrendered

A small bound volume in the Wallingford borough archives held at the Record Office (reference W/Z5) reveals the details of how Wallingford Castle, one of the last Royalist strongholds in England, fell into hands of the Parliamentarians who had been besieging the town. It sets out the procedures to be followed by the vacating army and what was to happen to the soldiers and the ordinary townspeople after the handover.

Wallingford did not actually succumb to brute force, but, as the document reveals, Colonel Thomas Blagge, governor of the garrison there, entered into a formal agreement for the surrender of Wallingford Castle and town by to Sir Thomas Fairfax, general of the Parliamentary army besieging the town, in July 1646. It was published by order of Parliament on 25 July, a few days before the actual handover, set for Wednesday 29 July, and was obviously circulated fairly widely. In fact, the surrender was brought forward by a few days as the royal garrison was on the point of mutiny due to lack of pay, and actually took place on the 27th. This copy appears to have been acquired by the borough in the 20th century.

On the day of surrender, the governor and all the officers and soldiers of the garrison were to march out of Wallingford with all their horses and arms, flying their colours (flags), sounding trumpets, and beating drums, with each soldier carrying a share of the gunpowder, matches and ordnance, to a place of the governor's choice anywhere within ten miles of Wallingford (as long as there was no royal garrison there).

There they were to surrender the majority of the horses and arms, and the soldiers were to be disbanded after promising not to take up arms again against Parliament. The soldiers would be given safe conducts to go home, and would be permitted to take their own baggage. The troopers were also allowed to keep their swords, and the officers horses and arms suitable to their rank.

They would be allowed to take up military service abroad if they wished. Up to four officers would be allowed to travel to London to negotiate with 'any Forraigne Ambassador', and the remainder wishing to go overseas would have passes to march to Harwich or Southampton to take ship.

The ordinary townsmen of Wallingford 'shall not bee troubled, or questioned for any thing said or written by any of them, nor the Corporation thereof prejudiced for any thing done by any of them by expresse Command since it was a Garrison.' Other inhabitants of Wallingford would be allowed to stay freely for a month after the surrender, and then to have free passage if they also promised not to take arms against Parliament. The sick and wounded could stay until they were recovered. There was a guarantee 'That no person whatsoever comprised in this Capitulation shall be reproached, reviled, affronted, plundered, or injured in their march, Rendezvous, or quarters, journies, or places of abode... nor shall be compelled to beare Armes, nor be imprisoned, restrained, sued, molested, damnified for any matter whatsoever'.



Any horses which had been acquired as 'lawfull prize of Warre' were to remain in the ownership of their current possessor. However, any household goods which 'shalle appeare to the Generall ... to have been borrowed by any Officer or Gentleman in the Garrison, for their use and accommodation in the Garrison, shall be restored back to the owners'.

The castle was demolished in 1652 by the victorious Parliamentarians, part of the stone going to build the tower of St Mary's Church, and only ruins now remain as a reminder of the bitter civil war which ripped the country apart over 350 years ago.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FREE RESEARCH EVENINGS

Experts from the Berkshire Family History Society will be on hand to help getting started in family history or with elusive ancestors at special open evenings at the Berkshire Record Office. Taking place from 6-8 pm, the next dates are 13 April and 13 July. No need to book: just turn up.





Soldiers' graves

The disruption caused by the Civil War can be seen in Berkshire's parish registers. Baptisms, marriage and burials are all recorded more scantily than at normal times – which is of course a major problem for family history.

The registers also sometimes bear witness to the war more directly, when soldiers far from home were buried. Even their names were sometimes unknown to the local parish clerk compiling the records. The dates show how the war waxed and waned across the county. Most distinguished of all the local victims, we have the record of burial for King Charles I at Windsor Castle (actually in St George's Chapel) after his execution by Parliament, which was entered into the Windsor parish register. One of the regicides - the men who signed the order for the execution - was Reading landowner and MP, Daniel Blagrove.

Over 30 soldiers (some named) are recorded between November 1642 and February 1644 in the burial register of Reading St Laurence (on display in our exhibition). Here are a few of the other casualties of the war across the county:

Aldermaston, 1643 (D/P3/1/1)

18 May A parliament Soldier being a German
22 Sept A parliament Soldier killed at Newbury

Windsor, 1643-1649 (D/P149/1/1)

6 June 1643 Henry Peto, Soldier
8 June 1643 John Waggstafe, Soldier
9 July 1643 Thomas King, Soldier
9 February 1649 King Charles in the Castle

Radley, 1643 (D/P95/1/1)

Thomas Gylburte, captain under Colonel Lunford's Regiment, was buried July 8
Umphrey [sic] Baine, captain Lieutenant under Colonel Bellasis was buried July 18

Great Shefford, 1643 (D/P108/1/1)

John Reade, a Welsh man & soldier who was wounded in the fight near Newbury, September 20 and died at Anthony Adams's house was buried September 21

Waltham St Lawrence, 1644-1645 (D/P141/1/1)

A Soldier buried October the 21st 1644
A Soldier buried November the 28th
A Soldier buried December the 2nd
Robert Welsey a Soldier buried January the 4th
Richard [blank] a Soldier buried January the 17th

Who's the traitor?

As the fortunes of war saw the towns of Berkshire change hands, leading officials were replaced if their loyalties and views were not to the liking of king or parliament respectively. An interesting case has been discovered in the newly catalogued records from Reading Borough (R/Z3/32), and helps us give the impact of war a human face. The incident occurred in royalist Reading in January 1643, after Henry Bradley defeated Francis Seakes in an election for the position of the town's attorney the previous November. In order to gain preferment, each man accused his rival of being a not-so-secret Parliamentary sympathiser, resulting in a formal hearing to establish the truth.

Seakes, who was not a good loser, alleged that Bradley opposed the king's cause. He even took part in the plundering by Parliamentary soldiers of Mr Yates' house at Bill Hill and 'was one of the forwards in that business'. Bradley's wife 'wished the death' of Prince Rupert of the Rhine, the king's nephew and a leading

figure in his army, wished that he had been hanged seven years previously, and said he would be the undoing of the kingdom.

Bradley counter-alleged that Seakes 'did voluntarily finde a horse and assisted the Parliament', and that one Henry Morris rode the horse 'for Mr Seakes uppe and downe the towne'. Seakes refuted these claims, saying that the horse was taken by force when a boy in his employment was taking it to water, supported by three further witnesses. The poor boy was 'thumped and beaten' by the Parliamentary soldiers.

Seakes and his witnesses come across as the more convincing in the written record, and the royal governor had him installed in the position – at least until Reading fell into the hands of the Parliamentarians.



New to the Archives

Hidden treasures of Reading's archives

One of our major current projects is to fully catalogue those older archives of Reading Borough, which were listed summarily in the 19th century by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts. Many items hitherto thought to be missing have been uncovered. We have made substantial progress, with most of the non-financial records now being available. The collection is particularly rich for the 17th century, and inspired the Civil War theme of this issue of the Echo.

Bear baiting and puppet shows

New highlights of the borough archive include regulations and lists of members of four of the craft guilds which governed trade in the town, c. 1560 (R/AG). Rules included the prohibition of tooth extraction, and shaving and hairdressing were forbidden on Sundays. The rules of the tanners include a reference to bull and bear baiting going on in the town. Only guild members were allowed to have their own businesses or shops. Legal records (R/AL) range from a 1525 agreement between the borough and abbey over the butchers' shambles, to the 1726 order of the Corporation that the town hall should not be let to strolling stage players or puppet shows, to prevent the corruption of the town's young people. The 18th century burgesses would be deeply shocked by the very existence of the council-run Hexagon! In his 1423 will, Richard Bedewynde, a former mayor of the town, left the George Inn and a slaughterhouse to his successors (R/AZ3/1) - puppet shows might be frowned on, but pubs were evidently an acceptable use of leisure time.

Reading's courts

Records of the borough court of record, which dealt with small debt claims, 1584-1839 (R/JB), are rather patchy and not very detailed, but the records of Reading court leet, a court with jurisdiction over minor criminal matters and market-related issues, 1563-1832, are much more exciting (R/JL). They are incomplete, but contain a wealth of research material for the town's social history, particularly in the late 16th and early 17th century. Court leets were often associated with manors, but this one was run by the borough under the terms of its royal charter. The registers of freemen, 1603-1835, have also been listed (R/RF).

War and religion in the 17th century

There is a report of an illicit religious meeting in Castle Street in the early 1660s, when only the Church of England was approved (R/AZ2/4). Militia records, 1614-1650 (R/AX), may be of interest as they effectively provide lists of able



bodied men in the town. Before the Civil War the entire adult male population was required to gather annually with their own arms and armour to be inspected by the county's Lord Lieutenant. When the king needed an army, some men would be recruited from those attending. After the Civil War (when the armies were initially formed from these county forces), this system fell into disuse.

A memorandum book, 1604-1655, which partially fills the gap in the borough minutes 1604-1622, also has a reference to the poor being set to work in Mr Kendrick's workhouse [the original Oracle], 1662 (R/AZ3/3). Articles for the regulation of clothmaking in Reading, 1520, and a revocation of royal privileges granted to the weavers of Reading, 1606 (R/IC2/1) are also of special interest. Series of miscellaneous papers from the 15th century onwards, but mostly relating to 17th century Reading, include some fascinating material relating to the billeting of soldiers, the impact of the Civil War on the town, Reading School, and the House of Correction (R/Z).



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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