

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo Issue 55

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### From the Editor

If you are already sick of the royal wedding, then it is probably best to look away now. We are the Royal County, after all, so we felt we couldn't really duck the occasion entirely. Two of this edition's articles are on the subject of weddings, though we have balanced a royal occasion with an equally recognisable tale of love gone bad.

For archivists, the more exciting event of this spring is the decennial census – possibly the last of its kind, if the current political rhetoric is carried through. As family historians will know, these censuses date back to 1801, bang in the middle of the Napoleonic wars, and although they were not preserved systematically until the 1841 returns, the loss of the census would be keenly felt by family historians of the future. Hopefully by now you will all have enjoyed contributing a little piece of history to the 2011 census, and if it is the last time you have to do it, my suggestion is to savour the moment.

Our Echo census story is one of nonconformity from 1851, which is interesting to balance against the inevitable news stories about the increase in the Jedi population once numbers in the current census are crunched. It is no surprise that where there is order, some individuals wish to cause chaos, and it seems a fitting part of the British psyche that rebellion can be found in the columns of paperwork rather than the streets.

I was reminded of my call to appreciate the cosiness of the BRO during winter just after the heating broke in the searchroom. Sadly this meant that for our visitors that, while pockets of heat remained, cosy was not really the appropriate adjective to describe us this winter. Our apologies to all affected. Of course, now that the warm weather is returning, the heating is being fixed, too late for this winter but not for the next. In the meantime, let's hope that spring brings some pleasant days for brides, grooms and census enumerators everywhere.



Mark Stevens  
Senior Archivist

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

#### 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.

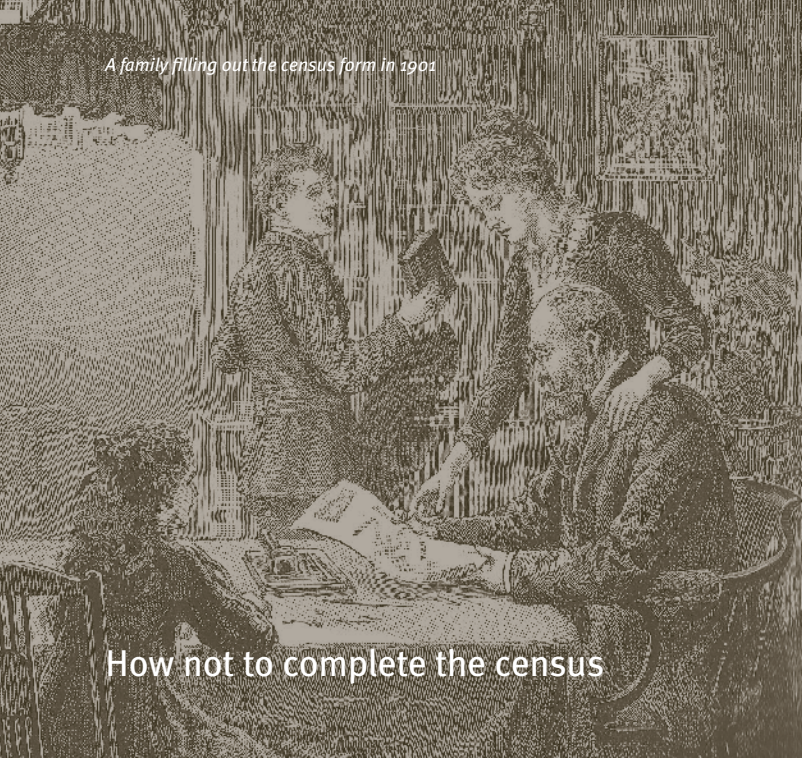
The next date is: 9 May. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk).

#### 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: 12 April and 12 July. No need to book: just turn up.



A family filling out the census form in 1901



## How not to complete the census

Ever wanted to subvert the census? Henry Ellis of Oxford Road, Reading, either a joker or protestor at government nosiness, annotated his return in 1851. In the column reserved for relationship to head of the household he described his wife Ann as ‘fruitful wife’ and the children as ‘olive branches round the table’. He described his own occupation as ‘plebeian gardener and Chartist’, and Ann’s occupation as ‘household and maternal cares’. Teenage daughters Mary and Ann were their ‘Parents’ Housemaids’, while 11 year old son Henry did ‘much work and little pay’, 9 year old John ‘helps brother and plays with the others’, 7 year old Charles ‘goes to school “whistling as he goes”’, three year old Thomas ‘stops at home and plays with baby’, and the baby, Edwin, ‘nurses tenderly’. He claimed his own birthplace to be the ‘City of Chimney Pots’ 38 years previously. He facetiously added in the columns to record gender, ‘I believe my daughters are girls, I presume my sons are boys’.

By the time of the next census in 1861, Henry was either absent or refused to include himself at all. Ann was listed as the married head of the household and working as a laundress.



## A royal wedding mystery: the case of the missing necklace

Windsor stationmaster Samuel T Mann was on duty as guests arrived for the wedding of Princess Alice of Albany, daughter of Queen Victoria’s youngest son, Prince Leopold, to Prince Alexander of Teck, at St George’s Chapel, in 1904. Mann later wrote about the day in his memoirs, kept at BRO (D/EX1915/5/14). This wedding caused a great commotion at Windsor Station, because many of the noble guests arrived by train, and one, Lady Mount Stephen, lost a valuable pearl necklace.

The missing necklace was searched for high and low, detectives were called in, and Edward VII personally asked on several occasions whether it had been found. Some weeks later, Mr Mann reports, one of the porters approached him, admitting that he had found the necklace, “and thinking it was a cheap one, I gave it to my girl in London”. The necklace was returned to a grateful Lady Mount Stephen, who gave the porter a £50 reward. Unfortunately, the porter was sacked as a result of the incident, but Lady Mount Stephen made sure that he did not suffer for his honesty. As the young man could drive a car and was smart in appearance, she got him a post as chauffeur to Lady Burnham, where he remained for many years.

Top middle: One of 12 wedding cakes made for the present Queen’s wedding in 1947; this one was produced by Huntley & Palmer’s of Reading (D/EX1748/1/25) Top Right: “Westminster” wedding cake produced by Reading firm Huntley & Palmer, 1940. “Princess” wedding cake produced by Reading firm Huntley & Palmer, 1940 (D/EX1748/1/3).



### Need somewhere to hold a meeting?

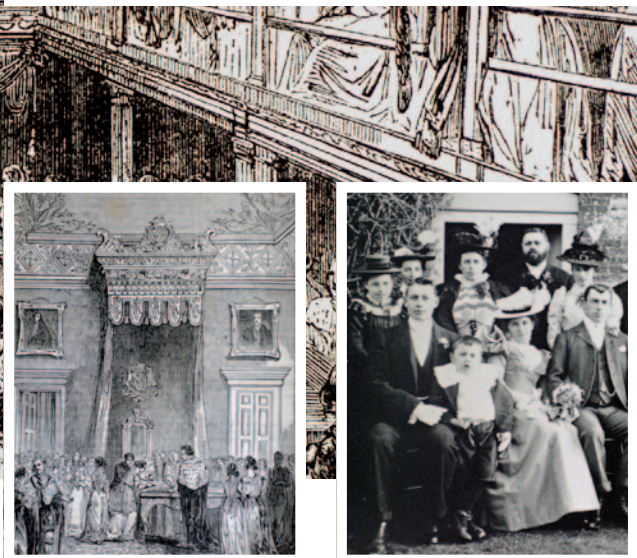
Why not ask about our Wroughton Room for hire? Reasonable rates, great accommodation. Call on **0118 937 5132** for more information.





Prince William's ancestors Queen Victoria and Prince Albert exchanging vows (left) and signing the marriage register (below left), from a special issue of *The Observer* to commemorate their wedding, 1840 (D/EX463/12).

Below right: A wedding party in Sparsholt, 2 February 1898. Note the fashionable big shouldered sleeves and full veil, and the pet dog in attendance just behind the bride (D/EX1303/7/91).



## Lover turned Leaver

Sadly, not all courtships end with marriage and a happily ever after. One such case in the 17th century is revealed in the records of the Berkshire Archdeaconry church court, which dealt with disputed marriages. Before 1754, it was not legally necessary to marry in church – a declaration before witnesses was sufficient, and a promise to marry in future committed the couple. So when the rather appropriately named William Leaver of North Moreton changed his mind about his seven-year romance with Mary Urlin in 1680, her family took him to court (ref D/A2/d.2).

They claimed that between 1673 and 1675 William Leaver and Mary Urlin were formally contracted to marry, by exchanging promises. It was widely known in the parish that they were thus contracted or even already married. They also wrote to one another and exchanged gifts and tokens of their love. William admitted they had exchanged small gifts, but insisted they were of small value.

William's testimony in 1680 was that he believed himself to be free from any contract to marry Mary; but that five years earlier he had indeed promised to marry her - if both sets of parents agreed. However, his parents were averse to the match and threatened to disinherit him 'and give him never a farthing'. Mary claimed that on the contrary, their fathers had been in discussions over a proposed marriage between them, with William's father William Leaver senior sometimes calling Mary 'daughter'.

She was reputed 'a person of a modest and virtuous behaviour'. She said that William had frequently publicly admitted that he was contracted to marry her, and even that

they were already man and wife in the eyes of God. He used this to persuade her to sleep with him, and after she became pregnant sent money for her and the child, still calling her his wife. He suggested that she should be sent away to have the baby in 'some secret place' while he tried to get his father's consent to the marriage, and she agreed to this.

When he heard that Mary was pregnant with his child, William says 'he believed that there was nothing but money in the case' and sent 20 shillings to pay off Mary's family, promising also to maintain the child 'if they would keep it private and not disgrace him and throw such a scandal on him'.

Mary said that both she and William had refused other offers of marriage, due to their contract. William agreed that he had rejected other women, but said he did not refuse any of them on the grounds of an existing contract with Mary.

Mary's aunt decided to intervene. She promised to pay a dowry of £200 if William married Mary, but this was not accepted. Then the girl's father sent William a letter threatening to prosecute or kill him if he did not marry her. Nothing worked, and instead there was the sad spectacle of the jilted bride and mother of William's child suing him in court.

Frustratingly, we do not know exactly what happened, as it looks as though the case was never heard in court. William did marry another girl, Mary Horne, in 1683, but Mary Urlin seems to disappear from the records.



## New to the Archives

### Cookham in the middle ages

Staff have recently completed cataloguing and conservation work on a group of medieval and early modern records of the manor of Cookham, c.1388-1645. This fascinating collection reveals that some 15th century rent payments were made in kind, including poultry and eels from the river Thames. There are also papers relating to a dispute over the boundary with Bisham manor in the mid 19th century, which centred on rights to use Maidenhead Thicket. The same collection includes 17th century records of Cannon Court manor, also in Cookham (D/EZ69).

### 'Outrageously exaggerated?': a new look at the Swing Riots

A rather miscellaneous collection of 18th and 19th century correspondence (D/EX2061) includes a number of gems. In the most fascinating letter in the collection, Miss Fanny Smith, a rather strong-minded young lady visiting her sister and brother-in-law Augusta and Henry Wilder at Sulham, offers contemporary comment on the Swing Riots, which engulfed west Berkshire in 1830 when farm workers protested against the use of machinery leading to unemployment.

Fanny believed press reports were exaggerated 'outrageously', and people were 'ludicrously' frightened. The soldiers dispatched to quell rioters travelled from Reading by coach, which she called 'rather an unmilitary tho' perhaps expeditious way of sending foot soldiers to the scene of action'. They heard machines were being broken at Aldermaston, but could not find the mob. Henry Wilder found 60 or 70 local labourers gathered together drinking at a pub in Tidmarsh, having been going to farms and extorting five shillings each time 'in a civil way' (at least according to Fanny), occasionally breaking machines, and forcing the farmers to sign a promise to pay married men 12s per week and unmarried men 9s. The unrest persuaded Wilder to have his own threshing machines destroyed, but the family felt relaxed enough about the crisis to name one of their new puppies Swing (rhyming with his brother Tring, named for the Hertfordshire parish where Fanny and Augusta's widowed mother lived).

### Air raids and other wartime emergencies

We have also acquired a rare set of official circulars issued to the police in Berkshire during World War II (D/EX2158). They include regulations and instructions relating to air raid precautions and the enforcement of agricultural orders, reports of persons wanted for questioning in relation to crimes, and lists of items and animals lost and found. Also of interest is the wartime information file kept by the joint clerk of Faringdon and Wantage Rural District Councils (D/EX2193); this mainly deals with arrangements for people rendered homeless by air raids.

### Rating and poor law records

Our ongoing project to catalogue rating records continues, with the addition of valuation lists for Wallingford Rural District, 1929-1933 (RD/W). Some stray valuation lists for the parishes of Longcot, 1838-1881, and Fernham, 1868-1880, have also turned up (D/EX2169), together with one early poor rate for the liberty of Eye and Dunsden, 1778 (D/EX2137).

A number of mainly financial records of the Boards of Guardians have been discovered as a result of this project, and as a result there have been additions to the records of the following Poor Law Unions:

- Abingdon: 1867-1931, including rating valuation lists for four parishes, 1912-1919
- Bradfield: accounts, 1928-1929
- Easthampstead: accounts, 1926-1930
- Faringdon: 1870-1929, including correspondence with the Poor Law Board, 1870, and bills and vouchers, 1884 (the only new material which refers to individual inmates – some referring to medical treatment)
- Hungerford: 1912-1930.
- Maidenhead: register of securities, 1870-1925.
- Newbury: 1906-1930.
- Wallingford: 1862-1930, including rating valuation lists, 1862-1896.
- Wantage, 1897-1930, including a valuation list for licensed properties only, 1911.
- Windsor: register of securities, 1870-1925.
- Wokingham: 1897-1930

### 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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