

BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo Issue 60

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From the Editor

You may not have noticed, but this summer London plays host to a couple of minor sports meetings called the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Obviously we have all known about this since 2005 so with 2012 in mind, three years ago we at BRO embarked on a project to try and record the County's own sporting history. The Sports Records Survey, as we called it, invited hundreds of local sports clubs to tell us what archives they held, and also encouraged them to deposit their material with the BRO for public research.

As a result of the Survey, various clubs made contact and several collections were deposited. Some of this material is currently on display as part of Reading Museum's sports exhibition which runs until October, while other stuff is detailed in this edition's New to the Archives. We were pleased to find that there is a lot of sporting heritage still in existence, and we remain very keen to collect further records of what is such an important part of our cultural life.



Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist

So this issue of the Echo provides no escape from Olympic fever. Instead, it is dedicated to sports in Berkshire, and to the thousands of Berkshire residents who actively take part in or support sports activities every week. We even have a guest appearance by one of our staff to tempt you into participation.

If you are completely sick of sport, however, then you might like to note that we have received a number of items relating to the Rivers Thames and Kennet. Enjoying the County's waterways is something that people do every year, not just in Olympics year, and hopefully it proves that you don't have to be rowing for Britain to spend time messing about on the river.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Bikes, Balls & Biscuitmen - Our Sporting Life: an exhibition at Reading Museum

A number of BRO documents are on display at Reading Museum until 28 October as part of this exhibition on local sporting activity.

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 July at 2 p.m. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: arch@reading.gov.uk.

Enclosure records day school

The County Archivist is leading a day school on enclosure records on Saturday 24 November (cost £52 per person). Places are limited to 20, so early booking is advised. Enrol online at www.conted.ox.ac.uk/V200-57.

Probate Name Index now available

The new index to the Archdeaconry of Berkshire probate collection is now available on CD, priced at £25. The collection spans 1480-1857, and over 39,000 names are included. Purchase at reception, or see our website for how to buy online.





Across Countries with Reading Athletics

If an international sports event is coming your way, then it is a safe bet that local volunteers will be required to help out with it. One such example comes from the archives of Reading Athletics Club, who hosted the Annual International Cross-Country Championship at Leighton Park in 1948.

The Club's first challenge was practical: they wanted to make sure that the event did not clash with Reading FC's game against Port Vale. When the football schedule had been published in August 1947 they wrote to the Football League asking them to re-schedule. This did not go down well at the football club, who felt that they had not been consulted on the matter. However, a compromise was reached with their match starting at 2.30 and the cross country race at 3.15.

The Championship was a nine-mile race for men only with the runners competing for both individual glory and team success. The competitors included teams from France, England, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and traditionally either France or England won.

This tradition was not respected by the team from the Low Countries. Here is the Club secretary's account of the race:

'A good-tempered crowd of approximately 10,000 in attendance and because of the fine work of the ground staff everyone had a good view of the course for at least 400 yards... Exactly at 3.15 the

Mayor of Reading started the runners on their way. After the first lap had been run we realised that England had 'had it'. But what a fight developed between the Continentals! At the finish, Belgium had the first two men in followed by Frenchmen and then Belgium again. When five men of each continental team had finished the teams were level on points at 30 each, and the 6th Belgium runner beat the 6th Frenchman by about a yard, and these men finishing in the 16th and 17th positions respectively decided the issue in Belgium's favour. Belgium scored 46, France 47, England 114.'

Like any good sporting event, there was also a large amount of hospitality. The Club was responsible for two days' worth of events, including a visit to Windsor Castle, an official reception by the Mayor at the Town Hall followed by a Smoking Concert, and then on the race day itself an inspection of the course, a lunch for the officials, and a banquet following the race. The Cross Country Union described the occasion as 'the best ever International in every way'.



above: International Cross-Country Championship poster, 1948 (D/EX2117/19/12)
top: Reading Athletics Club cross country race, c.1930s (D/EX2117/12/6)





Berkshire's Oldest Cricket Clubs

Many of Berkshire's oldest organised sports clubs are the village cricket teams. Cricket itself has had a codified set of rules since 1744, even if underarm bowling and the lack of a middle stump made the game then look rather different to how we play it today. But it was these rules that allowed the number of clubs to grow throughout the country, and Berkshire was no exception.

Berkshire's oldest cricket club still in existence is Sonning, which traces its history back to 1750. The oldest club records we have at BRO come from Hungerford Park and date from 1839. In 1852 that club hosted the 'All England Eleven' for a match against their 22. Hungerford won by 140 to 129 over two innings, but the match is principally remembered because Hungerford bowled out the England side for only 12 in their first innings. This was their lowest recorded innings score at the time.

Local landowners often supported the village teams. The minutes of the Aldermaston Cricket Club (D/EX 2000/1) show that both William Mount of Wasing Park and Charles Keyser of Aldermaston Court played key roles in the club. The club minutes for 1896 record 'hearty votes of thanks' to both men for allowing the club the use of their private cricket grounds, as well as to Mrs Keyser and Mrs Mount 'for their kind hospitality.'

Cricket was a popular pursuit of the professional classes too. In Waltham St Lawrence there had been a local cricket team in the early nineteenth century and the club was revived in 1886 by local vicar the Reverend Grey Neville. The club is still active today, and one of the collections received through the sports survey is some delightful ephemeral material for the club including fixture cards, newspaper reports and a series of photographs dating from 1886-2002, together with fixture cards and photographs for Waltham St Lawrence Football Club (D/EX2261).

We Play Too!

This summer's Olympics are all about participation, and we are pleased to say that we now have photographic evidence of our staff's sporting prowess. The eagle-eyed amongst you may spot our very own Robin Elliott in this photograph, crouching down third from the right. It comes from the recently catalogued records of Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club and it dates from the late 1980s. Robin and his wife Sue have played a key role in the club for many years and were instrumental in arranging the deposit of this valuable collection.

Hockey is well-represented in our sporting collections. The Newbury Club was formed in 1952 and has enjoyed some success: in 1995 the Men's 1st XI were promoted to the South of England Premier League and won the Berkshire Cup, no doubt spurred on by their archival connections.



top: Waltham St Lawrence FC fixture lists, 1929-1931 (D/EX 2261/8)
bottom right: Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club team including BRO's Robin Elliott crouching at the right (D/EX2153/8)



New to the Archives

Sporting records

Our survey of sports records resulted in the deposit and cataloguing of the records of several local clubs for both Olympic and non-Olympic sports, some of which are mentioned elsewhere in this issue. Perhaps the most distinguished is Reading Athletic Club, 1890-1969 (D/EX2117), which has boasted many international and Olympic athletes over the years. Football fans may also be interested in a collection of programmes and other ephemera from Reading FC, 1948-2006 (D/EX2148), and handbooks from Reading and District Football League and the Berks and Bucks Football Association, 1953-1983. We have also received records of the Berks and Bucks Athletic League, 1930-1939 (D/EX2252), and Reading & District Sports Council, 1967-1997 (D/EX2091).

We have acquired a 1910 photograph of the Wesley Guild cricket team, which consisted of Methodist ministers and churchgoers from Reading and Caversham (D/EX2237); a collection of programmes for Reading Speedway, 1948-1976 (D/EX2149); papers relating to Huntley and Palmers Football Club, 1946-1992; newsletters of Wokingham Bowling Club, 1999-2009 (D/EX1824); and papers relating to bar billiards in the Reading area, 1968-2007 (D/EX2181).

Berkshire County Council finances

Berkshire County Council's historic financial records, 1888-1974, are now available. They include accounts relating to Public Assistance (the renamed workhouses), 1930-1948, including registers of boarded-out children, 1930-1946 (subject to a 75-year closure period); registers of teachers employed by the council, c.1904-1956; and Superannuation Fund records, which record the names of other BCC staff, 1924-1949.

Cookham Bridge

We have acquired a substantial quantity of material relating to the Cookham Bridge Company, which led us to revise the existing catalogue (BR/C). The bridge was a 19th century example of private enterprise providing a public utility, namely a major road bridge over the Thames. The original

Hungerford Park Cricket Club score

| Name of Player | No of Runs |
|----------------|------------|
| C. Bradford | 1 |
| W. Blaydes | 1 |
| W. Fenwick | 1 |
| S. Goff | 11111 |
| She. Smith | 1 |
| H. Trew | 121122111 |
| Lockhart | 1111121 |

bridge, made of wood, was built in 1844, and replaced by a sturdier iron construction in 1867. The investors recouped the cost of building and upkeep by charging a toll to use the bridge. The toll became increasingly unpopular with users in the 20th century, and eventually the bridge was bought by Berkshire and Buckinghamshire County Councils in 1947, since which date the bridge has been free to use. A descendant of the toll keeper employed in 1902 has coincidentally donated a photograph of the family outside their cottage at the end of the bridge (D/EX1851).

Water transport

We have acquired a plan of the Kennet and Avon Canal as initially proposed in 1794 (D/EX2235), plus papers relating to a proposed link between the former and the Basingstoke Canal, 1824-1826, which (if it had been constructed) would have provided an alternative cargo route from Bristol to London (D/EX2179). There is also a plan showing the Kennet Navigation between Newbury and Thatcham, c.1818 (D/EX2236). We have also listed Reading Borough's register of canal boats, 1879-1921 (R/RV1/1).

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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