

BRO

The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo Issue 57

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From the Editor

The beginning of the school year sees this Echo include some stories about education. And with the first batch of the Government's revived free schools opening this autumn, it seemed like a good time for us to turn the clock back to the last time that the free schools reined supreme. This sees us heading off into the nineteenth century and beyond to shine a little light on Berkshire schooling.

Some of you may know that the BRO is also working on a gazetteer of Berkshire schools in existence before 1833, when the first Government grants were made for education. This is a substantial piece of work. The success of this project will be down solely to the commitment of our regular volunteers, to whom we owe a great many thanks for ploughing their way through many original sources.

Work to extract the data is going to continue for a few years yet, but results so far indicate that there was much more local provision for learning than you might expect. A lot of it was private education, of course, but large numbers of places provided some form of schooling for the local children, if they – or more likely their parents – wanted to take it up.

Provision was patchy only in its quality. We can all remember teachers who made a difference to us, as well as those who did not, and you may be reassured to note that this phenomenon was apparent in Berkshire at least as early as the seventeenth century.



Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Dayschool

If you have been inspired by our schools theme, County Archivist Peter Durrant and Dr Joan Dils from the Department of Continuing Education at Oxford are leading a dayschool on "The Victorian Village School" at the Record Office on Saturday 12 November (cost £51). Book online at www.conted.ox.ac.uk/V200-24. Places are limited to 20 so early booking is advised.

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: 10 October 2011; 30 January 2012; 16 April 2012; 9 July 2012; all at 2 p.m. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: arch@reading.gov.uk.

New! The BRO Facebook Page

You can now find us on Facebook: look for the Berkshire Record Office page with a photo of our building. If you visit, please remember to 'Like' us: the more 'Likes', the quicker we can ask for a memorable url address!



Reading School fails inspection – in 1648



Recently catalogued records of Reading Borough include material relating to Reading School, which details one of the less celebrated moments in its history (R/Z9/8-9).

The problems started in 1644 when political pressures forced out the master, William Page. He was an Oxford graduate and fellow of St John's College, which had strong links with the school, and had been personally recommended by William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury and an Old Boy of Reading. Laud took a special interest in the school – even though, or perhaps because, he had experienced poor teaching there himself. But Laud was a controversial figure who was hated by the Parliamentarians, and once they had taken control of Reading during the Civil War, a teacher he had approved of was bound to be unwelcome with the new regime, and Page was dismissed out of hand. He was replaced by Thomas Pocock – who may have suited Puritan religious sensibilities, but turned out to be no good at his job.

This became all too clear when the school was subjected to its regular 'visitation', or inspection in 1648. This was held by three Oxford dons: the Vice-Chancellor of the University, the president of St John's College (where the cleverest boys from Reading went to thanks to a special scholarship), and the warden of All Souls' College. They declared that Pocock was 'altogether unable to govern the school' and teach the classics, and because of this should not be paid the £20 supplement to the master's salary which had been given by Laud in his will. They had heard several complaints from parents about his 'ability and diligence', and had tested the boys' knowledge in his presence. Mr Pocock refused to be examined himself and declined 'all other ingenuous [sic] ways of trial by the Visitors'. It seems clear that they suspected his own grasp of Latin and Greek was not as strong as it should be.

The Visitors were surprisingly detailed in their enquiries, including asking about teaching methods. These are the questions Pocock could not answer:

1. What authors [of classical Latin and Greek texts] are your scholars able to give an account of in their several forms?
2. How many scholars have you in this school ripe for the university?
3. What methods do you use in teaching?
4. What exercises do your scholars daily or weekly perform?
5. Do you train up your scholars in the knowledge of religion and what course do you take for that end and purpose?
6. Do you pray with your scholars morning and evening?
7. By what testimony does it appear that you have been approved to be able, and that you are diligent in discharge of your duty?
8. What times of remission are usually granted to your scholars for their recreation?
9. Do you diligently attend upon the public ordinances of God, and do you cause your scholars to frequent the place of public worship, and see that they behave themselves reverently there during the time of all exercises of religion?

In the end, the Borough was forced to give the unsatisfactory Mr Pocock a golden handshake to get rid of him. In October 1649, Pocock was given the disputed £20 on his leaving the school. He was immediately replaced by a Mr Waddon, who had little experience, but was said to be 'civil, godly and learned'.

We do not know what happened to Pocock after this, but there was a happy ending for his dispossessed predecessor, William Page. He took up an alternative profession, practising as a doctor, and when the monarchy was restored in 1661, he relinquished the right to be reinstated to the schoolmastership. Obviously medicine had proved a more lucrative occupation than teaching.

The boys of Reading School at play, 1816 (D/EX2161/1/8)



School rules in 1860s Wokingham

Before school provision was regulated in 1870, there was no universal entitlement to free education. However, many families had access to cheap or free schooling thanks to the churches or individual benefactors. Local landowner John Walter of Bear Wood, proprietor of The Times newspaper, was just such a benefactor, and in 1866 he generously paid for a school to be built in association with St Paul's Church, Wokingham.

At this time, individual schools were completely autonomous from local government control, much like the current revival of free schools. Details of life at St Paul's when it first started in the 1860s are revealed in the printed 'Rules to be observed by the parents of scholars attending S. Paul's Schools, Wokingham' (D/P154B/28/1). Each child was required to provide their own slate, copy book, pen and pencil (available from the school at cost price), plus a bag to keep them in.

Education might not be free, but fees at St Paul's were variable, dependent on the family background – an early form of means testing. Clerks, farmers, tradesmen and foremen paid 4d a week for their oldest child at the school, and 3d each for younger children. Journeymen and small shopkeepers paid 3d for a first child, and 2d for the rest, and labourers (the poorest and most numerous group) paid 2d for one child and 1d each for additional offspring.

The income from fees was hardly enough to cover the costs of the master's salary or the building, and the school was run on a shoestring budget. One moneysaving notion was that the children should do the cleaning. The rules state firmly, 'Each boy is required to take part in keeping the yards, etc, clean and tidy, and, during the winter months, in lighting the school fires: and each girl in sweeping the rooms; but substitutes may be provided by the parents.' This may have meant that the better off could pay their way out of community work: a situation that was to be changed by the onset of universal education.

RULES TO BE OBSERVED BY THE PARENTS OF SCHOLARS

ATTENDING

S. PAUL'S SCHOOLS, WOKINGHAM.

I.—ADMISSION.

Application for Admission to the Schools must be made by the Parents to the Master, on any Monday Morning, at a quarter before Nine o'clock; but such admission will be subject to the approval of the Committee at their next monthly meeting.

Each Scholar will have to provide a slate, copy book, pen, and pencil (which may be had at the Schools at cost price). A bag for the same is also required.

II.—ASSEMBLING OF SCHOLARS.

The Children are to assemble at the Schools at five minutes before Nine a.m., and at twenty-five minutes past One p.m.

III.—ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL.

No Scholar may stay away from School more than one half day a week, and that only with the Parents' leave, except in cases of illness. Leave of absence for a week, or less time, will be readily granted by applying to the Master, either personally or by note; but leave of absence for more than a week must be obtained by special application to the Committee. This application must be made BEFORE and not AFTER the absence of the Scholar.

N.B.—This Rule will be strictly enforced.

IV.—PAYMENTS.

The following are the School Fees, payable every Monday morning, in advance:—

- (1) Children of Clerks, Farmers, Tradesmen, and Foremen, 4d. for the first child, and 3d. for all others of the same family.
- (2) Children of Journeymen and small Shopkeepers, 3d. for the first child, and 2d. for all others of the same family.
- (3) Children of Labourers, 2d. for the first two children, and 1d. for all others of the same family.

V.—INDUSTRIAL WORK.

Each boy is required to take part in keeping the Yards, &c., clean and tidy, and, during the winter months, in lighting the School fires: and each girl in sweeping the rooms; but substitutes may be provided by the parents.

VI.—VACATIONS.

The Vacations are the month of August, a fortnight at Christmas, and a week at Easter and Whitsuntide.

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New to the Archives

School records reveal Wallingford's performing hedgehog

We have catalogued the records of St Nicholas C of E Primary School, East Challow, 1907-1992 (SCH21); and St John's Primary School, Wallingford, 1863-2010 (SCH22). The latter is particularly notable for the 1930s advertisement for Jimmy, a performing hedgehog who lived in the town and is described as a 'real Wallingfordian'. We have also acquired magazines from Kennet School, Thatcham, 1975-1987 (D/EX2182).

The Education Act of 1870 led to the production of an order from the Education Department for the inadequate church school at Hamstead Marshall to provide additional space for the children on pain of being replaced by a secular School Board, 1870 (D/EX2130). We have also received a copy of Berkshire County Council's handbook for head teachers, issued in 1966 (D/EX2168).

Berkshire illustrated

A special Reading supplement of the Illustrated London News includes a number of sketches of the town in 1882 (D/EX2211), including the new improved Reading School buildings (pictured). We have also acquired a set of photographs of Harwell and Harwell Feast (D/EX2186); and a photograph of a wine merchant's shop in Sunningdale (D/EX2214). A small collection relating to Bracknell includes both photographs and printed miscellanea, 1873-1970s (D/EX2219).

Berkshire in arms

The records of the Lieutenancy of Berkshire, 1758-1960, are now available for research (L/). The Lords Lieutenant were responsible for the Berkshire auxiliary forces, namely the Militia, Yeomanry Cavalry and Rifle Volunteers, and the records include muster rolls and material relating to the appointment of officers in these bodies, mainly for the later 19th century, which will be of interest to both family and military historians. Wokingham's Second World War servicemen and women are recorded in the records of the Welcome Home Fund, which presented those demobbed with a commemorative wallet at a public ceremony (D/EX2142).

House history resources

An unusual recent discovery was the Windsor borough register of final concords, 1597-1685 (D/EZ169). Final concords were basically documents produced by fictitious lawsuits which were used to confirm the sale of property. Normally these cases were held in London, but Windsor borough had the right to register them locally under the terms of a royal charter. This book's existence was previously unknown to historians, as it had been removed from the borough's custody in the 19th century.



Reading School, 1882 (D/EX2161/1/8)

We have now listed the surviving building control plans for Wallingford Borough, 1891-1958 (WA/) and the plans and registers for Wallingford Rural District Council, 1928-1974 (RD/W). We have also acquired a small collection of sale catalogues for North Berkshire farms, 1957-1958 (D/EX2209).

For the family historian: new registers

Abingdon St Michael: banns, 1881-1997
Ascot Heath: marriages, 1975-1991; burials and funerals, 1958-2000; rough record of burials at Priory Road Cemetery, 1927-1949 (D/P185)
Calcot St Birinus: marriages, 1999-2007 (D/P188)
East Challow: banns, 1855-2007 (D/P81B)
Reading St Mark: marriages, 1962-2010 (D/P174)
Reading St Mary Castle Street: marriages, 1963-1997 (D/P175)
Reading St Matthew: baptisms, 1955-1997, marriages, 1967-1988, and banns, 1967-2003 (D/P176)
Tilehurst St Mary Magdalen: banns, 1971-1985 (D/P132E)
Wargrave: marriages, 2008-2010 (D/P145)
Hilltop Free Church, Earley: marriages, 1985-2005 (D/N56)

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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- Wokingham Borough Council

