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From the Editor

Celebrating the 110th anniversary of the foundation of Berkshire Education Committee

It was 1903 when Berkshire's first local education authority (LEA) was set up. This was the body that would run the all the county's funded schools: set standards, employ teachers, build classrooms, as well as provide a host of help for pupils like school meals and transport.

The vision of the educators was to create one commissioning body that would serve each county. Gone would be the plethora of diverse school providers and in would come uniformity and democratic oversight. It was a brave new world designed to provide equal education for all.

The Berkshire LEA thus had considerable power and influence over generations of Berkshire children. This is reflected in what is a vast archive of paperwork showing how the county went about running its schools. The articles in this Echo hint at that, but

also merely brush the surface of the County Council's legacy.

One hundred and ten years later and although much has altered in the world of education, schools are still a linchpin of our local communities. Whatever the changes in their management, they have carried on. Of course, each change is slowly forgotten by those who are living through it. At some point, the only evidence that survives is that documented in the records.

That's how archives are made and become valuable for anyone trying to understand the present. By witnessing change from a remote perspective we can take a dispassionate view of it and understand better its effects. We know that education is a subject that arouses fierce passions today: by looking at the past, we can see that it will always be that way.



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 dates are 11 February, 10 June and 7 October, all at 2 p.m. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: 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 date is 6 February. No need to book: just turn up.

Bracknell Family History Fair

BRO will be represented at the annual Bracknell Family History Fair on 27 January – for more details see <http://www.familyhistoryfairs.org/dateloc.html>

The 18th century market town

The County Archivist is leading a day school on the 18th century market town with a focus on Berkshire, on Saturday 16 February (cost £52 per person). Places are limited to 20, so early booking is advised. Enrol online at www.conted.ox.ac.uk.





Food, Glorious Food: wartime version

Viewers of BBC2's Wartime Farm series will be aware that feeding an embattled nation with limited resources was a massive problem. To help combat the labour shortage, older schoolchildren were excused school for a few weeks to help local farmers with the harvest. They were housed together in camps and their food was provided by the Education Committee – a job made more difficult by rationing.

Camp food is described in detail in one 1944 file within the Berkshire County Council archive (C/CL/E1/4/1), but not before the file has offered a little advice. 'Harvesting is strenuous work', it says, 'and long days in the open air with vigorous activity promote large and healthy appetites ... School children and students are growing fast and need ample portions of the right kind of food. They should have the full ration of body building foods, a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables and quantities sufficient to satisfy appetite and give them the energy they need to work with vigour and enthusiasm.'

So the plan was to keep the children placid and productive. There was a table of model menus, for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as mid-morning (at 11 am, of course) and afternoon tea breaks, for a fourteen-day period. Whilst

some of the recipes sound familiar and acceptable to our modern-day palate, others leave the reader in no doubt of the difficulties faced by a caterer in wartime.

Lunch on day 14 comprised cheese pasties accompanied by chocolate potato sandwiches (see recipe). Other 'delicious' sandwich fillings included carrot and cabbage; dried fruit and carrot; and carrot and jam. Dinner in the evening (always hot, except for Sundays, when a cooked lunch was provided) appears to have been a slightly ambiguous affair, with menus containing 'meat' pie; boiled 'meat', and 'meat' pudding. There were always desserts (day 2's 'patriotic pudding' sounds particularly appropriate), and cakes or buns for afternoon tea. Breakfasts, too, were always substantial, usually including porridge and cooked bacon or eggs, but sometimes the less appetising wheatmealies would be on offer (see recipe).

There was a handy list of ration-controlled food with the prescribed measures; with suggestions for shopping for foods that were not rationed, and for 'priority goods'. In case the reader should need some help in compiling the 'delicious' menus listed, there were detailed directions on the preparation of both the cooked meals and packed lunches.

HARVEST CAMP RECIPES

Fruit Fool (serves 50)

6 lbs fruit
3lbs carrot, swede or beetroot
Water, sufficient to cover bottom of pan to ½ inch
¾ lb sugar
8 oz custard powder
8 pints milk

Cook the root vegetables until soft and mince them. Stew them with the fruit and water until tender. Cool. Make custard and cool it. Beat fruit to a pulp then mix both together. Sweeten.

Cold Dogs (serves 50)

5 lbs flour
3 oz baking powder
1 tbsp salt
Approx 2 ¼ pints milk (preferably sour)
[As you will see, the recipe also contains potato and sausage - not included in the ingredients listed]

Mix flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in mashed potato and mix to a soft dough with the milk. Shape into 50 flat round cakes and paint with milk. Bake in a hot oven for 20 to 30 minutes. When cold, split, spread with margarine and insert sliced sausage and cress.

Chocolate Potato Sandwiches (serves 50)

3 lbs potato, cooked
¼ lb margarine
¼ lb sugar
¼ lb cocoa
3/8 pint milk
1 teasp vanilla essence

Mash potatoes while hot and beat in margarine and sugar. Blend cocoa with milk and boil up. Add to potato mixture. Add essence and cool.

Wheatmealies (*more honestly described as 'stale bread crust and crumb'*)

Slice the bread thinly then dice very small or crumble roughly. Spread on baking tins or clean oven shelves and dry in the oven after other baking until the bread is golden brown and very crisp. Serve with milk and sugar as a breakfast cereal.



The joys of running a Local Education Authority

Tough choices have always had to be made in the provision of publicly-funded education. One series of files in the County Council archive deals with the problem of ensuring that school-aged children had access to school transport, particularly in rural areas (C/CL/E2/5). It was an issue where the County Council was only ever likely to make itself unpopular.

In 1969, the Council was feeling financially squeezed. It was determined to enforce the national limit on school buses: that a pupil had to live at least 3 miles away from the school before claiming a free bus ride. Unfortunately, such a stance was a change to existing policy for the good people of Abingdon, who had traditionally enjoyed a 2 mile limit.

The parents of Abingdon organised themselves into a protest group and wrote to Airey Neave, the local MP. He asked the Council to look again at its rules, even though the 3 mile limit was one statutorily imposed by the Education Acts. The Council did not feel inclined to submit.

The dispute rumbled on for over two years. The parents' group changed tack and asked for the Council to subsidise fares if it was powerless to change the national limits. Airey Neave lobbied the Council to hold a public meeting in Abingdon to discuss the problem.

In the end, the Council's Education Director asked for a little more money to alleviate hardship cases but was refused by his finance committee. The local taxpayers were spared further expense and the parents of Abingdon continued to fume. The 3 mile limit stayed.



Incentives to learn

Not all decisions relating to schools were dictated from above. At Newbury Girls' Grammar School, the pupils themselves made many of the rules governing their behaviour. The School Council comprised all sixth formers and elected representatives from each lower form. One initiative which came from below was the decision in 1962 to offer a certificate to all 'girls who have made a marked effort to improve their work during the school year', rather than restricting prizes to high achievers.

The oldest pupils, in the Upper Sixth, said 'it was usually the same girls, mostly those naturally gifted, who received Certificates of Merit year after year. Girls in the lower divisions who, though not gifted with many brains, but who had tried very hard with their work, and made a marked improvement never received any reward. The fifth forms work for GCE [O levels], but the lower divisions of the Second and Third Forms had no real incentive to work.' It was these junior girls who were keenest on the idea. Some members of the Lower Sixth who had received Certificates of Merit in the past stated that 'they no longer valued them, but girls who had never received a Certificate realised their value, and wished to earn one'.



Need somewhere to hold a meeting?

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New to the Archives

Education in Berkshire

We are pleased to report the completion of a catalogue of the records created by the Clerk to the Council in his role as Clerk to Berkshire Education Committee, 1903-1974, with some inherited records dating back to 1883. The correspondence files he kept cover a wide range of topics for which the Clerk was responsible (C/CL/E).

As well as the establishment and maintenance of schools, these include further education, youth and community services, youth employment, and education welfare services (including the provision of milk, school meals and school medical and dental services; school attendance; the conveyance of children to and from school; the regulation of the employment of school children; and nursery provision. They provide an invaluable resource for those interested in education policy and practice, and have inspired this edition of the Echo.

Berkshire County Council finances

We have also catalogued the extensive archive of Ryeish Green (formerly Three Mile Cross) School, which closed in 2010 after educating local children for a century (SCH23). Originally a primary school, then after 1948 a Secondary Modern, it eventually became a comprehensive, and was a pioneer in the integration of physically disabled children in mainstream education. A new Free School opened in the premises last September.

A substantial accrual of records from St Bartholomew's Grammar School, Newbury (SCH11), includes the admission register, 1849-1906, and a large number of photographs. The log books for Mortimer Cookery Centre, 1923-1947 (SCH25), and Spencers Wood Domestic Science Centre, 1941-1946 (SCH26), record details of lessons taught. These centres hosted home economics lessons for children from a range of schools in the area. Private schools are under-represented in our holdings, so we were pleased to receive a prospectus for Barcote School, Buckland, 1967 (D/EX2263). The school specialised in less academic boys, but financial pressures forced it to close in the late 60s.

We have also catalogued records from a number of other local schools:

- Bradfield CE Primary School, 1921-2000s (SCH24)
- Wildmoor Heath (formerly Broadmoor) Primary School, Crowthorne, 1873-2000 (SCH29)
- St Mary's School, Datchet, 1844-1980s (SCH30)
- Newbury County Grammar School for Girls, 1950-1961 (D/EX2308)



A cookery lesson at Didcot, like those held at Mortimer and Spencers Wood, 1935 (D/EX1828/1, p.15)

- St Bartholomew's School, Newbury (the co-educational comprehensive successor to the Newbury grammar schools), 1975-1979 (SCH13)
- Parsons Down Junior School, Thatcham, 1997-2004 (SCH27)

Berkshire at war

Records of Berkshire County Council's civil defence and emergency planning functions, 1938-1972, open up much valuable source material for air raid precautions and the emergency services during the Second World War, with some information about post-war civil defence and emergency planning (C/CD). The ongoing impact of the First World War is revealed in a certificate recording the commitment of department store Messrs Montague Burton in Reading to employ disabled ex-servicemen (D/EX2308).

And finally...

Historical notes relating to Winkfield, compiled by the parish's incumbent, the Revd William Waterson, 1727-1767, join similar volumes of his work already here (D/EX2270).

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.

Contact Information:

Tel: 0118 937 5132 Fax: 0118 937 5131
Web: www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk
Email: arch@reading.gov.uk

The Berkshire Record Office,
9 Coley Avenue, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6AF

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