

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo

January 2015

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### From the Editor

January 2015 sees the 750th anniversary of the first elected English Parliament. So this edition of the Echo includes some election stories from Berkshire in times past.

Elections these days are a world away from the very public show of hands, and very public show of corruption that were a feature of historical hustings. These days we are much more discreet. Paradoxically, the election handbills and posters within the Record Office collections seem so much gentler and quieter than modern propaganda. The general election this year will probably be the noisiest on record, as it follows a 24 hour news agenda across a plethora of traditional and social media platforms. I'll bet that many of you can't wait.

Later on this year we will also have various national events to mark the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta. The 'big charter' was geographically nearly signed in Berkshire, and although the Record Office is not lucky enough to have a copy of it we are keen to celebrate a historical story that has an archive as its hero.

Magna Carta is an interesting document. Although it was created to settle a fight between rich and powerful men, and for centuries has been essentially meaningless, it has also become a symbol of rights for everyone. It has taken on a life separate from the reason for its being.

For the archivist, that is fascinating: that the public perception of a document might be more important than the information it actually contains. It demonstrates that how people feel about historic artefacts has a direct link to how we value them.

So should we decide what archives to keep based on how we feel about them? Should archivists stop looking for informational and evidential content in their collections, and instead look for an emotional link?

It may not be easy, though it would certainly seem appropriate in the context of politics. There, facts are always less important than feelings. I'm sure that Berkshire's Parliamentary candidates understood that then as well as now.

### 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. The next date is Monday 9 February, at 2 pm. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk).

#### Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol

Our current exhibition runs until 6 February 2015. Featuring items from the Prison archive, the University of Reading and from Reading Museum, it tells the story of the Victorian prison and reflects on Oscar's life both inside and outside it.



Mark Stevens  
Senior Archivist



# How to Rig a Berkshire Election



The tiny reach of the electoral franchise for most of British history has allowed plenty of opportunities to fix the outcome. Berkshire was not alone in its less than free and fair approach to gaining Members of Parliament.

In 1679, two Windsor men, John Carey and John Powney, found a loophole to exploit in their quest to represent the town. They applied a 40 day residency rule for townfolk to insist that servants in the Royal Household and soldiers billeted at Windsor Castle could vote, and simply 'made sure' that these new voters were motivated to swing the right way. Their defeated rival candidates complained this was unfair – presumably on the basis that they had not thought of it first - but did not get their way.

In Reading, the Parliamentary vote was reserved solely to freemen of the borough. These men met regularly in private

to oversee the town, so eventually they decided to dispense with the formality of elections. In June 1648, they agreed at a council meeting that Daniel Blagrave, the sitting MP, could continue on their behalf. Those freemen not present protested, alleging – as was entirely likely – that Blagrave had bribed the meeting to rubber stamp his candidacy.

Blagrave had friends in high places in Parliament, so his election stood. He was one of the men who signed Charles I's death warrant in January 1649, and he profitted personally from the sell-off of crown lands which followed. Blagrave was forced to flee the country when Charles II was restored to the throne.

*Above: "Treating" at an election, as seen by Hogarth*

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### **Life in the Victorian Asylum**

Mark Stevens' new book, based on our own Fair Mile Hospital archive, is available now in hardcover and ebook. It details the daily routines of the thousands of ordinary people who experienced Victorian mental health care.

### **World War I blog**

The blog continues to grow on a daily basis. Each post relates to that day or month 100 years earlier, as the war unfolds before Berkshire eyes. Check it out at <http://berkshirevoiceswwi.wordpress.com/>





# Resisting Reform

One other reform from 1832 brought in secret ballots. Before that, votes were taken on a public show of hands, and voting in the counties stretched out over weeks as voters made their way to the polling town. In Berkshire, candidates traditionally paid for their voters to journey to Abingdon, where votes were held, and treated them to lavish banquets once they were there.

Anyone benefitting from such bribes had no incentive to change the system. But, in the lead up to 1832, a handful of gentry across the country tried to challenge it.

The leading Berkshire reformer was probably William Hallett, who stood as an independent candidate in multiple elections between 1809 and 1832. His lawyer, James Crowdy

of Faringdon, kept various bills relating to Hallett's campaigns (D/EZ148/2/5).

Hallett was a member of the establishment – living at Denford Park, and posing for Thomas Gainsborough's *The Morning Walk* – but one who believed that the corrupt electoral system was morally wrong.

He habitually lost his elections: every time, the county hierarchy returned men who would defend their privileges instead. Nevertheless, Hallett managed to increase his share of the vote in each successive vote, and came very close to being elected in 1832. The passage of the Reform Act eventually met his demands.



Above: Polling day as observed by Hogarth

## Who Could Vote?

The phenomenon of such 'rotten boroughs' was only tackled in 1832. Until then, in Berkshire landowners elected two MPs to represent the county. Reading and Wallingford, as the most important medieval towns, were also entitled to two MPs each, while Abingdon, Newbury and Windsor had one.

Early MPs did not represent political parties but were simply those landowners most popular with their peers. A party system gradually developed in the late 17th century, and crystallised in the early 19th over calls to extend the franchise.

Only those holding property worth £2 rent a year – a substantial sum – were allowed to vote, and they could do so in all the places that they owned property to that amount. The Reform Act of 1832 also made the first small attempt to widen the franchise, by giving the vote to long-term leaseholders as well as property owners.

Even so, the electorate accounted for barely 10% of the adult population. Further reforms in 1867 and 1884 widened the franchise to the majority of men, but it was only in 1918 that universal suffrage – for men and women - was permitted.

### TIMELINE

- |      |   |      |   |
|------|---|------|---|
| 1215 | <i>Magna Carta recognises limitations to the King's powers</i>                  | 1885 | <i>Equal size constituencies created. Berkshire has five: Abingdon, Newbury, Reading, Windsor and Wokingham</i> |
| 1265 | <i>First English Parliament with representatives of the shires and boroughs</i> | 1918 | <i>All men over 21, and married women over 30 eligible to vote</i>  |
| 1341 | <i>Separation of Lords and Commons</i>  | 1922 | <i>Irish representation reduces to Northern Ireland only</i>  |
| 1707 | <i>Act of union with Scotland</i>   | 1928 | <i>Everyone over 21 allowed to vote apart from prisoners and lunatics</i>                                       |
| 1801 | <i>Act of union with Ireland</i>  | 1969 | <i>Everyone over 18 allowed to vote</i>   |
| 1832 | <i>Reform Act abolished rotten boroughs</i>                                     |      |   |
| 1884 | <i>Franchise extended to majority of working men</i>                            |      |   |



## New to the Archives

### Fair Mile discovery

Two early case books for private male patients at Moultsford Asylum (later Fair Mile Hospital), missing from the hospital archive before its transfer here, have now arrived at the Record Office (D/EZ181). They cover the years 1884-1924, and include some criminal lunatics. There are also some letters from two of the inmates, one of whom, Edwin Price complained vociferously of his treatment in 1902, and demanded to be sent back to prison.

### Reading Prison

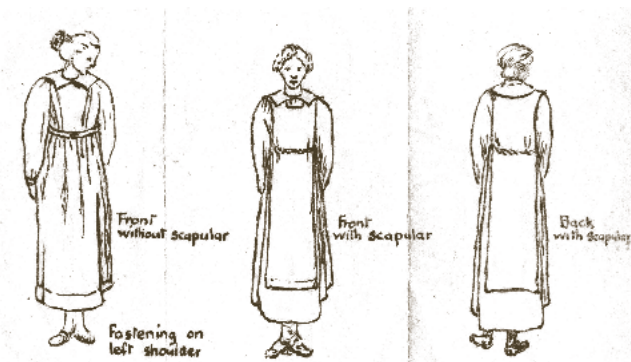
When Reading Prison closed in 2013, its remaining records were transferred here (P/RP1). Most are relatively recent, but will eventually prove a valuable resource for researchers. The existing catalogue has also been improved.

### Schools and education

The archive of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd (D/EX2398) sheds light on a small religious community founded in Wantage in the 1920s, which developed an international role in education. It was formed by a group of unmarried women teachers who felt a call to a religious life within the Church of England, while continuing their professional work. They set up their own private school for girls, St Gabriel's, originally in London but moving to Sandford Priory in 1947. Some Companions (later known as Sisters) taught at schools in India and Borneo, the latter suffering the privations of internment by the Japanese during World War II. After the war, they took up school and parish work in several parts of the Caribbean. Numbers declined in later years, and the Sisters joined forces with the Community of St John Baptist. The archive of St Stephen's College, founded by the latter community in Clewer in the 1860s and later based in Kent until its closure in 1991, has also been catalogued (D/EX1626).

Ranelagh School has added some deeds to its collection (SCH5), including the original trust deed of 1709, which specifies how the original school was to be run in fascinating detail. It was originally for 'poor Protestant boys and girls of Winkfield and Cranbourne Chase' aged 7-12. The boys were to be taught reading, writing and arithmetic, and the girls reading, writing, spinning, knitting and sewing. Inspectors checked that the children were taught correct spelling and punctuation. Parents had to send the children 'clean washed and combed' and with their clothes (supplied by the school) mended.

It is always exciting to come across early school records, and the records of two have arrived recently, coincidentally both called St Peter's and with records starting in 1863. One is in Earley (SCH36) and the other in Old Windsor (SCH31).

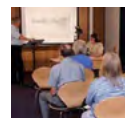


*The habit of the Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd, c. 1920 (D/EX2398/1/13/15)*

Particularly interesting was the complaint at Old Windsor in 1891 that singing lessons were too long at '1 hour and 25 minutes at a stretch'. Deposits of 20th century records have come from Chelsey Primary School (SCH32); Lambourn CE Primary School (SCH33); Dunston Park Infant School, Thatcham (SCH34); St Mary's Junior School, Thatcham (SCH4); Thatcham Park Primary (SCH35); and Piggott CE Senior School, Wargrave (D/P145). Finally, a historic buildings report on the former Presentation Convent and School, Wokingham, records the state of the premises in 2014, with some details on its history (D/EX2423).

### 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.



### 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:

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### Funding Partners

- ✦ Bracknell Forest Council
- ✦ Reading Borough Council
- ✦ Slough Borough Council
- ✦ West Berkshire Council
- ✦ The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- ✦ Wokingham Borough Council

