

The logo for The Berkshire Record Office, featuring the letters 'BRO' in a large, bold, white font.

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

# The Berkshire Echo

October 2017

- Hooting and bludgeons in the fields
- Broken windows
- Captain Swing: a contemporary view
- New to the Archives

## WHAT'S ON

## From the Editor


Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Berkshire Echo. This time we look at 'Riots and Revolution' as it coincides with the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1917. To give some background, following significant losses in the First World War, the Russian people rose up against government corruption and the lack of food. This resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II and the end of the Romanov Dynasty. The Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries gathered support and later became the Communist Party of Soviet Union. Unfortunately the unrest did not stop there and a form of civil war continued until 1923.

Unrest is nothing new in history and indeed even within Berkshire we find evidence of rioting and revolutionary activities. We discover in "Hooting and bludgeons in the fields" how lack of access to common fields in Newbury in the 1840s resulted in rioting. It's interesting to read in "Captain Swing: a contemporary view" how one particular lady thought the whole thing was exaggerated – arguably

a similar 'complaint' of modern media reporting. We hope you enjoy reading about some of Berkshire's 'riotous' events and you can discover more stories connected with the Russian Revolution on the WW1 blog.

If you're interested in the Royal Merchant Navy, why not come along to our next exhibition? Called "Orphans of the Sea", the exhibition will celebrate the 190th anniversary of the Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation charity. It starts on 8th November and is completely FREE! Don't forget to see what else is going on at the BRO as well as what's new to the archives.

You can keep up to date by visiting our website: <http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk> or social media pages

 @berksarchives

 berkshirerecordoffice

Ivone Turnbull  
Senior Archivist

**Orphans of the Sea: The History of the Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation in London and Berkshire**  
8th November 2017 to 16th February 2018

This exhibition celebrates the 190th anniversary of one of Britain's foremost maritime charities. Explore the story of the Foundation and the children that it has helped. Available during our opening hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 9am to 5pm, Thursday 9am to 9pm and Friday 9am to 4.30pm. FREE Admission. Why not come along and take a look?

**Cutting and Decorating Picture Mounts**  
27th November 2017 12.00-16.00

Ever wanted to know how to cut and decorate picture mounts for your pictures and photographs? Come along to our workshop and learn how as well as clean and attach pictures to your mounts. Cost is £25 per person. There are 8 places available and booking is essential. Please email [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk) or call 0118 937 5132.

### World War I blog

Follow local reaction to the Russian Revolution on our World War I blog. Each post relates to that day or month 100 years earlier, as the 1914-1918 war unfolds before Berkshire eyes. Why not take a look: <http://berkshirevoiceswwi.wordpress.com>



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## Hooting and bludgeons in the fields

Most riots affecting Berkshire, whilst often terrifying for those caught up in them, were relatively small scale responses to local issues.

In 1842 the issue was anger at the loss of access to the former common fields of Newbury, which had been enclosed a few years earlier, preventing people from pasturing their cows and horses for free. Several hundred men were led into the fields by a horse dealer named Robert Aldridge. The riot started with the forcible rescue of two of Aldridge's horses, which had been impounded, and the men then tore down fences in the fields.

Local lawyer Robert Fuller Graham tried to calm them down, suggesting they should instead take the matter to a legal tribunal, even offering to pay the costs. Sadly, his efforts were met only with “insults of the grossest kind”. The crowd, allegedly all drunk, was described by Graham as “apparently ripe for every devastation”, “hooting” abuse at anyone who tried to stop them and threatening physical violence by brandishing bludgeons. The disorder lasted several days before the mayor of Newbury sent in the borough police to disperse the mob.

Circular letter from R F Graham to the inhabitants of Newbury (D/EX241/Z3)

## Broken windows

Patriotic feelings led to a smaller riot in East Hanney during the Boer War. Local bookseller James Robins Holmes had outraged public opinion by promoting the Boer side of the story in letters to the *Oxford Chronicle* newspaper. He called the war “one of the vilest crimes committed by the English nation during the 19th century”. One of his schoolfriends later testified to his “always [being] different to anyone else, and whatever anyone proposed he, Holmes, always opposed”, and it seems likely that he did not keep his opinions quiet in the village. He was also a member of the Vegetarian League, which was regarded as a sign of extreme, and probably dangerous, eccentricity.

At least 25 families in Hanney had members serving in the war, and Holmes' unpatriotic views prompted a group of local millworkers to cart an effigy of him around the villages of

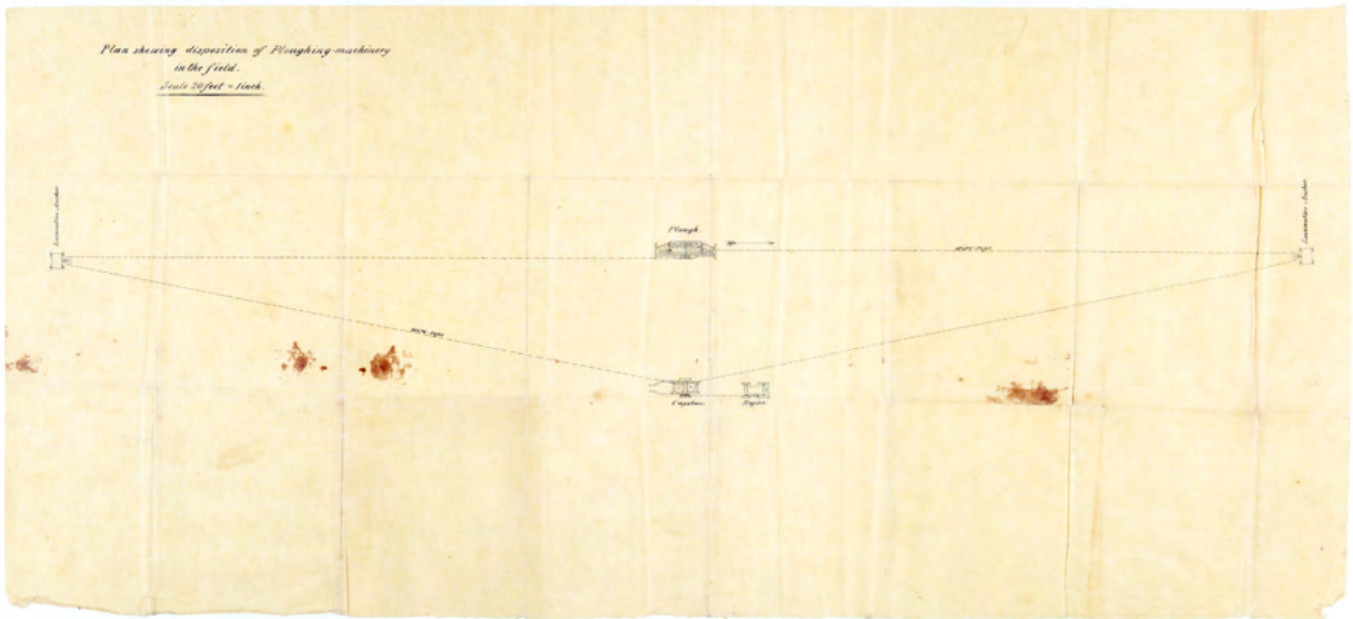
East and West Hanney before burning it on the green on the evening of Saturday 7 April 1900. Accompanied by a band, the mob shouted, hooted and “made a great din”, while throwing stones and eggs. The mob smashed windows at The Mulberries, the home of Holmes and his wife Alice, including those in the children's bedroom, and one of the dozens of stones hit Alice.

Those rioters who could be identified were prosecuted, and the court heard that they had used “a lot of filthy language”. However, the “extenuating circumstances” of family members involved in the war meant that they were let off.

File relating to Holmes's claim for compensation under the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 (C/CL/G1/43/1)

Top: One of the Newbury enclosures (D/RDC46B)





## Captain Swing: a contemporary view

The landed classes were alarmed in the early 1830s when a wave of popular unrest swept across rural parts of the south, including Berkshire, bring memories of the terror of the French Revolution 40 years earlier. The Swing Riots were aimed at destroying agricultural machinery, blamed for putting labourers out of work. The name came from the fictional figurehead of the rebellion, “Captain Swing”.

A contemporary letter from Miss Fanny Smith in November 1830, gives us an insight into local reactions. Fanny told her mother that she had seen ‘neither mobs nor soldiers’ on her journey from Hertfordshire to her sister Augusta’s house at Sulham, and there had been no disturbances in the immediate vicinity.

Fanny, clearly a young woman of strong character, believed the reports were ‘outrageously’ exaggerated, and people, including her own sisters, were ‘ludicrously’ frightened. Fanny reported that her brother-in-law Henry Wilder had found a group of 60 or 70 labourers gathered drinking at the public house in Tidmarsh, having been going round

local farms and collecting five shillings ‘in a civil way’, only occasionally breaking machines, and forcing the farmers to sign a promise to pay a minimum wage of 12s per week for married men, or 9s for single men.

Henry told the ladies ‘there seems no use in taking up [arresting] the people, for you may put the whole country in jail, it is in fact a general striking for wages’. However, fear of the riots getting closer to home meant Henry Wilder had made up his mind to have his own threshing machines destroyed. Fanny was rather amused that the army, sent to break up the riot, had been bussed in in coaches, which she called ‘rather ... unmilitary’.

The rioters were eventually apprehended. Some were transported to new lives in Australia for their actions, while some of the ringleaders were hanged, even though no one had been killed during the riots, with the main damage being to property.

Letter from Fanny Smith, 1830 (D/EX2061/19)

## Russian echoes

The Russian Revolution(s) of 1917 sent shockwaves through Europe. Berkshire hosted refugees, such as Blaguigna Illitch, who was a pupil at St Stephen’s College in Clewer

from 1918 to 1924. She became the school’s Head Girl, and went on to qualify as a doctor.

Source: records of St Stephen’s College, D/EX1626

Top: The ploughing machinery which put labourers out of work and inspired the Swing Riots (D/EB1/E71)



# New to the Archives

## Berkshire County Council

Light has been shed on the work of Berkshire County Council before 1974 by the listing of the Clerk's Department files (C/CL/G). The Clerk to the Council was the equivalent of today's Chief Executives, and this wide-ranging collection includes over 500 files on various Council activities and interests, including the police, local authority boundaries, the closure of the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal, bye-laws, public buildings like schools, agriculture, wildlife, housing, public health (including midwifery, TB and VD), and help for disabled ex-servicemen after the First World War.

Earlier material dating back to 1834 was inherited from the Quarter Sessions, relating to matters like elections and the inspection of weights and measures.

## Schools

We are pleased to report the cataloguing of the records of Alfred Sutton Secondary Boys' School, Reading, 1936-1986 (SCH38); and Yattendon CE School, 1868-2012 (SCH37).

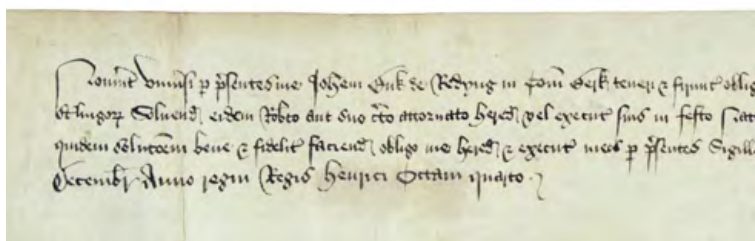
An unusual item in the records of Newbury County Girls' School is a scrapbook relating to children from Dr Barnardo's Home, who the Newbury girls sponsored for emigration to Canada and Australia, 1914-1952 (SCH12). Some of the young emigrants wrote back with their impressions of life in their new homes, including one girl's enjoyment of surfing in 1930 – overshadowed by her fears of a Communist takeover in Australia.

## World War II

A letter relating to Red Cross dances for American servicemen in Reading and local girls in 1944 contains the firm instructions to 'dress properly if you jitterbug', and for the girls not to sit on other girls' laps, or in 'other indiscreet positions' (D/EX2595).

## 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.



## House history: Deeds and estate records

We have catalogued deeds of property in Reading and Caversham as part of ongoing work on the Reading Borough deposited collections (R/D). The earliest of these date from 1512 (property in Castle Street, R/D11), and perhaps the most interesting are for Caversham Park and manor, 1633-1684 (R/D88). Other recently catalogued deeds relate to property in Bray, 1742 (D/EX2598); Burghfield, 1858 (D/EX2554); Longcot 1617-1905 (D/EX2595); Reading, 1797-1913 (D/EX2572); Sparsholt, 1799 (D/EZ190); and Thatcham, 1669-1818 (D/EX11).

We have received a small collection of the Berkshire estate records of the Grenfell family of Taplow Court, relating mainly to Bray and Cookham, 1877-1962 (D/EX2510). We are pleased to have completed work on some estate papers from the Monck family of Coley Park, Reading, c.1700-1938 (R/D5). Also useful for house history is a sale catalogue of Basildon Farm, 1884 (D/EX2467).

## New for family history

The following parish registers are now available: Shrivenhams baptisms, 1941-1980; marriages, 1813-2007; banns, 1958-1991 (D/P112).

*Top: Bond relating to property in Castle Street, Reading, 1512 (R/D11/1/1)*

## Opening Hours

Tues 9-5, Weds 9-5, Thurs 9-9, Fri 9-4.30.  
Closed Mondays, Weekends and Bank Holidays.  
Please contact us for further details.

## Contact Information:

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## Funding Partners

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