The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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NO. 23: Spring 2003

Dates for your diary

With Easter soon upon us, a reminder that we will close on Thursday 17 April at 5pm (rather than the usual 9pm) and reopen at 9am on Tuesday 22 April.

Also, this year sees Reading celebrate the 750th anniversary of its first charter granting the town some privileges and rights. The Council is planning various events to mark this occasion, and we will stage our summer exhibition around the theme. The exhibition will run from 3 July to 13 September. The actual anniversary day of the charter grant is **Saturday 5 July**.

The end of this exhibition coincides with our annual open day, which this year will be on **Saturday 13 September**. As usual this date is during the national Heritage Open Days when many local buildings are open for the public to visit. We very much hope to see you on the day, when you will be able to look round the parts of the building usually closed to public access.

One of the strongrooms on last year's open day, below:

Mark Stevens

Staff news

Hilary Atkinson and Lin Eggleton joined the Conservation Unit as part time (job-sharing) Preservation Assistants at the beginning of February. We have temporarily lost conservator Sally Webb, who is on maternity leave. The NOF enclosure records project team has been joined by Mathew Sutcliffe (who succeeds James Emptage) and Bethanie Afton.

Lisa Spurrier

A Company of Quakers

A hotbed of early nonconformity in west Berkshire is revealed in the records of the Archdeaconry of Berkshire church court, at a time when it was illegal to worship anywhere other than in the Church of England (D/A2 c.165 f.133).

John Smith of Oare in the parish of Chieveley wrote in 1684 to the Archdeacon's Surrogate (an official), pleading against the decision that Oare, which had its own chapel, or church building, should also have a chapelwarden. He started out by saying that "I doe assure you that our chappell is in extraordinary good repaire, a great deal better than their church is at Cheivly", and went on to threaten that Oare ratepayers would as a result withdraw their financial support for the mother church, including poor rates.

More interestingly, his main objection to the proposal was that "There is noe one capable of serving this office in the village; for we have such a company of Quakers, that there is but two or three families in the village, (besides my owne) and those are widdows, but what are Quakers, and I suppose you cannot oblige me to serve in this office, because I am in the Commission of the peace; and he who now complains (I having sent some of the Quakers to the jayle already) is affraid least I should punish him for his neglect in that he takes not that care to supprasse their meetings, as he ought, and to that and takes this course to slip his owne necke out of the coller, and throw the burthen upon other mens shoulders".

This other complainant was Edmund Sylvester of Chieveley.

Lisa Spurrier

Black and Asian studies

You may have seen the recent publicity regarding the Black and Asian Londoners research project at the London Metropolitan Archives. This project, which searched London parish registers from 1536 to 1840, has produced references to over 1,800 Black and Asian people in the capital during this period.

In a similar vein, the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA) has, for some time, been running a project to map the historical presence of Blacks and Asians in Britain. Several record offices already collect information relating to Black and Asian people that are found amongst their archives and forward them, at regular intervals, to BASA.

Berkshire Record Office would like to help with this project. We have already identified some references, for example the Cookham parish baptism register (ref. D/P43/1/4) records an entry for **Thomas Goree – an African adult** baptised 6 January 1771. (The island of Goree lies off the coast of West Africa and was once an important centre for the slave trade).

If you come across any references to Black and Asian people in the course of your research, and would like to help, please ask staff here for a form to complete. I will co-ordinate the project and send any information we find to BASA.

Julie Grisman

The changing face of Methodism

The records of Maidenhead High Street Wesleyan Methodist Church include an unusual look at fashion. At a meeting of Sunday School teachers on 5 July 1864 (D/MS 10/7A/3), one of those present, "Brother" White,

> *suggested that we ought not as professing Xtians to allow persons who wear a Mustache [sic] to address our Sabbath School, as it may have a baneful influence upon the boys & young Men of the School.*

The minutes continue:

> *this practice was spoken of in language of detestation especially by the fair sex, & all allowed that a Methodist especially, or in fact any Englishman, could not be too "bare faced".*

Lisa Spurrier

Just catalogued

The Home of the House of Toomer since 1692. Crown Place looking to Northbrook Street. [Sketch by Victor Corden.

This issue's highlight collection must be the fascinating archive of the Toomer family of Newbury, c.1781-1989 (D/EX 1718). This includes records of their ironmongery business (later known as the House of Toomer), which reveal that products stocked in 1813 included coffin letters, burd cages, bells, pencils and fishing tackle. The firm also made the official measures for Newbury Borough in 1826. Two members of the family were mayors of Newbury – Samuel in 1767/8 and 1783/4 and his son Joseph in 1791/2, 1801/2 and 1814/5. The most exciting individual item is a detailed census of Newbury compiled by Joseph in 1815, which we are currently in the process of microfilming. More on this in the next issue of the *Echo*! The Toomers were also involved in nonconformist circles, and the records include deeds of the Presbyterian meeting house in Newbury and the library register of Newbury Congregational Church.

Our Methodist records cataloguing programme continues, with the completion of catalogues of the records of the following Methodist churches: Maidenhead High Street, formerly Bridge Street, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1822-1990 (D/MS 10), Maidenhead Queen Street Primitive Methodist Church, 1859-1959 (D/MS 11), Cookham Dean Primitive Methodist Church, 1842-1978 (D/MS 12), Britwell Methodist Church, 1963-1978 (D/MS 13), Stroud Green Methodist Church, 1943-1990 (D/MS 15), Sunninghill (Bowden Road) Methodist Church (additional records), 1999 (D/MS 16), Cheapside Wesleyan Methodist Church, Sunninghill, 1915-1970 (D/MS 17), Sunningdale Primitive Methodist Church, 1925-1970 (D/MS 18), Crowthorne Methodist Church (additional records), 1949-1998 (D/MS 19), Beenham Primitive Methodist Church, 1894-1967 (D/MS 20), Boxford Methodist Church, 1935-1977 (D/MS 21), Bracknell London Road Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1876-

1998 (D/MS 22), Bracknell Shepherds Lane Methodist Church, 1950-1993 (D/MS 23), Bracknell Binfield Road Primitive Methodist Church, 1868, 1968 (D/MS 24), Bradfield (also known as Tutts Clump) Primitive Methodist Church, 1843-1992 (D/MS 25), Burghfield Common Primitive Methodist Church, 1930-1975 (D/MS 26), Burnham (Lent Rise) Methodist Church, 1928-1990 (D/MS 27), Burnt Hill Methodist Church, Yattendon, 1942 (D/MS 28), and Caversham (Gosbrook Road) Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1881-1990 (D/MS 29).

Above: Bradfield (Tutts Clump) Primitive Methodist Church

The Established church is represented by recently deposited records from the parishes of Charlton, 1967-1976 (D/P 143B), Enborne, 1883-1978 (D/P 51), Inkpen, 1950-1997 (D/P 76), Reading St Luke, c.1921, 2002 (D/P 173) and Wantage, c.1926-1995 (D/P 143). Family historians will be especially interested to learn of the arrival of parish registers of baptisms from Reading St Agnes, 1904-1937 (D/P 167) and marriage registers from Winkfield, 1988-2001 (D/P 151). We have also acquired copies of the *Caversham Bridge*, an ecumenical newspaper, 1964-2001 (D/EX 1758).

Staff have listed deeds for property in Eaton Hastings, 1670-1769, Maidenhead, 1901, Shellingford, 1863-1898, and Sunninghill, 1875-1892 (D/EX 1775); Windsor, 1800-1896, and Winkfield, 1840-1901 (D/EX 1780); Wokingham, 1822-1909 (D/EX 1757); and public houses in Bray, 1816-1952, Reading, 1873-1949, and Windsor, 1863-1962 (D/EX 1788). We have also acquired early 20th century photographs of Wilder's ironworks, Yield Hall, Reading (D/EX 1751) and a photograph of plans of the Old House, Thames Street, Windsor, believed to be the home of Sir Christopher Wren (D/EX 1760).

Finally, miscellaneous material to have been added to our holdings recently includes deeds relating to the money marriage settlement of Lewis Cooper and Fanny Hammond Cowper of Reading, 1854-1879 (D/EX 1777); records of the 31st Reading / 1st Earley Rover Scout Crew, 1934-1962 (D/EX 1787) and additional records of Reading and District Scout Association, 1948-1971 (D/EX 1500); and magazines and newsletters from Reading School, 1959-1981 (D/EX 647).

Lisa Spurrier

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