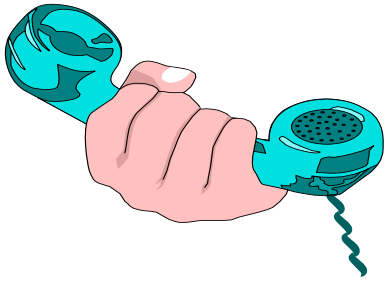
The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

NO. 5 SPRING 1998

What's New?

By the time you read this, Berkshire County Council will have been abolished, and the Record Office will be run by Reading Borough Council on behalf of all the unitary authorities in Berkshire. As explained in the last *Echo*, we expect most things to carry on as before, but there are one or two changes to remind you of. Firstly **our new telephone number is 0118 901 5132,** and the name 'Shire Hall' has been dropped from our address. Secondly, visitors will no longer have access to the shop and restaurant in the old Shire Hall. We are sorry for the inconvenience this may cause, but now that the building is owned by the multi-national engineering firm Foster Wheeler, security has inevitably had to be stepped up. Thirdly, we're still here, so please keep coming!



We have recently acquired microfilm and microfiche copies of census returns 1841-1891 for the newer areas of Berkshire, which were not already covered by our holdings. The new returns cover the Caversham and the Slough areas (including Burnham, Datchet, Eton, Horton, Langley Marish, Upton cum Chalvey and Wraysbury - and of course Slough itself, which was created out of several of these!). They incidentally also include some places still in Oxfordshire (such as Rotherfield Greys and Peppard, Henley and Eye and Dunsden) or in Buckinghamshire (such as Boveney, Dorney, Farnham Royal, Iver, and Stoke Poges). So, if you are interested in a border parish, we may have it.

You may notice some new faces in the searchroom. Our new archivist, Sarah Edmondson, joined us at the end of March. You will also be seeing more of Jeremy Taylor, the archivist who deals with official records, and archives assistant Robin Elliott.

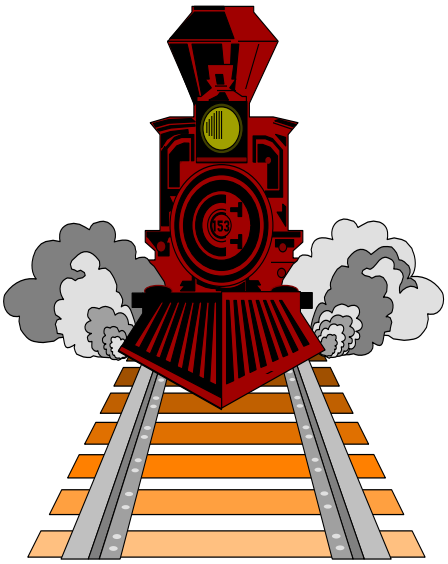
Not many people know this, but Berkshire Record Office will be celebrating its 50th birthday in the summer. Watch out for news of celebrations!

Elizabeth Hughes

Coroners' Inquisitions

An additional useful research aid to finding missing deaths/burials in Berkshire is now available on the shelves in the searchroom [reference T/B 62] This is a transcript of coroners' inquisitions for the years 1775-1814 and 1833-1859. Regrettably, there is a gap of eighteen years between the two for which no records have survived. However, the transcript covers approximately 4,500 inquests (148 of whom were unknown and never named) and, as many of these deaths occurred outside the deceased person's own parish, they may be worth checking for a missing ancestor.

In many cases the cause of death is stated, and occasionally age at death is recorded, the majority of verdicts being 'death by natural causes'. With regard to infectious diseases a few cases of cholera occurred around 1849, and there were isolated instances of diphtheria, scarlet fever and smallpox, and amongst those detained at His Majesty's pleasure consumption appears to end their unhappy lot. A number of people succumbed to cold, but very few to malnutrition, and there was only one case of rickets.



(mainly in the home) and death by drowning. At Wootton in 1854 five people were involved in a single drowning accident, probably all members of one family. Death on the roads was even then a problem of the time. A number of pedestrians were fatally injured beneath the wheels of laden waggons; two girls failed to survive after jumping from a runaway chaise; and in 1809 the Liverpool mail coach failed to reach its destination when it overturned in Remenham, killing the driver.

Occupational hazards accounted for quite a number of deaths, e.g. the caving-in of gravel, chalk and sand pits, accidents with threshing machines, and one or two gunshot fatalities. A few workmen died on the railway, and a tragedy occurred in Shrivenham in 1848 when a gathering of clergymen died in a collision of carriages on the railway line.

In cases of accidental death, by far the two greatest causes were death by burning

The coroners had to decide on quite a large number of deaths by suicide, and a smaller number of deaths by violence, including murder. A number of books on Berkshire murders have been published, and further information may also be found in local newspapers of the time.

Finally, we sympathise with poor Joseph Chivers who died in 1797 'in consequence of eating pudding', - perhaps a clerical error in the records, but we will never know!

Margaret Foreman

[Margaret Foreman is too modest to admit that she is the author of the index. We are very grateful to her, and to all our volunteer transcribers and indexers, for the work that they do - Ed.]

Library Corner

Do you visit the Public Record Office at Kew, or the Family Records centre in London? Or have you yet to pluck up courage? perhaps we can help. We have just bought for our own Record Office Library the newly-published guides to these offices which enable you to plan your visits there to best advantage: *New to Kew* and *Never Been here Before? a genealogist's guide to the Family Records Centre.* These are the PRO's *Readers' Guides* nos. 16 and 17.

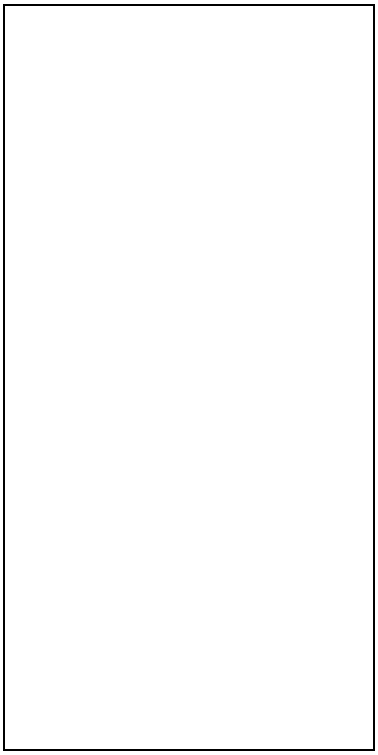
We are building up a collection and now have most of the other *Readers' Guides*, which cover such classes of records as: manorial, education, militia, census, Army, Navy, Marines and RAF, maps for family history, P.C.C. wills, and nonconformity. they are all beautifully clear and concise, and on our searchroom shelves for you to consult.

Bob Hale

Just Catalogued

This issue's highlight collection must be the papers of the Berkshire clients of the Oxford solicitor's firm, Morrell, Peel & Gamlen of Oxford (**D/EMP**). These consist of the Bowles family of Milton Hill and Streatley (mostly deeds of their Aldworth and Streatley estates, with some family and estate papers) 1594-1886, and the papers of the Leveson-Gower family of Bill Hill (on the borders of Wokingham and Hurst) 1728-1892. These, in contrast, have relatively few deeds, but are full for family, official and estate papers.

The distinguished careers in public service followed by many of the family are reflected, including the army career of General John Leveson-Gower (1774-1816), represented by papers covering his time as commander of a body of Volunteers in Suffolk in 1798-1799, when Britain feared invasion from France, these papers including details of pay and food, and recipes for the fumigation of hospital areas; the proceedings of courts martial in 1804 and 1806; and letters and reports on the defences of the island of Goree (off the west coast of Africa) and the conquest from the French of the colony of Senegal, 1808-1810. There is even a fine coloured plan of the defences of Goree.



More locally the papers include overseers' accounts for the liberty of Broad Hinton, 1801, with a list of families receiving relief, their trade, marital status, numbers and ages of children, address, special circumstances such as illness or extreme age, and details of total income from earnings and poor relief. The family's personal lives are also revealed, with papers on the General's horse racing interests, 1801-1820, and others relating to the *Acorn*, the yacht of his grandson John Edward, 1876-1891, and passports recording European travels, 1838-9 and 1850. There are series of love letters to John Leveson-Gower from his wife Gertrude (known as Minnie) 1840-1849, and to their son John Edward (known as Jill) from his fiancée Harriet Jane (Duck) Hunter, 1849. The latter are counterpointed by a letter from John advising his son against an early marriage.

Another substantial estate collection to derive from a solicitor's office is the Carleton Holmes papers which comprise records of Buscot Park, 1669-1949 (**D/ECH**). These are a fine supplement to the Loveden papers highlighted in the *Echo*'s second edition, and include papers passed by the Lovedens to the new owners in 1860, and additions to the estate by the Campbell and Henderson families who subsequently owned the estate. Items of particular note include a fine plan of the estate in the conveyance of 1860 and an interesting survey based on a map of 1798 (not deposited) which includes Edward Loveden Loveden's acerbic comments on "the most reluctant and shabby manner" in which neighbour Lord Radnor sold him land he had purchased from a third party "contrary to his solemn promise...not to interfere with" an agreement to sell it to Edward Loveden Loveden.

The papers from the time of the ownership of Australian tycoon Robert Campbell include a letter noting the progress of a war against "the natives" in New Zealand, 1864, and the collection includes deeds of property mostly in Buscot, Eaton Hastings, Great Coxwell and Faringdon, including the Primitive Methodist/Baptist chapel in Buscot.

A family feud is revealed in the exemplification of Chancery court proceedings concerning the will of Sir Robert Rich of Sonning, 1729-1730 (**D/EX 1436**). His widow, Dame Mary Rich, complained that her son Sir William "doth sometimes pretend that the said Sir Richard Rich his father made no such will...and at other times...that his said father was imposed upon in the makeing of the said will". The document includes a copy of the full text of the disputed will; the problem was that Sir Robert had provided for younger children at the eldest son's expense.

Other records relating to property which have been added to our holdings include Woolhampton manor jury presentments, 1624, and a licence from Clewer manor allowing the subletting of copyhold property, 1692 (**D/EZ 117**); deeds of property in Crowthorne, 1891-1969 (**D/EX 1428**); and sale catalogues of a Georgian mansion called The Grotto in Basildon, 1938 (**D/EZ 115**), Whites Farm, Arborfield, 1997 (**D/EX 1479**), and Culham Court, Wargrave, 1997 (**D/EX 1486**). A small miscellaneous collection of West Berkshire documents, 1768-1910, includes deeds relating to Chieveley, Enborne, Newbury, Speen and Thatcham (**D/EZ 114**).

Official records are represented by the records of Arborfield and Newland civil parish council, 1854-1996 (**CPC 6**). Some parishes have made additions to their records, including Buscot, 1891-1912 (**D/P 30**), Newbury, 1960-1986 (**D/P 89**), Tilehurst St Michael, 1948-1951 (**D/P 132**), and Warfield, 1929-1991, including a banns register, 1929-1966 (**D/P 144**). Miscellanea include additional records of Reading Amateur Regatta, 1995-1997 (**D/EX 1192**), Cholsey parish magazine, January 1907 (**D/EX 1488**), an abstract of overseers' papers for parishes in Wantage Union (**T/B 59**) and an index of the log books of Grovelands Board school, Reading (**T/B 60**).

Lisa Spurrier

Unholy Matrimony

The early 18th century incumbent of East Lockinge occasionally made notes about the circumstances surrounding the entires that he made in the parish register. When he baptised the young Mary Lay in February 1723, he had plenty to say about her mother, Sarah, and her marital circumstances:

"Sara Lay had one bastard before & was big with this child when said to be married. Her husband never bedded her after this pretended marriage. West Lockinge overseers bought a ring which the fellow refused to put on. It was put on by her father. They went first to Wantage to be married, But behavd so impudently Mr Birch, though their minister, refused to joine them. Then they went to Ardington, And she being heavy, and behinde, asked some neighbours how far Old Whistling William (so she calld him she was going to Marrie) was before. He likewise behavd most impudently in Ardington church. So I looking on this not as True Matrimony, But prophanation of the Holy Ordinance, Registered the child in her name only. When I promised the Grandfather, a very good, poor man, to Baptise the Child, I told him I would not church His Daughter". *[This entry was drawn to our attention by David Disbury]*.

Elizabeth Hughes

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