The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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HRH Princess Royal opens the new Berkshire Record Office

On 28 February we welcomed Princess Anne to open our new (and fourth) home. The Princess was joined by guests from the six district councils which now fund the Record Office, as well as searchers, representatives of local historical societies and colleagues from UK archives. The Princess was met by the Vice-Lord Lieutenant for Berkshire, Sir William Benyon, and given a tour of the building by Karen Knight, Reading's Head of Museum and Archives, and Peter Durrant.

At the end of her tour the Princess unveiled the slate plaque that you can see in reception, and was presented with a copy of John Speed's map of Berkshire 1611 and a brooch with a design from Roman Silchester. There were speeches from David Sutton, Leader of Reading Borough Council (who manage the service), and Keith Lock, Leader of West Berkshire District Council (who managed the project to build the new Record Office). Partnership and co-operation have been the themes behind the construction of the new building, and the Princess touched on these when she said:

The Princess Royal examining a map with County Archivist Peter Durrant

"The record office goes back a long way and from talking to people today it is clear that it has been well-used. There is always something of interest to find out. That is what is so attractive and necessary about these offices. This office has already had a lot of visitors and a lot of supporters. I have a suspicion they are going to have a lot more".

Mark Stevens

Lost and found

During January two documents were unexpectedly discovered and brought in to Berkshire Record Office. One was a minute book of Easthampstead Rural District Council, 1910-1913, found in a cupboard in one of the old Easthampstead Union Workhouse buildings. This volume was missing from the otherwise complete series which was deposited in May 1975 and, although a hopeful gap and reference was left for it in the catalogue, I think no-one ever really imagined it would be filled. The other discovery was of the parish copy of the South Moreton tithe map of 1849 which was found in a strongroom at Cornwall Record Office. By a quirk of fate Paul Brough, the County Archivist, was attending a meeting in Taunton which was also being attended by Gillian Sheldrick of the National Monuments Record in Swindon,

who was intending to visit Reading the following day. This meant the map had an exciting journey by train from Truro to Taunton, then a car journey and overnight stop at the National Monuments Record, and finally another car journey from Swindon to Berkshire Record Office in the morning!

Sabina Sutherland

He lit it to see how it would burn

Unkindly dismissed by Oscar Wilde as "one of the silliest of God's sheep", Maurice T Friend, chaplain of Reading Prison, appears in a kindlier light in the recently catalogued volume of his official correspondence (P/RP1/11/1), and especially in the heartrending case of seven year old arsonist Frank Stockwell from Shalbourne (now in Wiltshire). Asked by the Prison Commission to comment on the child, Friend made the following report, dated 15 July 1884:

1. I have the honour to make special report as requested in reference to the juvenile offender, Frank Stockwell.
2. He is but 7 years of age from last January. According to prison Rules as a juvenile he is allowed one hour's school instruction in classes with other juveniles if there happen to be any. We had no other till the 11th inst, when a boy of 14 was sentenced to one month. These two make up our present class of juveniles. Besides this one hour's instruction, and the time for "Chapel" service, he has the rest of the 24 hours each day in solitary confinement, excepting for the most carnal interruptions. I am of the very decided opinion that this is not usually healthy for a child of such tender age.
3. I gather from my own observation and from the Schoolmaster that he is not sharp, but rather idle and without any show of application, and if anything dull, and even apparently sullen only I take it to mean that he feels strange in a strange place is [a bit bewildered deleted] not quick of speech and also seems as if he knew what it was to be in fear & scolded. And is he not young? But certainly I find nothing artful or vicious about him. And I have studied him much knowing the bad opinion held by the Vicar of his Parish.
4. I have talked to him myself and from the beginning got him to own that he was sorry and would be a better boy. I am quite ready to believe as I drew out of him that he had lighted it to see how it would burn but never dreamt of the probable consequences and when he saw how it [went?] ran away frightened.
5. Firm in strong conviction of the unsuitableness of prison to such a child and the great risk of hardening such a character as I have attempted to describe as his, I should greatly rejoice if it were thought better off to give him the second tricking and discharge him.
6. At such an age it is rather a case for home treatment.

(Friend's initial draft of point six read rather more strongly : "I think the parents are more to blame than such a mite who ought not to be punished as [except?] by his parents.")

We can only speculate as to what happened to young Frank.

I hope to write more on Friend's work in a future issue of the *Echo* – including the prisoner who said the Chaplain was "the right stuff"!

Lisa Spurrier

Enclosure news

Between 1600 and 1900 the landscape – and agriculture – of Berkshire was transformed. In 1600, three quarters of the county was covered by large open fields, common land or waste. By 1900 all but 4% was in the form of small enclosed, hedged fields, owned by individual landowners. Strip farming, widespread in the county until the sixteenth century, was all but eliminated by the nineteenth.

In a new book published by Berkshire Record Society and available from the Record Office, price £25.00, plus £2.50 p&p.) (*Enclosure in Berkshire*, 1485-1885, ed. Ross Wordie (Berkshire Record Society, vol 5, 2000), Dr Ross Wordie of Reading University describes how this transformation occurred. Two methods were employed to achieve this change – enclosure by agreement (not always between equal partners) and enclosure by Act of Parliament. As much as one-third of Berkshire was enclosed by Act of Parliament, and the greater part of this was carried out in the relatively short period of the French wars, 1793-1815.

The process was not uniform across the county. In a series of parish surveys, drawing extensively on documents in the Berkshire Record Office, Dr Wordie describes the very different stories of enclosure in individual Berkshire parishes. From this, he is able, in a fascinating introduction, to describe for the first time the impact of enclosure in the county as a whole. This important book will be of value not just to Berkshire historians, but to all interested in the wider history of agricultural change in England.

Shortly after the publication of Dr Wordie's book the Record Office was delighted to receive from *Meet the Ancestors'* presenter Julian Richards a hitherto unknown original enclosure award and map for part of the downland parish of Compton. County Archivist Peter Durrant said: 'It is extremely unusual for such documents to come to light today. This makes the document all the more interesting, and we are extremely grateful to Julian Richards for this generous act in presenting it to the Record Office'.

Peter Durrant

Just Catalogued

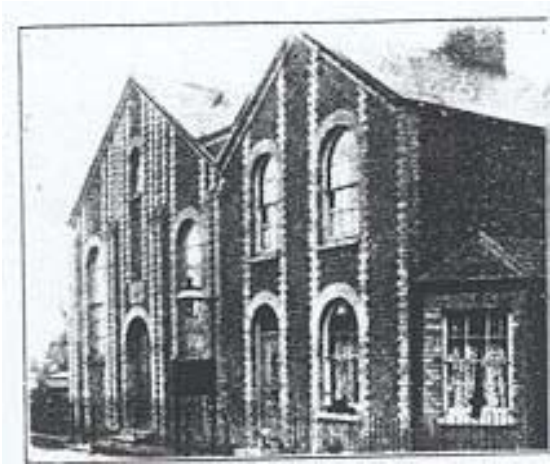
The most exciting new arrivals are additional records of Reading Prison, 1878-1966 (P/RP1). These include papers of the prison chaplain, 1878-1884, and minutes of visiting inspectors, 1887-1919 (one prisoner asked in 1896 for more exercise "as he feels giddy and weak", and complained that "his teeth are not good enough for the crusts"). Sinn Fein prisoners were present in 1918, and the inspector took special care to see if they had any complaints.

The records of Theale Congregational (later United Reformed) Church have been deposited here following the church's recent closure (D/N 40). They include registers of baptism, 1846-1865, 1922-1982, marriage, 1928-1956, and burial, 1922-1996. We have also acquired some papers relating to the extensive renovation of Kings Road Baptist Church in Reading between 1911 and 1914 (D/EX 1619). The work undertaken included building over the Holy Brook. Five rural chapels in East Berkshire (Fifield, Binfield, Dedworth, Moss End and

Theale Congregational Church

White Waltham) are included in the recently discovered accounts of Fifield Village Mission, 1904-

1941 (D/EX 1623). Parish registers of baptism and burial from 1868 to the 1990s have come in from Beech Hill (D/P 121), and the parish of North Moreton has sent records dating from 1842-1977 (D/P 86), including papers on the village hall, a prefabricated building which before its was transported to Moreton in 1931 served as Milton Isolation Hospital! Other Anglican parishes to have made deposits recently include Grazeley, 1854-1968, including vestry minutes from 1854 (D/P 124B), East Hendred, 1959-2000 (D/P 66), and Charlton, 1913-1980 (D/P 143B).



The Fifield Village Mission chapel at Binfield

An interesting little collection of deeds and papers relating to Marchfield House in the parish of Wokingham, 1758-1939 (D/EX 1570) includes "very private" letters relating to an illegitimate niece of the Campbell family in India in 1902, in which the family regretted that her Hindu mother did not wish the child to be baptised. We have also catalogued deeds of two cottages in East Hendred, 1910-1980 (D/EX 1588), various parts of the Woodhurst estate, Ray Mead Road, Maidenhead, 1909-1964 (D/EX 1595), Stapleton's Chauntrey, North Moreton, 1738-1863 (D/EX 1591), 1-9 Baker Street, Reading, 1828-1860 (D/EX 1579), 154-172 Southampton street, Reading, 1873-1971 (D/EX 1597), a house called Wiforne's in Speen, 1804, (D/EX 1592), and property in Welford, 1733 (D/EX 1576). Other papers relating to property include a note of the sale of Pope's Wood Cottage, Binfield, 1816 (D/EX 1580), and an inventory of stock at Manor Farm, Bourton, 1907 (D/EX 1587).

Other recent acquisitions include records of Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity in Sonning, 1815-1958 (D/QX 24); records of Reading Ladies' Club, 1927-1980 (D/EX 1589); and photographs of Mortimer railway station in about 1977 (D/EX 1640). Business records are represented by the correspondence of the Derby firm of Bennett & Sayer, manufacturers of clayworking machinery, with their many Berkshire clients, 1928-1964 (D/EX 1596). Finally we have acquired the 1885 diary of W C Blandy (D/EX 1606). Born in 1860, Mr Blandy was working in London prior to joining the family firm of Reading solicitors a few years later, and the diary records the successful progress of his courtship of future wife Marion "Mamie" Moeran.

Lisa Spurrier

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Berkshire Record Office, a countywide archive service
for all local authorities in the Royal County of Berkshire