The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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The end may be in sight!

We are very pleased to report that our strongrooms are now back in order, and that all our documents are once again accessible. There are still a few small jobs still to complete but nothing that should cause significant further inconvenience to visitors (famous last words!).

We really are very grateful to you all for being so patient; it has made life much easier for the staff, who have had the added pleasure of working on a building site for the last few months. Thank you all for being so understanding, and we look forward to welcoming you back to the 'reconditioned' Office.

Mark Stevens

Enclosure maps and awards online

Please watch for publicity about our Lottery-funded project to put images of enclosure maps and awards online, together with a searchable database of award entries. This site should launch in April. Meanwhile, one fruit of the project is available in the searchroom – complete indexes to all the enclosure awards, compiled by Jane Chedzey.

Mark Stevens

Microfilming update

Regular visitors will probably be aware that we are constantly adding to our holdings of documents on microform. We have an in-house microfilmer, Linda Hennessy, who is regularly working on frequently used items such as parish and nonparochial registers and older electoral registers, and also fragile documents which would benefit from not being handled at all.

One particularly exciting document to have been filmed recently, and which is now available in the searchroom, is the Reading Borough register of freemen, 1603-1700. This volume is uncatalogued, so has previously not normally been accessible, and was in a rather fragile condition. Its provisional reference is R/HMC/XLVII, and the microfiche is MF31005, in the drawer with other Reading Borough fiche.

Lisa Spurrier

a2a update

Hopefully most of you are already aware of the fantastic resource that is the website www.a2a.org.uk. This is the 'Access to Archives' site, Lottery funded, which hosts catalogues from archives throughout the UK. We now have a significant proportion of our catalogues available via this site, covering something like 7,500 pages of those available in our searchroom. New catalogues recently added include:

- wills and admons and other Archdeaconry papers (note, there is a name index but only for Faringdon Peculiar wills)
- coroner's inquisitions (name indexes for virtually all)
- local public bodies, including the Boards of Guardians, electoral registers and all council minutes
- most of the 'miscellaneous unofficial' collections (D/EXs)

There is a huge amount to discover, and for the first time you can do so whenever you like, without having to come in to the Office. Please do get online and see for yourselves. The catalogues are searchable by keyword, including names and places.

Mark Stevens

Drunk in charge of the workhouse

A shocking incident is revealed in the records of Windsor Workhouse! On 14 August 1883 P. Hanson, master of the workhouse, made the following report to the Board of Guardians (G/WI/9/1):

On Wednesday August 1st, my attention was called by the Matron to the Nurse. I went and saw her about 9.30 PM and found her drunk. I took the keys from her and ordered her to bed, and told one of the inmates to see all lights out.

About 10.30 the Matron visited again, and found her up. She had gone into the Women's Ward, taken up a Poker and forced the lock off her Sitting room. She refused to go to bed. I then went over again, and thinking she had drink in her bedroom the Matron insisted on seeing in. She refused to allow her, and we went in by force. We found the Room in a dreadful state; strewn all over with rags, and at least 20 vessels, viz Chambers, Jugs, Cups &c. full of filth, Vomit, urine &c. The stench was unbearable.

The next morning I went to the Chairman, who saw the state of things. Drs Drew and Andrew were sent for and saw it also. I then commenced to turn out her drawers, and found every drawer full of dirty rags, and linen : 40 hand towels; 15 chamber ditto; 10 blankets; 14 sheets; 11 Neckerchiefs; 9 Pockethandkerchiefs; 11 Pairs of Hose; 9 Babys' Napkins; & 2 Night Caps.

These should all have been clean, and in her drawers when not in use, besides a large quantity of her own linen in a filthy state. The carpet is spoiled and the bed not yet fit for use. It took 3 days to get the rooms clean and fit to be occupied. She left the House the same day.

Mrs Roberts has taken duty temporarily. She is a Candidate for Matronship in Manchester. If not successful I should recommend that she be appointed Nurse. She has been Schoolmistress 12 years, & Matron 4 years. I have known her for 13 years.

The Board minutes (G/WI/1/6) reveal the drunken nurse's name as Marion Russell. Dr G Andrew also reported on the incident, concluding:

To judge by her outward appearance the late Nurse was most clean & tidy and the only opinion I can give is that she is a monomaniac.

Mrs Eliza Roberts, aged 39, was duly appointed in her place, at the meeting of 28 August 1883.

Lisa Spurrier

Staff news

We were sorry to say goodbye to two members of staff in January. Rachel Hassall, the archivist working on the enclosure records project, left for a post in the Theatre Archive at the University of Bristol, while strongroom assistant Philip Wilson is starting a career in the police force. We wish them both well.

We are delighted to welcome Lindsay McCormack to fill the vacant post in the archivists' team from 1 April. Lindsay was previously engaged on a special project to catalogue the records of Berkshire Education Committee, but will now become a familiar face to regular visitors. Graham Powell also joins us, as the new archives assistant (strongrooms).

Lisa Spurrier

New fees for research

We are sorry to have to announce that our fees for research undertaken on behalf of users have risen to £17 per hour (£8.50 per half-hour). This is the first increase in five years.

Just catalogued

It is always exciting to receive records from a parish which has not previously deposited its records at Berkshire Record office, and one to have done so lately is Twyford (D/P 73B). The records include the parish's earliest registers of baptisms, 1832-1983, marriages, 1877-1955, and burials, 1847-1967. Significant new material from Cookham Dean, 1845-2003 (D/P 43B), includes registers of baptisms, 1876-1966, marriages, 1846-1994, and burials, 1845-1973, which are already available in the searchroom on microfiche. We have also received parish records from Cholsey, 1837-1973 (D/P 38), and the marriage register from Speen, 1972-1987 (D/P 116).

Nonconformists are represented by the recently catalogued records of Maidenhead Free Church Federal Council, 1944-1963 (D/N 47).

A real highlight of recent months has been the discovery of the Visiting Justices' report book on Reading gaol, 1860-1878 (D/EX 1847). This series is continued in the prison records also held here, but this earlier volume had long been believed lost. It includes references to the discipline of unruly prisoners, the employment of staff, an outbreak of smallpox in the prison in 1868 and the resignation *en masse* of the Visiting Justices (a committee of JPs deputed by the Quarter Sessions) in 1872 when their favoured candidate was rejected for the post of prison chaplain.

A fine set of deeds has been purchased for Ockwells (then known as Ockholt) manor, Bray, 1581-1777 (D/EZ 144).

Right: Maidenhead MP Theresa May visits the Record Office to see the Ockwells deeds.

L to R, Pat Curtis from RBWM Libraries, Theresa May MP, and Senior Archivist Mark Stevens.

A collection of deeds and related documents mainly for property in Hampstead Norreys and Chieveley, but also some in Tilehurst and Wargrave, 1753-1922, has been catalogued (D/EX 1084). We have acquired the deeds of a house in Woodcote Road, Caversham, 1898-1923 (D/EX 1848), property in East Challow and Denchworth, 1756-1978 (D/EX 1842), and Leckhampstead manor house and land, 1632 (D/EX 1845/1).

We have also received the sale agreement of the blacksmith's business of Charles Oakes of Hungerford to his sons in 1900 (D/EX 1845/2), in which he promised to provide "an efficient personal introduction to all his customers" and to refrain from working within four miles of Hungerford for the next 20 years as blacksmith, machinist or shoeing smith. Another unusual item is a photograph of the 32nd Divisional Signals Company of the Royal Engineers outside Wantage Hall, Reading, in 1915 (D/EX 1840).

Official records to have arrived recently include the records of Beech Hill Parish Council, 1894-1992 (CPC 121). We have also acquired an interesting set of diphtheria and scarlet fever case books for Park Isolation Hospital, 1910-1931 (D/H 11). This hospital was at the corner of Prospect Park, Reading, and nursed those suffering from serious communicable diseases. These records are subject to a hundred years' closure, because they contain medical details about named individuals, but will eventually be of great use to medical historians.

Lisa Spurrier

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