The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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The annual closure at Coley Avenue

Regular visitors who make use of microfiche (particularly the GRO indexes or parish registers) will have noticed that part of our stocktaking closure in November was taken up with renewing the dividers in the drawers. We seem to have tracked down a more robust type of divider than we previously used, with the result, we hope, that it will be easier to find your way through the fiche in the future.

We spent most of this year's stocktake in the strongrooms compiling an itemised inventory of what we have and where it is. We intend to use the results of this inventory to construct a searchable database of document locations during next year. This should provide a more efficient document production service for you.

Our open day in September was a great success with over 100 visitors seeing special displays of documents (above) and behind the scenes (p3)

Finally, don't forget you can get the *Echo* and other news online. This was the first year we have been able to advertise our stocktake closure dates on the web; our Christmas and New Year opening times are also posted on the news page.

Mark Stevens

Record Society publishes new book on mediaeval Reading

I am delighted to be able to tell you that the long-awaited edition of the Reading gild accounts, 1357-1516, prepared by the late Dr Cecil Slade, with an English translation (the originals are in Latin), will be published by Berkshire Record Society in January. This is a major work, comprising the surviving rolls of the Reading merchant gild over a period of more than one and a half centuries, with an extended introduction by Reading's leading historian and an acknowledged authority on the mediaeval town. Because of its size, this edition has been produced in two parts, volumes 6 and 7 in the Berkshire Record Series.

The books may be purchased from the Record Office for £25 each (£50 the pair) plus postage (contact us for details).

Peter Durrant

Absconding with the Clothing Club money

A shocking incidence of theft at St Sebastian's National (Church of England) School, Wokingham, in 1888, was revealed in a volume of parish accounts and memoranda (D/P 154C/5/1) deposited earlier this year. The hand is not very legible, and words in square brackets are my interpretation.

On St Thomas' day - a very sad event happened in this Parish. It was the last day of the school before the Christmas holidays. On that day the Master W J [Potts? – not very clear] was [bound to [illegible] over] to the Vicar [the amount] subscribed to the Clothing Club during the year – He arranged to do this at 2 o'clock – At 2 he did not come and the enquiry was made later on it was found that having secured his half year's stipend he had left the place, absconding in fact with the Clothing Club money – It seems that for at least a year he had been [falling] into evil ways – frequenting public houses, & neglecting his school work. The [conduct was] deplorable at the last inspection – He resigned & was under notice to go on February 1. It is a miserable ending of what seemed a good beginning – He has done good work and finished shamefully.

The Clothing Club subscriptions usually averaged at about 50 pounds a year, and, supplemented with gifts from charitable locals, were spent at local draper Heelas & Co. The school was not very lucky with its staff – a few years later the schoolmaster was prosecuted for hitting a child with an umbrella, causing severe bruising (recorded in D/P 154C/5/2).

Lisa Spurrier

Farming in wartime Inkpen

At the outbreak of World War II, Julia White was a 39 year old single woman living in the New Forest. Tired of her job in nursing, she decided to become a farmer as an alternative contribution to the war effort. Julia spent a year living in a caravan at Baverstock Farm in Shalbourne, Wiltshire, learning from Doris Mason who ran the farm. She then bought the run-down Manor Farm at Inkpen in west Berkshire for £3000, and ran it herself with her two little dogs as resident ratters and rabbiters.

Julia's unusually detailed farm diaries and memoirs of her time at the farm have now been given to Berkshire Record Office. Records of her daily work at Manor Farm show how she transformed it from a run-down place without mains water, electricity or sanitation, to a successful farm which won a prize at the Newbury Agricultural Show in 1952. She kept cattle, pigs, geese and chickens, and horses for ploughing. The fields were planted with wheat and barley. One temporary labourer who also lodged at the farmhouse turned out to be a professional burglar on the run from prison. He disappeared just before being unmasked, and the local police gave Julia a secret password to use on the phone to alert the authorities if he turned up again. German PoWs also helped out on the farm.

The memoirs record some of the special difficulties of wartime – rationing of clothes and gumboots, and the destruction caused by Army exercises with live ammunition (the Americans before D-Day and the British 6th Airborne Division before Arnhem). Julia's time at Manor Farm encompassed the transition from working with horses to mechanisation with tractors and a combine harvester. The farm was also the location for part of John Schlesinger's first short film *Black Legend*, in which some of her workers appeared as extras.

Julia sold the farm including the stock in 1955 for £40000, and returned to the New Forest.

Mark Stevens and Lisa Spurrier

The name's Day: Christmas Day

Some of the voluntary transcribers of parish registers have reported to us that they have found a number of unusual names in the course of their work, which we think deserve a wider audience. Interesting surnames include Haccabout, Bathbun, Thickbroom, Heathpacker, Sprouts, Tribute, Blackberry, Bisto, Mackarel, Rawbones, Cruel, Egg, Halfhead, Mylkesoppe, Strawberie, Mouldy and Varnish. Christian names include Biblical ones like Nazareth, Zipporah, Bathsheba, Mephibosheth, Abednego, Moses, Nebuchadnezzer (sic), and Philadelphia. Other choices were Blandy, Blandina, Brilliana, Banister (a girl's name), Phetiplace, Voice, Organ, Celestine, Freelove, Deodatus, Peering, Parthenia, Grecian, Carnation, Temperance, Onesipherus, Epaphroditus, Agabus and Lemontania, and the middle name Radical. Some of these were probably family surnames, while Classical literature and religion provided inspiration for others. Unexpected combinations of first and last names belonged to Berkshire people called Christmas Day, Princess Brittania, Angel Heaven, Mince Samuel Merriman, Areana Kerenhappuch Petty, Head Wise, Will Winner and Comfort Waker.

With many thanks to Mrs Ayres, Mrs Littleby and Mr and Mrs Woodall

Church ale

The regular visitations of Berkshire parishes by the Archdeacon involved the churchwardens being asked to "present" wrongdoers, so that they might be prosecuted in the church courts. In 1685, John Milward, curate of Warfield, turned the table on the churchwardens of his parish by presenting them for their failings (D/A2 c.140), in the following words:

"I present Henery Johnson & Mong Chamber Ch: Wardens for permitting ye Churchouse key to be kept by an Aleman for to sell his Ale therein & ye other part to keep his turfs for fuell … [and] both of them for not coming over to ye Evening Service upon ye Lds day For suffering persons to sit disorderly by laughing & other gestures & for suffering ye people to go out of ye Church before Sevice be ended & for permitting ye Boys at Communion Table & for their walking about ye Church."

Lisa Spurrier

Just catalogued

We are pleased to announce that we have resumed our programme of cataloguing (and in some cases recataloguing) Methodist records, halted before our move to this building. The first fruits of this come in the form of completed catalogues of the records of Hungerford Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1833-1968 (D/MS 3); Chieveley Primitive Methodist Church, 1917-1957 (D/MS 4); West Shefford Methodist Church, 1962-1980 (D/MS 5); Eastbury Primitive Methodist Church, Lambourn, 1822-1966 (D/MS 6); Lottage Road Methodist Church, Aldbourne, just over the border in Wiltshire, 1906-1942 (D/MS 7); Lambourn Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1874-1968 (D/MS 8); and, the most substantial collection of those listed so far, Windsor Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1825-1994 (D/MS 9). The Windsor records include detailed Sunday School records from the 19th century and minutes of the local Christian Workers' Association (for evangelistic work), 1888-1896.

Senior Conservator Sue Hourigan explains the work of the Conservation Department to Open Day visitors

We have also had some additional material deposited for Reading Oxford Road Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1879-1997 (D/MS 1), Newbury Bartholomew Street (former Primitive) Methodist Church, 1956-1967 (D/MS 2), and Wokingham Rose Street Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1881-2002 (D/MS 14), other records of which had already been catalogued according to the new scheme. Methodism is also represented by the recent arrival of minutes of the Slough Circle of the Regnal League, a branch of a national Christian organisation affiliated to Hampshire Avenue Methodist Church in Slough, 1998-2001 (D/EX 1759).

As St Saviour's Church in Coley, Reading, was declared redundant and closed in 1985, we are especially delighted to report that records (including the registers of baptisms and burials), 1922-1985, have now been deposited (D/P 178). Drayton parish registers of baptisms, 1882-1987, marriages, 1979-1999, and burials, 1919-1967, have also been transferred here, together with other parish records, 1835-2000 (D/P 48). Baptism registers have come in from Reading St Michael and All Angels, 1901-1946 (D/P 96B). Staff have also listed records of Greyfriars Church in Reading, 1876-1987 (D/P 163), most relating to the 18th century vicarage designed by celebrated architect John Soane, which had fallen into severe disrepair and had to be demolished. Parish records of Binfield All Saints, 1897-1957 (D/P 18), and service registers for Binfield St Mark, 1910-1944 (D/P 18B) and Hamstead Marshall, 1926-1957 (D/P 61), have also been deposited. The extensive records of Hurst Consolidated Charity for the Poor and its various predecessors, 1638-1995 (D/QX 30) have also been catalogued. The charities included almshouses in Hurst and Twyford, schools, apprenticeship, fuel for the poor and so on.

Some of the gaps in Reading Borough Council's own archive have been filled by the transfer of several reports to committees, 1941-1962 (R/AC 3). We have acquired minutes of Midgham Parish Meeting, 1894-1927 (D/EX 1767). We have purchased a miscellaneous collection of deeds relating to property in Ashbury, Beenham (Jennings or Carter's Farm), Eaton Hastings (Lower House Farm), Hungerford (including the Malt Shovel Inn), Reading, Sparsholt and Tilehurst, 1801-1900 (D/EZ 141). Staff have also listed deeds of Oakwood Lodge (formerly The Laburnums), Lambourn, 1736-1955 (D/EX 1764). A miscellany of material relating to Woolhampton, 1871-1909, includes papers on the construction of a fountain to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee (D/EX 1766). Another small collection of documents relating to East Garston and Speen, 1629-1871 (D/EX 1768) is among recent additions to our holdings, and we have acquired plans of proposed alterations to Englemere Wood Lodge, Ascot. Finally, one woman's unusual contribution to the war effort is revealed in the unusually detailed records of Manor Farm, Inkpen, 1941-1955, with a memoir written in 1982 (D/EX 1785), as described on page 2 of this issue.

Lisa Spurrier

Staff news

We are pleased to welcome Helen Williams, who joined us in November as the new morning searchroom assistant. Jane Chedzey, formerly attached to the enclosure records digitisation project team, has been appointed as an archives assistant to work on architectural records. James Emptage has joined the enclosure project.

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