The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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More news on the building works

Many thanks to you all for continuing to bear with us while the various remedial works to the building are undertaken. By the time you read this, we hope to have moved back into the first of the downstairs strongrooms (complete with new floor), and to have moved out of the second. Needless to say access to original documents will still be restricted, so if there is something specific that you are journeying to see, please do get in touch before you visit.

As I write (mid December) work is still on schedule, and should be completed by the end of March, which is the revised date we were given when work commenced. The move of documents back into the second strongroom, which should be the last period of major disruption, is due to take place in the second and third weeks of March. We'll place an update on the desks in the searchroom and on the website once that has been confirmed.

Mark Stevens

Staff news

Brenda Edwards, one of our hardworking office staff members, retired in November after working for the Record Office since 1998. Happily it's not a final farewell, as Brenda will be returning to help us by typing catalogues on a casual basis in the New Year. We welcomed new administrative support assistant Victoria Lewis to the staff in December. Congratulations go to Ivone Turnbull, promoted to the new post of Visitor Services Archivist.

Advance notice

Look out over the next few months for news of the launch of our New Opportunities Fund project to digitise the enclosure maps for Berkshire and make them accessible on the Internet.

Right: a charmingly old fashioned image of family life in the mid 20th century as shown on the cover of the cradle roll of a local Methodist Church.

Brightwalton Marriages Shock!

When George Miles and Sarah Gibbs were married at Brightwalton on 16 January 1864, little did they suspect that they were the first of a long line of couples stretching forward forty years whose marriages were not actually legal. In 1861 a faculty had been granted to take down the ancient parish church and build a new one on a different site. The new building was consecrated on 3 August 1863 but no deed substituting the old church for the new one was ever obtained. As a result all the marriages solemnized there were invalid, a situation which was only resolved by the passing of the Marriages Legalisation Act, 1903.

Brightwalton shared the dubious distinction of featuring in this Act with a church and chapel in Essex and a church, chapel and mission room in Yorkshire, all of which had by some sin of omission rendered their marriages invalid. Nothing if not thorough the Act not only made valid all the marriages solemnized and banns read in these buildings but also declared that the ministers should not be liable to any civil or ecclesiastical censure and that all the registers should be regarded as a correct record which could be accepted in a court of law.

One cannot help thinking that had Wilkie Collins known of these particular buildings he might not have had to resort to the tortuous and often improbable sets of circumstances found in many of his novels.

Sabina Sutherland

Marginalia

As well as containing records of christenings, marriages and burials, parish registers sometimes contain little notes added by the vicar, which give valuable insights into the lives of and personalities of his parishioners.

The Vicar of Speen in the mid C17th was a note-writer, and in the burial registers from 1742-1746 can be found the following:

24 February 1745 *Capt William Wood 46 from Bristol, died at the Angel, Speenhamland. He took 3 French ships, the least of greater force than his, they were all together and attack'd him. He was in his way to London to be made a Commodore.*

22 March 1746 *George Purnell 75 A good honest patient Man, born (I think) at or near Wooton Under Edg Glostersh [sic], had been in good circumstances, but much reduced, yet bore undeserved Hardships and Neglect with a Christian Mind*

As we search for ancestors about whom we know very little other than names, dates and sometimes occupations, we must be grateful for these little scraps of information.

Neila Warner

Editor's note: Another entry from this register was published in the 6th issue of the *Echo*.

Female Pills invented in Reading

Did you know one of the most popular patent medicines of the 19th century was invented in Reading? Local doctor John Hooper was granted a patent in 1743 for a recipe he sold as "Dr Hooper's Female Pills". These purported to cure "the irregularities" and palpitations of the heart, amongst other things. Dr Hooper also patented a Child Bed Cordial and powder and Strengthening Balsam in 1753, to help with recovery after childbirth.

Dr Hooper (who died in 1773) and later his family continued to manufacture the pills at their dispensary in Reading until they sold the business in 1849. In the last issue of the *Echo* we mentioned that the Record Office has recently acquired the papers, mainly accounts, of Dr Hooper's grandson, who carried on the business (D/EX 1830). It looks, from scattered references in the latter, as if the original Dr Hooper may have been a Wesleyan Methodist, and his family background may have been within the local Quaker community.

Lisa Spurrier

Buried in the garden

In the Hungerford burial register for 1833 (D/P 71/1/14) there is a note pinned against the entry for the burial of baby Sarah Jane, daughter of Sarah Ann and William Bunce, on 24 January 1833. The grieving parents were so annoyed about being asked to pay the (usual) fee to the clergyman that they refused to hand over the money! The note by the incumbent reads,

"*Won't pay it, the woman told me she would bury in the garden next time*."

Julie Grisman

Just catalogued

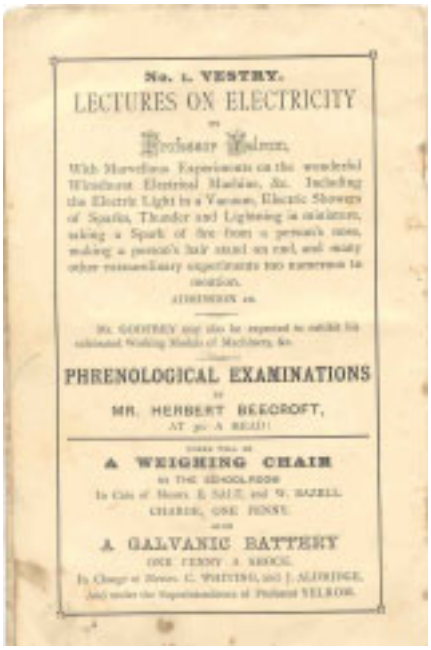
The most interesting document to have been added to our collections in recent months is probably a fascinating photograph album entitled *Didcot Senior School At Work* (D/EX 1828). This was produced in 1935 as a souvenir of the school's "experimental" work. The (originally) mixed secondary school was established in 1931 for 11-15 year olds.

Among the vocational subjects taught were rural science and horticulture. "Groupwork and building construction" was a course taught to 3rd and 4th year boys in the Technical Class for "intending mecanics" (sic). Some of the boys cultivated the school gardens. There was a 2 or 3 year "commercial" course in shorthand, typing, duplicating, book keeping and office routine. There were also more conventional subjects such as mathematics, art, science and Physical Training.

Some tuition took the form of voluntary Societies or Clubs, including surveying and mapmaking, gardening, drama and history. Photography and cycling took place out of school. Many of these activities are shown in the album, as well as photographs of formal classes at work, such as gym displays, the science labs and typing classes. Members of the Art Club even produced hand-drawn white ink illustrations!

Family historians will be excited by the arrival of the Shottesbrooke parish register of baptisms from 1813 to 1974 (D/P 111). Other newly catalogued parish records come from Reading St Laurence, including the baptism register, 1889-2002 (D/P 97). Also new is 20th century material from White Waltham, including the marriage register, 1993-1998 (D/P 142), and Earley St Peter (D/P 191).

The Methodist records cataloguing project continues apace, with new lists for several churches in Reading : Elm Park Hall (D/MS 56), Wesley (D/MS 60), two churches known as West Reading (D/MS 61 and 62), Whitley Hall (D/MS 63), Wokingham Road (D/MS 64), and Woodley, 1884 (D/MS 84). Also well represented are the Methodists of Slough, with new catalogues for Hampshire Avenue (D/MS 67), Ledgers Road (D/MS 68), St Andrew's (formerly Slough Central Hall) (D/MS 69) and William Street (D/MS 70) churches.



No. 1. VESTRY.

LECTURES ON ELECTRICITY

PHRENOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS

MR. HERBERT BEECROFT,

A WEIGHING CHAIR

A GALVANIC BATTERY

Above right : see the more unusual fundraising activities available at Wesley Methodist Church in May 1888.

Other newly listed material comes from Methodist churches at Shalbourne (D/MS 65), Shefford Woodlands (D/MS 66), Stockcross (D/MS 71), Riseley Common, Swallowfield (D/MS 72), Thatcham (D/MS 73), Theale (D/MS 74), Three Mile Cross (D/MS 75), Tilehurst (D/MS 76), Kentwood, also in Tilehurst (D/MS 77), Wash Common, Newbury (D/MS 78), the old Primitive Methodist Church in Denmark Street, Windsor (D/MS 79), Winkfield Row (D/MS 81), and Woodlands Park, White Waltham (D/MS 83).

We have also acquired records of two Methodist Churches with histories as "Undenominational Missions": the former Gospel Hall at Old Windsor (D/MS 80) and the church at Winnersh (D/MS 82). The latter was given to the Methodists in 1959 by its former trustees, two sisters who subsequently regretted the decision, and the later records are unfortunately full of references to the subsequent dispute.

We have also received deeds of property in Sutton Wick, 1727-1841 (D/EX 1834), and ephemera from 2002's Golden Jubilee celebrations in the county (D/EX 1822).

Lisa Spurrier

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