The
Berkshire Echo

Berkshire Record Office Newsletter Issue 30 Winter 2004/2005

Introductory Visits

In October, we undertook an introductory visit of the searchroom for newcomers to the Office. Places were limited to 10 and we had a full turnout. The day went very well, with our visitors commenting on the fact that they felt more confident on how to go about undertaking research at the office. As a result of the success of the day, we have set two further dates in 2005 for other visits. The dates are: **17th January 2005** and **11th April 2005**. If you would like to attend, or know someone who would like to attend, please ask to put your name down on the list at Reception at the Office or call 0118 901 5132.

Ivone Turnbull

Stocktake Update

Our closure for stocktake in the first two weeks of November allowed us to undertake a large number of activities. Behind the scenes we re-organised certain boxes in the strongrooms, repackaged numerous items and pressed on with cataloguing. We also up-dated the website. In the searchroom, many binders and labels were replaced, many fiche and indexes were checked and put in order, and new labels for the parish index made. We hope that all these activities will be of benefit to you.

Ivone Turnbull

Production Changes

Upon re-opening after stocktake, we introduced changes to our production service. Previously items were produced at various times during the day until the last collection time. We are now aiming to produce tickets as soon as possible after they are ordered, though it may take a little longer between 12.00 and 2.00pm over the lunch period. We still have the same last production times each day. We hope that this will be a benefit to you.

Ivone Turnbull

Just Passing Through

The baptism of a gypsy child, recorded in Arborfield parish, 18 January 1889 (document ref. D/P6/1/5), contains an interesting note by the Incumbent (Revd. John Jones), on the reason for performing the baptism in his parish.

The child, James, son of William and Emily Smith (father described as a "Gypsy Pedler"), was baptised because:

"Emily Smith said she was on her way from the encampment near the Duke of Wellington's Monument Stratfield Saye to Bristol her infant was ill of bronchitis & she said the doctor of Swallowfield had told her to get it baptised".

Julie Grisman

Drunken prison clerk shock!

The Record Office has discovered a shocking lapse in security at Reading Prison – in January 1868 (document ref. D/EX 1847/1). The Justices of the Peace appointed to visit Reading Prison and ensure all was well noted:

"Complaint made by the Governor against the Prison Clerk Mr Brownjohn for Drunkenness & Consequent loss of Prison Keys which were found in one of the Prison Reception Cells."

Although none of the prisoners escaped, the JPs added, firmly:

"Drunkenness & loss of keys by a trusted officer endangers the safety of the Gaol & we have felt it our duty to dismiss Mr Brownjohn."

Lisa Spurrier

New Items For Sale

We have recently acquired two new Godfrey Maps (reproductions of old Ordnance Survey maps), which you can buy at Reception at the Office for £2.10 each. These are the Vale of White Horse, 1893 and Eton and Eton Wick, 1897. We have also introduced the sale of some snacks, including biscuits and crisps (also available at Reception).

Ivone Turnbull

Staff News

We recently welcomed two new members of staff to the Record Office. Alison Pritchard joined us as an Administration Assistant in October and Ruth King joined us as a Searchroom Assistant in November.

Ivone Turnbull

Just Catalogued

The highlight of this issue's Just Catalogued is the account and memoranda books of the Southby family of Buckland (D/EX 1876). These detail life for a wealthy Berkshire family, principally for 1695-1734, and include Richard Southby's dancing and fencing lessons and Oxford college expenses; the costs incurred in buying an army commission for his younger brother John; and wife Bridget's household and family expenses, including payments for the nursing and schooling of her children.

A recent state school arrival is the log book of North Town School in Maidenhead, 1946-1968 (D/EX 1880). More unusually, we have recently acquired a fascinating photograph album showing life at an exclusive preparatory school, Wixenford, in Wokingham, 1931-1934 (D/EX 1883).

We have received a number of new deposits from parish churches. The largest accrual comes from Swallowfield, including 20th century registers of baptisms and marriages, and marriage licences, 1780-1952. The newly deposited records of Woodley St John include registers of baptisms, 1881-2001, and marriages, 1979-2003; plans and charming watercolour sketches of the original vicarage, built in 1882; and Woodley Church of England School managers' minutes, 1903-1949.

Image of Swallowfield Church taken from D/P 129/28/11/5

Additional material from the parish of Twyford includes a petition for the church there to be enlarged, dated 1834; this did not happen, and in fact a completely

new church was built in 1847. Other parishes to have added to their holdings here include Burghfield (including 20th century baptism and marriage registers), Grazeley (including marriage registers, 1989-2000), and Tilehurst St George (including 20th century marriage and burial registers). We have also acquired charming watercolour sketches of the parish churches of Cumnor, North and South Hinksey, and Wytham, 1851-1852 (D/EX 1860).

Material continues to arrive from local Methodist churches. It was particularly exciting to take in records from Maidenhead Wesleyan Methodist Church (D/MS 10), including the earliest society accounts and the first class book, both from 1829. There are also three fascinating examples of "Workers' Plans" from the late 19th century (one shown here), which allocated weekly duties to Sunday School teachers, leaders of prayer meetings etc - even the person due to give the visiting preacher a meal! We also received additional records for the Methodist church at Cookham Rise (D/MS 36), and for the various Reading, Bradfield and Silchester circuits (D/MC 1-6).

PLAN FOR GENERAL METHODIST PURPOSES.
MAIDENHEAD. 1872.

Much material relating to the history of Welford is to be found in the carefully arranged scrapbooks kept by the rector's wife Henrietta Batson c.1890-1919 (D/EX 1846). After her only child died aged seven weeks in 1880, Mrs Batson devoted her life to local history and to writing (she was the author of six novels and three books on gardening). The books include drawings and watercolours of Welford and Wickham by previous rectors' wives and daughters, and the text of the mummers' play performed at Hoe Benham until 1900. Henrietta's activities were revealed in the last issue of the Echo.

Lisa Spurrier

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