# The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

**NO. 2 SUMMER 1997**

## What's New?

We are still getting some anxious enquiries from people who are worried that Berkshire Record Office will disappear on 1 April 1998. Fear not! Foster Wheeler, the engineering firm which has bought Shire Hall, is allowing us to stay on in our present premises, and for public access to continue until the year 2000, by which time we should have a new purpose-built Record Office. At the moment the most likely site for the new office is adjacent to the Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths at Yeomanry House, Castle Hill, Reading, although this has not yet been finalised. From 1 April 1998 the Record Office will be run by Reading Unitary Authority, as a county service, on behalf of all the unitary authorities in Berkshire, and with any luck it should be a seamless transition. That's what we're aiming for anyway. So, don't stop coming after 31 March. We'll still be going strong.

I must apologise to anyone who has been on tenterhooks to find out more about East Garston's mad vicar mentioned in the last *Echo*. I am in the rare and enviable (and, no doubt, temporary) position of having an abundance of copy, so the mad vicar has been held over (presumably in a straight-jacket) for a future edition.

**Elizabeth Hughes**

## Outreach Events

### Exhibitions

Currently on display in our Shire Hall showcases is the annual Just Arrived exhibition, highlighting some of the most exciting accessions of 1996-1997.

The exhibition includes a coroner's account book which was used by three successive Reading-based coroners to record the cost of attending inquests. In it is an entry for an unnamed highwayman who was drowned while evading capture by swimming across Virginia Water in December 1797. The 1541 will of William Martyn, Wokingham clothier, is interesting because it shows the survival of Catholic feeling at the time of the Reformation and also lists the various tools of the clothier's trade, which William kept at Swallowfield Mill.

The church book of the Newbury Independent Church is one of the oldest surviving records of any Berkshire nonconformist church. The opening pages are an account of a dispute among the dissenters of Newbury in 1696-1697. The very fine plan of Hidden Farm, Hungerford, was drawn by John Garlick of Welford in April 1740. The buildings drawn in elevation include the farmhouse and farm buildings, Eddington bridge, houses in Eddington village and Hungerford church.

## Out and About

You may have seen us at two locally organised family history events: a family history fair at the Viables Craft Centre, Basingstoke, at the end of April, and the Berkshire Family History Society's conference at Prospect School, Tilehurst at the end of June (at which Peter Durrant, the County Archivist, gave a lecture on the county records of Berkshire).

We are keen to support local events such as these and attend several throughout the year, complete with our exhibition on the work of the office, and a range of handy books, maps, and other sales items, plus free leaflets, not to mention cheery staff to give you advice on how to make the best use of your local record office! Come and see us - future issues of the *Echo* will include dates and venues, or you can contact me for details on 0118 923 3186.

## Archives on Air

We now have a regular monthly slot on BBC Radio Thames Valley FM (once every four weeks at about 3.15 PM for about ten minutes). Recent topics have included parish registers, school records, 19th century records of elections, health remedies found in archives, prison records, travel diaries and 18th century records of the poor. The 5 August broadcast will be on women's' pages in local newspapers of the 1920s and 1930s. Future topics to be announced - tune in!

**Katie Willis**

# Leaf Casting for Beginners

The Greenham parish register of births and marriages 1706-1769 (D/P 130B/1/1) has recently been repaired using a process called leaf casting

The first stage in the process is to remove the surface dirt The pages are then washed in a bath of water to reduce staining and put some strength back into the paper. The pages are left to dry before being collated into new folios. Two single sheets are then placed on the casting area within a template set to the finished folio size. At this stage it is possible to realign text and to sort out crumpled areas. The paper is then ready to be cast.

Leaf casting works by pulling a reservoir of water, in which the fibres are suspended, downwards through a casting screen. The water takes the path of least resistance, passing through the screen and depositing the fibres where there is no paper. The casting is then removed and placed between felts to be pressed until dry. The completed register is then rebound in a limp vellum style incorporating the original cover.

One of the advantages of this method over the more traditional repair is the reduction in time taken to repair a document. Repetitive repair and repair of intricate damage caused by insects can also be carried out to a very high standard, and more accurate colour matching is possible by blending different quantities of raw fibre. Lastly the process is fully reversible, which is in keeping with the conservation code of ethics.

We have only had the leaf caster for a few months but we can already see the benefits. It is not a replacement for the traditional methods but offers an alternative to give us greater freedom of choice when undertaking conservation work.

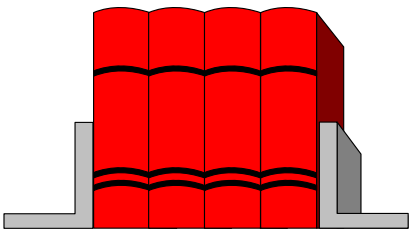
Although leaf casting is not a new technique (the first machine was developed nearly 30 years ago) its slow development

was probably due to expense and the lack of knowledge in the preparation of paper fibres. Our machine has been developed by a conservator and works on the principle of gravity rather than suction, which makes it more affordable for the Conservation Unit budget.

**Sally Webb**

# Record Office Library Periodicals

It is not possible, for lack of space, to display all our library stock in the searchroom. We would always advise searchers to check our library card indexes (authors, subjects, places, personal names, and periodicals). These will reveal any volumes, of interest both to local historians and family historians, which are shelved behind the scenes, and any pamphlets and periodicals stored in boxes, which can easily be retrieved for you.



Among the periodicals which we receive, usually monthly or quarterly, are:

*Berkshire Family Historian*
*Oxfordshire Family Historian*
*Root and Branch* (West Surrey FHS)
*Family Tree Magazine*
*Family History News and Digest*

*Berkshire Old and New*
*Berkshire Local History Association newsletter*
*Berkshire Archaeological Journal*
*In the Field* (Berkshire Field Research Group)
*Berkshire Museums News*
*Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society newsletter*
*Journal of the Twyford and Ruscombe Local History Society*
*Southern History*
*Local Historian* (British Association for Local History)
*Local History News.*

We also subscribe to professional publications, such as:

*Journal of the Society of Archivists*
*Archives* (British Records Association).

A fuller list is now displayed in a notice on the wall of the searchroom. Details of everything we hold can be found in our Periodicals Index also in the searchroom. And don't forget, if you're not sure or can't find it, just ask!

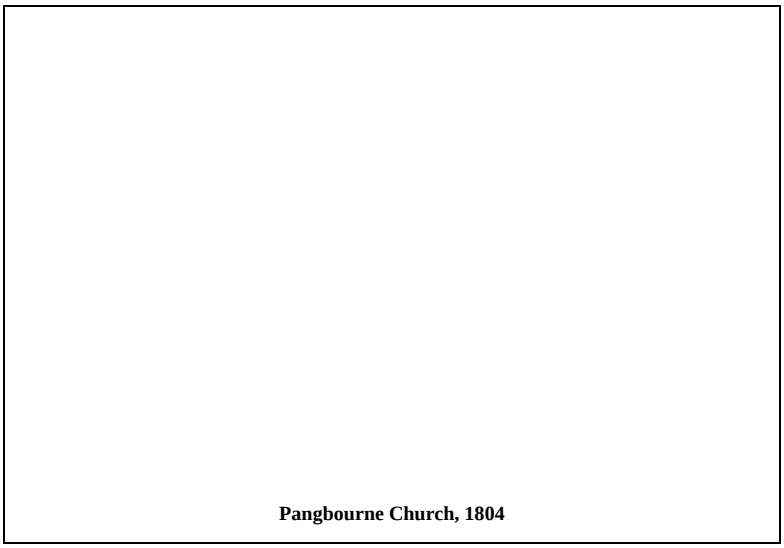
**Bob Hale**

# Just Catalogued

The last few months have seen some exciting additions to our catalogued holdings. The highlight of these is probably the papers of the Loveden family of Buscot 1190-1907 (**D/ELV**). The oldest deed in this collection has a well-preserved seal, which is the oldest in the Record Office. There are some other medieval and 16th and 17th century estate papers, but the archive is at its fullest for the lifetime of Edward Loveden Loveden in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It includes many papers, principally accounts, of the building of Buscot Park (now a National Trust property) in 1780-1783. On a more scandalous note, the archive also contains a copy of a love letter from Edward's wife Anne to her lover, which was intercepted and produced

in evidence in a divorce suit in 1809.

We are delighted that minutes of Maidenhead Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapel 1815-1838 have been deposited (**D/N 34**). The church closed in 1858, so the survival of its earliest records is fortunate. Received at the same time were records of the Maidenhead Auxiliary of the London Missionary Society 1828-1974 (**D/N 35**) and of Maidenhead Free Church Council 1892-1921 (**D/N 36**), and annual reports of the Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks Association of Independent Churches 1875-1899 (**D/EX 1447**) (earlier than those in the Association's own archives).



**Pangbourne Church, 1804**

Anglican parish records have been deposited from a number of parishes, including: the first ever deposits by California (**D/P 189**), including registers of baptisms 1940-1980 and marriages 1972-1978; Pangbourne 1920-1992, including banns 1962-1992 and PCC minutes 1920-1978 (**D/P 91**); Reading St Laurence 1754-1853, including pew rents 1775-1809 and 1852-1855 (**D/EX 1427**); Tilehurst 1835-1991, including marriage registers 1946-1986, banns 1924-1991, and overseers' quarterly accounts 1835-1848 (**D/P 132**); and Waltham St Lawrence 1867-1994, including a roll of honour of WWI soldiers from the parish (**D/P 141**).

Official records include a complete run of the minutes of Newland parish council, 1894-1948 (**CPC 73D**); accounts of John Kendrick's charity (run by Reading Borough), 1837-1852 (**D/EX 1448**); visiting JPs' reports on Reading Gaol, 1787-1801, including references to escape attempts (**D/EX 1452**); and the letter book of Reading and Wokingham District School, Wargrave, 1850-1856 (**D/EX 1461**). This school, in the old Wargrave workhouse, was for the education of pauper children, and was designed largely to keep them away from the bad influence of older paupers. The letter book was one of several deposits received *via* the Reading Local Studies Library.

A fascinating glimpse of local pubs is to be found in the detailed probate inventory of Mrs Elizabeth Burd of Reading, 1748 (**D/EX 1453**). Mrs Burd owned pubs in Beenham, Caversham, Knowl Hill, Reading, Theale and Tilehurst; all probably inherited from her first husband Robert Noake. The inventory gives details of the contents of her own house in Castle Street, arranged by room - an interesting indication of the furnishing of a wealthy tradesman's home in the mid 18th century.

**Lisa Spurrier**

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