The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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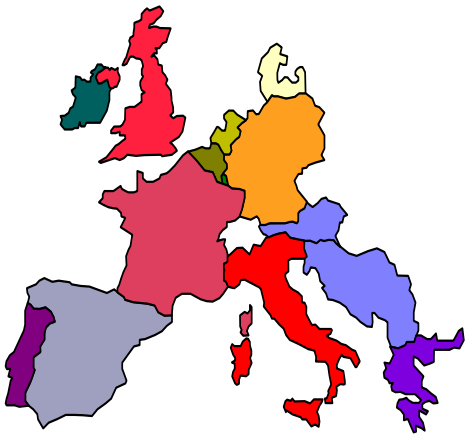
What's New?

We have recently acquired overseas indexes of births, marriages and deaths from the Registrar General. These are as follows: army returns of births, marriages and deaths, 1796-1965 (excluding war deaths); Consular returns of births, marriages and deaths for British citizens abroad, July 1849-1965; High Commission returns of births, marriages and deaths from the date of independence of the Commonwealth country to 1965; and combined overseas births, marriages and deaths, 1965-1994. We do not yet have returns of war deaths, but we hope to be able to buy these, and the other available overseas indexes, later this financial year.



Elizabeth Hughes

Thomas Noon Talfourd : Reading's Justice

The autumn 1997 edition of the *Echo* promised an article on Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795-1854), whose papers had then just been made available in the Record Office, and here is Part One.

Thomas Noon Talfourd was born in Reading in 1795, son of a brewer and grandson of the Revd Thomas Noon, minister of Broad Street Chapel (now Waterstone's bookshop), Reading. It seems that his parents' firm religious views meant that as a child, he was forbidden to attend performances of Shakespeare, on the grounds of their immorality. He spent two years at Reading Grammar School, where contemporaries were later to recall him as a dull, stupid boy, but while there first attracted public acclaim with the publication of a volume of didactic poetry in 1811.

After leaving school, Talfourd studied law. Before being called to the Bar in 1821, he supplemented his income by writing literary and dramatic criticism; he was one of the first to acclaim Wordsworth, and became a friend of Coleridge and other distinguished writers of the time. He also wrote a number of poetic plays in a style which might most kindly be described as florid. He married in 1822 after a 7 year engagement, and in the early years of his marriage supplemented the family income by working as legal reporter on the Oxford Circuit (which included Reading and Abingdon assize courts) for the *Times*. He was what the *Law Magazine* was to call "a sound rather than first-rate lawyer", at his best when sympathetic to his client, and one of the things he was proudest of was his role in the abolition of the pillory as a punishment.

In 1849 he was delighted to be appointed a judge, and he was clearly a careful, conscientious officer of the court. He travelled around the country to attend assize courts mostly in Wales and the south-west, attending Abingdon and Reading Assizes once each, and also heard cases at the Old Baily. Talfourd died suddenly of an apoplexy while addressing the jury at Stafford Assizes, speaking on the subject of the divisions of English classes.

Talfourd's papers include his journals, 1841-1854, an account of a European trip of 1846 which he later published, rough autobiographical notes (wonderfully entitled "Gleams of Long past Life as they twinkle Through the mist of years"), and a couple of drafts of plays. The most interesting, however, were his legal notebooks, some 35 volumes in which Talfourd made notes of the cases he heard as a judge, often recording evidence more or less verbatim, and usually giving the verdict.

Cases heard at assizes included many instances of burglary, robbery with violence, embezzlement and fraud, rape, murder and bestiality. The most sensational case, however, was at the Old Bailey in 1850, when Talfourd sentenced Robert Pate to two years imprisonment for attacking Queen Victoria in her carriage in the street. Talfourd does not fit the popular impression of a harsh Victorian "hanging judge". From the notebooks, I know of only eight death sentences passed by Talfourd, and two of these were commuted to lengthy periods of transportation.

Details of the cases Talfourd heard will be described in Part Two of this article.

Lisa Spurrier

Criminal Ancestors?

"Anyone missing from your family tree in the 19th century? Ever wondered if they might have been in jail? Or Australia? The Criminal Register Indexes can provide a very quick answer to the above problems." Thus reads the sales blurb for microfiche published by Stuart Tamblin, and just obtained by the Record Office Library, for the first series of indexes to registers in Class HO27 at the PRO, in which the Home Office recorded people tried from 1805 to 1816. These are now indexed by county, and we have bought Berkshire and Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire and Herefordshire, together with a supplement of "executions, treasonists, rioters and machine breakers" for the whole of England and Wales. The indexes cover both Quarter Sessions and Assize court trials, and give brief details which will enable further research to be carried out either at the relevant County Record Office (Quarter Sessions) or at Kew (Assizes), e.g.

GOLDING, Abram
1809, County: Berks
When tried: January session
Crime: larceny
Sentence: transportation for 7 years

The original registers continue up to 1892, and we shall look out for the fiche indexes from 1817 onwards when they become available.

Bob Hale

Just Catalogued

A number of West Berkshire churches have added to their deposits in the Record Office. They are Midgham, which has deposited registers of burials 1813-1980, and baptisms 1931-1982 (D/P 130C), Woolhampton, with the register of baptisms for 1872-1980 (D/P 156), and Beenham, which has deposited registers of baptisms 1924-1984, and of services, 1963-1977 (D/P 16). We have also acquired Reading Christchurch parish magazines, 1904-1906 (D/EZ 119). Nonconformists are also represented, with the recent deposit of the records of Woolhampton Congregational Church, which cover the period 1838-1969, and include registers of baptisms 1838-1859, 1877-1904, and 1930-1941 (D/N 38). The records of Crowthorne Methodist Church, 1870-1988 (D/MS 19), have also been transferred here. The Church of England is also represented by the records of Reading Deanery Mothers Union, 1926-1983, and of three of its constituent branches : Christchurch, 1933-1996, Holy Trinity, 1966-1974, and St John with St Stephen, 1957-1974 (D/EX 1480).

An interesting collection of records has been received from Compton Civil Parish Council, covering the years 1814-1995 (CPC 41). The oldest documents are the inclosure map and award for West Compton, 1814-1816, and also of particular interest are the papers of the Local Defence Committee, 1941-1944, and a series of photographs of floods which devastated the village in 1925.

The disruption caused locally by World War II is also reflected in plans of proposed post-Blitz emergency building arrangements, 1942-1943, (D/EX 1483). We have also acquired the admission register for Newbury County Girls' School, 1943-1961 (98/SCH/1) and the logbook of Ashampstead Church of England School, 1901-1903 (D/EX 1493).

We have purchased an interesting pamphlet recording the speeches of local candidates at the General Election of 1818 (D/EZ 116) (see illustration).

A particularly interesting deposit has been the records of the Reading Temperance Society, 1832-1993 (D/EX 1492). Among the records are reference to a particularly hard winter (1891) which led to many local workers being thrown out of work, when the Society set up a soup kitchen for affected families, and provided free breakfasts for local schoolchildren. A local organisation of more recent vintage to deposit its records has been the East Reading Horticultural Society, 1941-1991 (D/EX 1482). The Clewer Non-Ecclesastical Charities derive from a number of charities set up in the parish of Clewer at various dates between the 17th and 19th centuries. We have catalogued their records, 1861-1980, which contain much detail relating to beneficiaries (D/QX 33). We have also listed an interesting collection of deeds of property in Enborne, Newbury, Speen and Thatcham belonging to St Bartholomew's Charity, Newbury, 1546-1879 (D/EX 1379).

The most interesting estate collection to have been listed recently consists of

Chamberhouse manor and estate records, 1306-1800 (D/EZ 77). This estate was in the parish of Thatcham, and highlights of the archive include 15th century manorial accounts, two 15th century leases of Chamberhouse mill which are (unusually) in English, and a charming survey and plan book containing a set of plans of the estate, copied in 1691 from an even earlier original map. Unfortunately, the 18th century estate papers have been badly damaged by exposure to water, and the majority will be unavailable until essential and extensive conservation work can be carried out.

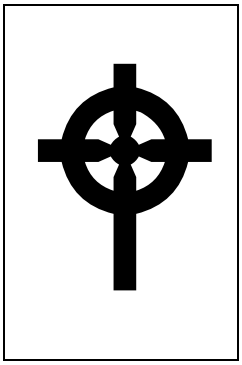
Another fine collection relating to the property of the Blagrave family of Southcote and Calcot Place has been catalogued, consisting primarily of deeds and estate papers, from the 13th century to 1902 (D/EBG). The family acquired much of the Reading property formerly held by Reading Abbey after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, much of which they let out on long leases, including, in the early 19th century, the homes of Reading printer Robert Snare and the Revd Richard Valpy, a much celebrated headmaster of Reading School. The mediaeval deeds refer to property in Shinfield and Swallowfield, but the majority of the collection relates to Reading.

We have also purchased a revealing probate inventory of the Revd Osborne Gordon, Rector of Easthampstead, 1883 (both D/EZ 118). Gordon was a distinguished scholar who taught the future Edward VII at Oxford. The inventory, which records all his possessions at the time of his death, includes, rather charmingly, a black retriever dog and kennel, along with books including the complete works of his friend Ruskin, an 88-volume "library of Anglo-Catholic theology", and *Alice in Wonderland*, whose author he also knew.

Lisa Spurrier

The Late Unlamented

The following verse appears in the parish register of Speen near Newbury by the burial of Thomas Smith recorded on 6 October 1742 (D/P116/1/2). One wonders what Tom Smith did in life to deserve such an epitaph.



Tom Smith is dead and here he lies
Nobody laughs, nobody cries
Where his souls gone or how he fares
Nobody knows nor nobody cares

Elizabeth Hughes