The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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What's New?

Building work on the new Record Office continues apace, and the building is scheduled to be handed over by the builders on Christmas Eve. This means that we shall be able to start moving documents in as soon as possible in the New Year. As stated in previous editions of the *Echo*, we do not yet have an exact timetable for moving but we anticipate some disruption to the service from January onwards. This will be relatively small at first, as we are aiming to move uncatalogued, closed and rarely requested records first, but as we move more of our holdings, users will find that original documents will become unavailable. So, please contact us in advance if you plan to visit in the New Year, to make sure that the records you need are available and that we are still open when you want to come! Access to records on film and fiche will be the last to go, when we close for the final phase of the move.

Our ability to answer enquiries will also be reduced, with records in transit and staff concentrating on moving documents and getting the new Record Office ready, and we will not be taking on any talks or visits during the first three months of 1999. Please bear with us. If all goes to plan, we should be up and running in our brand new building in early April.

We are compiling a mailing list of individuals and institutions to whom we should send details of the moving schedule when it has been finalised. If you would like to be on the list, please let me know (see address on the back page).

Elizabeth Hughes

Berkshire War Graves

Researchers tracing relatives killed in the First World War may be interested in a list of war graves in Berkshire churchyards and cemeteries compiled by the Imperial War Graves Commission (as it then was) in 1930, largely from information provided by the families (**D/EZ 110/19/1**). For instance, did you know that there were no less than 208 war graves in Reading Cemetery? They include eight German soldiers and a Serbian, although the list only gives details of the British and colonial forces.

Examples include Corporal Charles Eggleton, boxing instructor to the Royal Berks Regiment, who died of wounds on 6 February 1915, aged 29, and was buried in Bray Cemetery. His parents' names and address are given (as is the case for most entries), and in this instance the deceased's place of birth is provided (nearby Fifield).

22 year old Lance Corporal A Gibbs of the same regiment died of wounds caused by gassing on 19 April 1917, and was buried in Wokingham churchyard.

A number of Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians were buried in Berkshire, including one Maori soldier. Private Puaka Whitau, just 19 years old, died of "sickness" in 1915 and was buried with other war deaths in a part of St Sebastian's churchyard, Wokingham.

Finally, a few women are counted among Berkshire's war graves: a couple of nurses and Ellen Clark of Mount Pleasant Grove, Reading, who served with the Women's Royal Air Force. She died of pneumonia in 1918 aged 35, and is buried in Reading Cemetery.

Lisa Spurrier

Sandhurst - Missing Baptisms and Burials Uncovered!

The contents of a damaged parish register for Sandhurst covering baptisms 1696-1812, marriages 1696-1753, and burials 1696-1812 (D/P 102/1/3) has recently been made available. The original had been subject to water damage some time in the past and it was thought that the information contained in the volume would be lost forever. Bishop's Transcripts (transcripts of which are already available in the search room) cover most of the register, but there was a gap for baptisms and burials 1771-1793.

New materials have enabled one of our conservators to separate the folios that had been stuck together or to the front board. The original register could not be repaired to make it available (it is still not fit to be produced) but special permission was given to photocopy the individual folios. This copy is now available in the search room together with an index and transcript of the missing baptisms and burials. Look for it with the other transcripts.

Sarah Edmondson

Reading Prisoners Released

Amongst the records of Reading Prison deposited in Berkshire Record Office are four photograph albums of prisoner "mug shots" (references P/RP1/5/1-4) for the period 1883-1915. It is interesting to see how the photographs change over time. The earliest photographs show the inmates from head to lap. Many are dressed in their ordinary clothes, others in prison garb (yes, with arrows!) and circular prison numbers which indicate the wing, floor and number of their cell. Between 1887 and 1895 most have their hands in front of them, palm inwards and fingers spread, presumably to show if any fingers are missing. In 1889 the photographer begins to use a mirror so that a profile, as well as front view, is included in the single shot. In 1896 the technique changes completely; the photographer takes two facial shots, one face one, one profile, we no longer see the prisoner's torso, and prison uniform is rarely seen

The first three albums are indexed and the subjects of quite a few of the photographs can be found in the nominal registers of prisoners, which cover the period 1889-1915. The registers include the

prisoner's name, the time and place of hearings of their case, their offence, sentence, education, age, height hair colour, trade or occupation, religion, birthplace, number of previous convictions and date of discharge. Unfortunately the Record Office does not hold an unbroken series of nominal registers: those for the period 1894-1905 for women and 1894-1908 for men are lacking (this includes the period of Oscar Wilde's incarceration in the Gaol) and that for 1892-1894 is currently too fragile to be produced in the search room.

The photograph albums had been not fit to consult for some time because the sewing was loose and the binding, which was half suede leather, was very badly damaged. Most of the photographs as well as the album paper were also quite dirty and many of the pages were torn.

Over the past few months, the Record Office's conservation staff have conserved the albums and they are now available for consultation. One of the albums had to be relaxed and flattened. The first stage in the conservation of the albums was to clean the photographs with a brush and the paper with an eraser or chemical sponge. The photographs were then cleaned with water and cotton wool. It was not possible to restore anything of the original structure of the albums so every page was trimmed along the spine and put in a melinex (inert plastic) sleeve. The sleeves were then bound in post binders, with new covers, held together by screws rather than sewn.

Roberta Ciocci and Elizabeth Hughes

Library News

An indispensable reference work for anyone researching the history of houses or buildings in and around Reading up to 1930 has been purchased: Sydney Gold's *Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading*. We have also put in an order for *The Builder: Illustrations Index 1843-1883*, which should arrive any day now.

Bob Hale

Just Catalogued

The largest collection to have reached completion in the last few months has been the papers of Windsor-based solicitors Darvill, Last and Goodford (now Stuchbery Stone) (D/ESB).

The papers, 1638-1959, are those of the firm's clients, and include a considerable number of deeds for Windsor, Winkfield and Bray in particular, a large number of wills and marriage settlements for clients from a fairly wide surrounding area, and the trustees' records of Windsor Independent Chapel (William Street), 1832-1930, mostly relating to the chapel building.

The building of another church is recorded in a recent deposit from

Reading St Mary (Castle Street) (D/P 175), 1799-1915, including deeds of the chapel, 1838, which confirm that the site was formerly that of the old county gaol. The deed of appointment of minister James Sherman is also of special interest, as it includes salary arrangements and a covenant for him to use the "excellent Liturgy" of the Book of Common Prayer. The church was an anomaly in that it was independent, outside the control of Church of England control, but adhered to Anglican doctrines. Records of more conventional parishes have come in from Arborfield 1890-1990 (D/P 6), North Moreton 1837-1980, including the marriage register commencing in 1837 (D/P 86), and South Moreton 1969-1981 (D/P 87).

We have also added to our Methodist holdings, with additions to the following circuits: Maidenhead Primitive Methodist Circuit, 1876-1939, including minutes of the London II District temperance committee 1902-1932, and regulations for the visit of a mission van in 1906 (D/MC 15); Windsor Primitive Methodist Circuit 1836-1932 (D/MC 16); Windsor and Maidenhead Methodist Circuit c.1900-1987 (D/MC 17); Slough Methodist Circuit 1950-1986 (D/MC 18); and Thames Valley Methodist Circuit 1986-1998 (D/MC 19).

The most exciting collection to have been catalogued has been a fine group of deeds for Binfield, Easthampstead, Sandhurst and Wokingham, c.1293-1707 (D/EZ 125), discovered at auction in France and purchased with the aid of a donation from Wokingham Local History Society in memory of late member Dennis Ayres.

The parish of Binfield is also represented by the papers of another local historian, David Frank Tomlinson of Binfield, 1773-1998 (D/EX 1511). These include Mr Tomlinson's own extensive notes and some original documents, including a terrier of the parish, 1818, and papers relating to Binfield Nursing Association, 1905-1970.

Various collections relating to individual families have been catalogued recently. These include the Frankum family of Woolhampton, 1627-1973 (D/EX 1007); the Clayton family of Fyfield House, Maidenhead, 1871-1923 (D/EX 1545); the Pearson family of Sonning, 1848-1883 (D/EX 1546); and the Butler family of Reading, 1873-1999 (D/EX 1557). The last is perhaps the most interesting, including records of the family wine and spirits business, and the very detailed natural history diaries of W E Butler, 1881-1924, which correspond to his collection of lepidoptera (butterflies, moths etc.) now at Reading Museum. We have also acquired family papers relating to Anna Rosetta Thoyts of Sulhamstead and her marriages to Sir Henry Watson of Essex and (after his death) to the Revd Edwin James Parker of Waltham St Lawrence, 1821-1874 (D/EX 1547).

Finally, miscellaneous collections include a survey of Radley manor, 1633 (D/EX 852); Earley Power Station operating manuals, 1942 (D/EX 1556); additional papers of the Revd W J F K Stride of Besselsleigh, 1917-1935, including comic verses on the people of the parish ending with the exhortation "Jump on your bike and take a run, To far-famed Besselsleigh", and a letter commenting on local views of the new poor law institutions (as the workhouses were renamed in 1930) (D/EX 1533). Also newly catalogued are letters on life in London during the General Strike, 1926 (D/EX 239). These also record an encounter with the poet A E Housman .

Lisa Spurrier

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