The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

NO. 16 Summer 2001

Open day

We are going to be open on the afternoon of Saturday 8 September as part of Reading's programme for this year's national Heritage Open Days. We will be open from 1.30pm-4.30pm. This will not be for research (sorry!), but for you to visit if you want to see behind the scenes, including our new strongrooms and the conservation unit. We will have more details nearer the day.

Mark Stevens

Family history searchers' interests

If you would like other people researching the same families or individuals as you are to contact you, you are welcome to add to a new 6 x 4-inch card index which we have introduced in the search room, along these lines:

[Surname of interest]	**SMITH**
[Period(s)]	18th-20th c.
[Area(s)]	Any Berks
[Your details]	A. SEARCHER 15 ANY STREET WHICHTOWN WH7 1AB
[Tel (optional)]	
[e-mail/fax]	asearcher@aol.com

- Use a separate card per surname interest
- Please *print* names
- Cards to be placed in alphabetical order (of course)
- Top drawer of CABINET 4, right hand side
- Blank 6 x 4 inch index cards are in the same drawer
- Write neatly! Or type.

We will supply the index cards and drawer space, but we cannot undertake to contact anyone on your behalf. You will understand that we cannot be held responsible for the accuracy or otherwise of any information subsequently exchanged.

As a special offer to *ECHO* readers (!), if you cannot visit the Record Office yourself, or if you do not have cards of the right size, we will gladly prepare *one or two* cards for you and

add them to the index, if you send us details set out as shown above. If you are researching several names, however, we would prefer to post you the desired number of blank cards on receipt of a suitably sized SAE.

Bob Hale

England is a free country

In the last issue I promised more from the papers of Mr Friend, chaplain to Reading Prison, and here are a couple of cases of prisoners who wanted to change their religious allegiance – something rather discouraged by the prison authorities. It was permitted to change once, but woe betide any convert who then changed his mind! The advantage of adhering to the Church of England was the regular visits to the prison chapel, a change of scene not open to Catholics or nonconformists. Illustrating this point, Catholic prisoner Owen Laurey wrote in a letter dated 15 April 1884:

> The reason why I wish to change my Creed is this because I know that any place of Worship is better for a man than to be in his cell Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Day and all other Sundays in the year, I have to remain in my cell and as I have two years to serve here, I do not feel satisfied to go on in this way, I spoke this morning to the Priest about it, he told me that he had represented the case to the Authorities and he could do no more as he could not see me on Sundays and holidays as he was the Catholic Priest for the town, I told him that England is a free Country and a man is at liberty to do as he likes about his religion, So I have made up my mind to belong to the Church of England rather than to be kept shut up in my cell.

Another prisoner that year, William Hazleton, had attended the Anglican services, but now wanted to see a Wesleyan minister occasionally to "advise with me … helping me to rely on Him who is the sure foundation, strengthen & encourage me as a brother in the right & sober way." The chaplain opposed this application to change creed, casting doubt on Hazleton's Wesleyan credentials. The outraged 62 year old habitual criminal called the chaplain "a villain and a blackguard", which led Mr Friend to conclude "the prisoner is either crazy or thoroughly bad in disposition". Happily, all ended with reconciliation; Hazleton apologised for his rudeness, and later wrote to the chaplain:

> You accepted my apology & forgave me with a kindheartedness so unmistakeably prompt … it proved to me that you were made of the right stuff which is willing to help & not oppress.
> I trust I shall be a wiser & a better man always desiring to act rightly in the right way.

Lisa Spurrier

Best Value review

Along with all other local government services, we are now required to show 'best value' through a comprehensive review of the service every 5 years. Our review started in April. We have to measure ourselves against the '4Cs' – challenge what we do and how we do it, consult with our 'stakeholders', compare ourselves to other similar services and compete with alternative ways of providing our service. Record Office staff are currently working on the review with an aim to finishing an improvement plan for the service in the autumn. We will use the survey you helped with in February as our main customer consultation, so thank you very much to everyone who took part. We will let you have the results of that when we get them.

If you want to comment further on what you would like to see in the review, please fill in a customer comment form or write to me at the Record Office.

Peter Durrant

Just Catalogued

The Second World War is revealed in the recently deposited papers of Inspector William Seager, Chief ARP Warden for Reading (D/EX 1657). They include a complete run of the *Wardens' Bulletin*, including the 1940 instruction, reminiscent of *Dad's Army*, that "On picking up the telephone the warden should state the designation of his post such as 'Wardens' Post M 1 speaking' and not 'Hello'." One little-known arrangement was the establishment in 1941 of an animal rescue centre for "dogs of bombed out owners" at the Greyhound Stadium in Oxford Road. There is also a dramatic set of reports and photographs of the bomb raid on Reading in February 1943, which killed 41 people. Amazingly, it could have been far worse: one of the bombs exploded in the restaurant at Wellsteeds department store, where normally over 150 people would have been; it was the shop's early closing day. The photograph below shows the aftermath of the bomb which hit Messrs Blandy (and famously destroyed Berkshire Archdeaconry marriage bonds); three were killed here, one in Blandy's, one in the Town Hall, and one who had taken shelter in the church porch. The War also saw the start of a Reading institution of which we have just acquired records, 1941-1986: Reading Show, which started as the Dig For Victory Garden Show (D/EX 1613).

Official records to have been transferred recently include the inclosure map and award for Boxford, 1819 (CPC 21); Slough rate books, 1849-1963 (S/FR); records of Little Wittenham Parish Meeting, 1894-1994 (CPC 152); accounts of St Bartholomew's Grammar School, Newbury, 1895-1907 (2001/SCH/1; log books for Robert Piggott Church of England Junior School, Wargrave, 1993-2000 (2001/SCH/2); and the minutes of Easthampstead RDC mentioned in the last issue (RD/E). We have also acquired returns relating to the number of paupers in Berkshire, 1818 (D/EX 1609), and a Ministry of Works report on the 1952 fire which destroyed Coleshill house (D/EX 1616).

We were very excited to acquire the archives of St Paul's Presbyterian (later United Reformed) Church, Reading, 1897-2000 (D/N 43), as we do not have any other Presbyterian records. The Church was built at the expense of local businessman William McIlroy, and closed last year. Family historians will be pleased to know that Shippon parish church has deposited its registers of baptisms, 1856-1957, marriages, 1856-1975, banns, 1856-1938, and burials, 1856-1974 (D/P 1C). We have also been given copies of Finchampstead parish magazines, 1887-1921 (D/EX 1630).

A large collection of photographs illustrates (literally) the past of Caversham and Emmer Green, c.1860-1980s (D/EX 965), and the Howse collection of material relating to the Vale of White Horse has had some additional deeds, photographs and printed items, 1804-2000 (D/EX 1303). Some interesting plans relating to property owned by St John's College, Oxford, in various north Berkshire parishes, and by Sir Richard Sutton in Stockcross and Welford, 1864-1912 (D/EX 1618) have just been listed. We have acquired deeds of Blatch's Brewery, Theale, 1763-1972 (D/EX 1639), to supplement the business records we already held. Deeds of property in Reading, 1875-1979 (D/EX 1603) include 1891 sales particulars for houses aimed at "the very special attention of Working Men" hoping to buy their own home. Other recently catalogued deeds and papers relate to property in Abingdon, 1905-1926 (D/EX 1601); East Challow, 1781-1834 (D/EX 1628); Clewer, 1868 (D/EX 1617); Newbury, 1852, and Reading, 1887 (D/EX 1649); Sutton Courtenay, 1621 (D/EX 1614); Little Wittenham (the School House), 1900-1966 (D/EX 1607); and Peach Street, Wokingham, 1896-1981 (D/EX 1611).

The Record Office has recently purchased a small collection of unpublished letters by local author Mary Russell Mitford, 1845-1854 (D/EZ 131), mainly on contemporary literary subjects such as her opinion of *Jane Eyre*, which she found "terribly coarse and unpleasant", and her friend Elizabeth Barrett (to whom she gave the latter's famous dog Flush, a son of Miss Mitford's own Flush) and the latter's husband Robert Browning ("Well! he does nothing & nothing will he do – or try … There is a great lowering of tone since her marriage"). She also tells a correspondent about a Swallowfield neighbour, Mrs Parry, who wished to sell a cutting her vet husband had taken from the tail of his patient the Duke of Wellington's horse Copenhagen. Other interesting recent arrivals include the nuncupative will of Clement Kent, a Reading merchant who died in Marseilles, 1661 (D/EZ 133); a pamphlet on dog racing and coursing at Ashdown Park, 1834 (D/EZ 130); the apprenticeship indenture of Alfred Drewe of Swallowfield to Reading architect Charles Smith, 1864 (D/EX 1604); the author's own annotated copy of Walter Money's *Stray Notes on Basildon*, 1889 (D/EX 1598); nursing training certificates of Ethel Fletcher from Battle Infirmary (Reading Workhouse), 1924 (D/EX 1602); accounts of Southmoor Preparatory School, Longworth, 1958-1981 (D/EX 1612); and a photograph of HRH the Duke of Connaught and his bride Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia, 1873 (D/EX 1599).

Lisa Spurrier

Stop Press: We now have a drinks machine opposite the lockers, providing a selection of hot and cold drinks at 40 pence each.

Berkshire Record Office, 9 Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF. Tel. 0118-901-5132 Fax 0118-901-5131 E-mail ARCH@Reading.gov.uk

To receive the *Echo* by post for a year, send £1 to the Record Office, payable to Reading Borough Council.

✔ ✔

Berkshire Record Office, a countywide archive service
for all local authorities in the Royal County of Berkshire