The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office
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A chance to see behind the scenes at the Record Office

The Heritage Open Day this year will be on Saturday 13th September 2004. This will be an opportunity to take a look behind the scenes in the strongrooms and office areas. Further details will be available in due course.

We would like to announce that it intends to provide a tour of the searchroom on 11th October 2004 for up to 10 people. The aim is to provide a beginners' introduction to the searchroom and its research facilities. We hope to provide more tours in the future, should this prove popular. Further details, including how to book a place, will be available in due course.

Ivone Turnbull

Berkshire County Council contracts, 1892-1939

A series of 270 contracts between Berkshire County Council and various firms, 1892-1939, has recently been catalogued, mainly for the construction and maintenance of Council property throughout Berkshire, including bridges, roads, dwellings, farm buildings, police stations, schools and public assistance institutions (C/CL/L2). Others include decoration, water supply and installation of electric lighting and domestic equipment.

The most prestigious project is the construction of the original Shire Hall and the most unusual involve a mill wheel, traffic lights, printing, educational supplies and conveyance of children to school. Where appropriate most contracts include coloured plans, elevations and sections prepared by the County Architect's Office and a detailed specification and estimate submitted by the contractor, usually a local firm. These records would be very useful for the study of particular buildings and structures and local architectural history.

Jeremy Taylor

Maps for sale

We will shortly be obtaining two new Godfrey map titles (reproductions of old Ordnance Survey maps). These are Abingdon, 1910 and Wokingham, 1909. They will be available for purchase at reception at a cost of £2.10 each.

Ivone Turnbull

"Affid. in 8 days"

Whilst carrying out a search of the Padworth burial register (D/P 90/1/2) for 1750, I found the above phrase written after most of the entries: it relates to 'Burials in Woollen'. The act of 1666 for *Burying in Woollen was intended for the Lessening the Importation of Linen from beyond the Seas and the Encouragement of the Woollen and Paper Manufacturers of this Kingdom.* This proved ineffective and was therefore followed by the 1678 act which provided that:

No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of plague) shall be buried in any shirt, shift, sheet, or shroud or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk hair, gold or silver, or in any stuff or thing, other than what is made of sheep's wool only ... or be put into any coffin lined or faced with ... any other material but sheep's wool only.

To show that they were complying with the act, many parishes started a new Burial in Woollen register from 1st August 1678, when the act came into force, e.g. Uffington (D/P 134/1/2). The act provided that within eight days of the funeral, affidavit must be made that the law had been complied with. Certificates of Burials in Woollen can be found in the register for West Hanney (D/P 63/1/3), e.g.

October 16th 1680 Oath was then made by Elizabeth Chadwell and Frances Lay both of East Hanney...before Robert Parker Justice of the peace...that the corps of Robert Belcher of East Hanney was buried...11th day of October according to the Act of Parliament for burying in Woollen.

Penalties were ordered of £5 on the estate of every person not buried in woollen, with half the penalty going to the poor and half to the informer. It was therefore an incentive for a member of the family to act as an informer, where a person had decided to defy the act, to reduce the penalty from £5 to £2.10s.

The unpopularity of the act was perhaps encompassed by Pope in his poem Narcissa

> *Odious! in woollen! 'twould a Saint provoke*
> *(Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke)*
> *No, let a charming Chintz, and Brussels lace*
> *Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face:*
> *One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead -*
> *And - Betty - give this Cheek a little Red.*

The act was not repealed until 1814 but was not enforced after about 1770.

Robin Elliott

Staff news

Staff were sorry to say goodbye to longstanding Archive Asssistant Andrew Mitchell in June. Andrew, who had been a popular face in the searchroom and an invaluable member of staff behind the scenes for thirteen years, has accepted a new post in Reading Borough Council. Also moving on to new opportunities is Administration Assistant Vicky Lewis.

Lisa Spurrier

60 years ago: Enemy Action in Earley

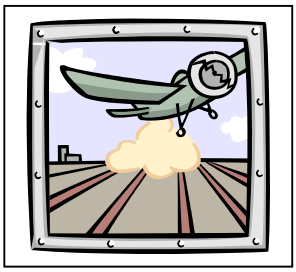
Berkshire Civil Defence Incident Reports file (ref. **C/D 4**) contains a report from Sergeant East at Woodley Station on the following incident:

"Pilotless enemy plane carrying bomb. In corn field south of Beech Lane, Earley. Grid Ref. Q186906"

At 2224 hours on 19 June 1944, the Sergeant reports hearing the noise of an "enemy robot plane" over the station.

At 22434 hours, Station Officer Beare in Early reported that a bomb had fallen and exploded "in an open field at the east end of Beech Lane, Earley". PC 141 Rippington was duly despatched to investigate. He found that police and Earley District Civil Defence were already on the scene.

The report lists the following damage:
Approximately one quarter of an acre of oats; 100 yards of hedge (both sides of Beech Lane); one field gate.
Farmhouse and farm buildings (property of Mr. Bunce, Radstock Farm): broken glass, tiles and slates. Door to henhouse blown off.
Farm cottages and the following properties also sustained damage: numbers 131; 133; 135; 137; 139; 181; 183; 185 and 195 Beech Lane.
100 yards of electricity cable was brought down.



Two people suffered injuries from broken glass, and were treated at Royal Berkshire Hospital. Three further people - suffering from shock - were treated in their houses. (No report of casualties to the hens is recorded!).

Beech Lane was duly closed and the damaged properties patrolled (the occupants having found alternative accommodation for the night). The wreckage of the enemy craft was guarded until it could be inspected by a Regional Intelligence Office and duly removed from the site.

Julie Grisman

Just catalogued

A number of parish churches have deposited additional records recently, including Beenham (D/P 16) (including the burial register, 1907-1983), East Ilsley (D/P 74) (the baptism register, 1884-2003), Longworth (the marriage register, 1985-2001), and Maidenhead St Luke (D/P 181) (an almost complete set of parish magazines from 1911). Nonconformity is represented by the recent deposit of correspondence of the Berkshire, South Oxon and South Bucks Congregational Union, 1941-1953 (D/N 25), which includes material relating to a number of Berkshire Congregational churches.

Newly deposited marriage registers for Wesley Methodist Church, Reading, 1982-1994 (D/MS 60), Spring Gardens Wesleyan Methodist Church, Reading, 1902-1905, and its successor Whitley Hall, 1906-1996 (D/MS 63), and Three Mile Cross Methodist Church, 1959-1996 (D/MS 75), may be of interest to family historians. Our Methodist records cataloguing programme continues, with the completion of catalogues of the records of churches at Worlds End, Beedon (D/MS 86), Kintbury (D/MS 88) and Yattendon (D/MS 87).

Methodist churches are organised in circuits, or groups, of churches, which do not always correspond to county boundaries. As a result, we hold newly listed material for Baughurst (D/MS 89), Burghclere (D/MS 90), Charter Alley (D/MS 91), Hannington (D/MS 92), Haughurst Hill (D/MS 93), Kingsclere (D/MS 94), Little London (D/MS 95), Silchester (D/MS 97), East Woodhay (D/MS 101), and Wolverton Common (D/MS 100) Methodist Churches, all in Hampshire, and for Gallows Tree Common Primitive Methodist Church, Kidmore End, Oxfordshire. These were all in Newbury or Reading circuits.

Official records to have been added to our holdings include the minutes and annual reports of West Berkshire Community Health Council, 1974-2003 (P/HA 3). This was an independent statutory body, which represented the public in ensuring the delivery of healthcare for the western half of the county (from Newbury to Wokingham). It was abolished last year. Staff have also listed the Berkshire County Council series of contracts, 1892-1939 (C/CL/L2) described elsewhere in this issue.

We have recently acquired a selection of 20th century sale catalogues of properties in Basildon (D/EX 1844) and in Caversham, Earley, Reading, Tilehurst and Woodley (D/EX 1850). A plan from one of these may be seen to the left. Finally, now available for research are papers relating to the education of Freda Wells of Winnersh, a pupil at Grosvenor House School, Wokingham, 1927-1930 (D/EX 1833).

Lisa Spurrier

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

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