The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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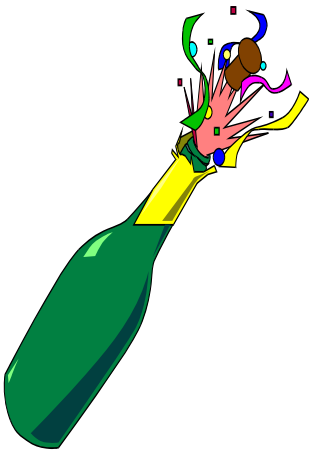
What's New?

Users of probate material will be interested to hear of two new additions to the Record Office searchroom. Firstly, we have acquired more microfiches of the National Probate Index so that we now cover the period 1858-1943. The index covers wills and administrations proved country-wide by local probate registries. Secondly, we have improved our index to probate material held at Berkshire Record Office for the period 1711-1858. The wills and administrations have been combined, so you no longer have to look at two indexes to find the person you want and each name has its full reference number and microfilm or fiche number against it. For those interested in local or social history, the material is now also indexed by place and by occupation, as well as by name.



Staff News

In August we said goodbye to Phil Waterhouse, who left us to start an MA course in Archive Administration at University College, London. At the end of September retirement beckoned for Hazel Gordon, who had been with the Record Office since 1981. Both will be greatly missed. Meanwhile Roberta Ciocci, who works in the Conservation Unit, was commended in the Society of Bookbinders international competition for her work restoring a copy of *Reading, Past and Present*, published in 1839; Peter Durrant, the County Archivist, has been reappointed Visiting Fellow to the University of Reading; and archivist Lisa Spurrier has become a registered member of the Society of Archivists (the archive equivalent of Chartered Librarian).

Elizabeth Hughes

East Garston's Mad Vicar

A collection of papers of the Butt family recently acquired by Berkshire Record Office has revealed the fascinating story of East Garston's mad vicar. His name was John Marten Butt, known in the family as Marten, and he was born in Worcestershire in c.1774, the son of the Rev George Butt. He studied at Oxford in the 1790s before being ordained, and in 1802 was presented with the living of East Garston, although for many years he was an absentee vicar. In 1806 he married Mary Anne Congreve, whose death in 1818, soon followed by that of their youngest son, Theophilus, seems to have brought on Marten's first attack of insanity - possibly what might today be termed a clinical depression. He was successfully nursed back to health by one of his married sisters.

After regaining his health, Marten proposed marriage to Jemima Hubbald, who had been looking after his seven surviving children. Jemima was understandably in some trepidation about this marriage, but eventually agreed, partly because of her love of the children. The couple were married in 1821, and the family moved to East Garston, where Marten and Jemima had at least four more children. It appears that Marten carried out his religious and pastoral duties most conscientiously, and was respected in East Garston, despite what Jemima later, rather endearingly, described as his "natural eccentricity of character".

Unfortunately, the pressure of his work led to a complete and irreversible mental and physical breakdown after nine years in East Garston, and in 1833 the family were forced to place Marten in a private lunatic asylum in Staffordshire. Marten was never to regain his sanity, though his physical health improved, and the family had to sell his library and the furniture of the vicarage by public auction in 1833, and move into lodgings.

Money was tight for Jemima, as most of the income of the East Garston living was needed to pay for a curate to carry out Marten's duties, and for the unfortunate vicar's care. Things were not helped by the extravagance of Congreve, one of Marten's sons, who ran up so many debts during his own training as a surgeon in Worcester, that, in his own words, he had made the town "too hot to hold" him. His aunt Lucy described him as "the only wandering sheep of all our family". His difficulties led him to apply for a "Commission in Lunacy", a legal arrangement which would have enabled him to call on his future inheritance at the expense of Jemima. Every other member of the family opposed this move, and eventually Congreve dropped proceedings. He was forced to convey his expectations on his father's death to one of his creditors, but died himself in 1844.

Lisa Spurrier

Outreach Events

Out and About

A **Family History Feast** will be taking place on **Sunday 30 November** at Hartwell Day Centre in Aylesbury (off the A418), organised by Buckinghamshire Family History Society. I will be there with the Record Office stand and sales of family/local history related books, maps of Berkshire and Christmas cards - come and do some Christmas shopping!

Celebration Time!

During the week of **13-17 October**, two important anniversaries will be celebrated. Battle Library (in Oxford Road, west Reading) will be 90 years old, and the Battle bindery (based in the library) which looks after the binding needs of the Record Office and all of Berkshire's local studies librarians, will be 45. The Record Office will be contributing towards the celebrations with a small exhibition on life in west Reading in the early 1900s, which will be on display at the bindery. It includes Ordnance Survey map copies of the area around the library in c. 1900 and 1911, and a photograph showing a page of the library's rules, drawn up in November 1907, which express very strong views concerning the health, appearance and behaviour of readers: "No person who is intoxicated, dirty or disorderly shall be permitted within the building". Book borrowing was forbidden to "any person suffering from infectious disease". Also on show will be a display of photographs which show the bindery as it used to be.

For further details on Record Office outreach events, please contact me on 0118 923 3186.

Katie Willis

Diary of an Ordinary Man

An astonishingly long run of diaries has recently been transferred to the Record Office, written by William Henry Hallam, who was born at East Lockinge in 1868. Although Hallam lived all his adult life at Swindon, where he was employed as an iron-turner in the GWR workshops, he remained devoted to his native Lockinge Estate, referring to it always as 'home'. His wife Sarah came from Padworth and they had three daughters.

Broken only for brief spells between 1894 and 1897, his diaries begin in 1886 and continue to 1952 [BRO ref D/EX 1415]. Although much of the content is humdrum and repetitious daily routine, the occasional entry has a wider interest:

29 Oct 1917. Mr Eady late of Lockinge bought that old house at Shrivenham, Elm Tree House, by Inigo Jones, for £1000.

He naturally records his spare-time activities. He was keenly interested in Berkshire history and antiquities, with a particular enthusiasm for churches, their monuments and bells, old books and coins, and local customs and dialect. He enlarged on his village school education by reading and attending lectures, and in 1900 published a *History of East Lockinge* (copy in BRO Library, the manuscript being here with his diaries).

Of course, comments in his diaries reveal his attitude to the world at large:

7 Jan 1929. I paid our Rates today, £6.9.1. Scandalous how we are bled for officialdom.

He was often fiercely impatient with workmates, with "so-called socialists", "football maniacs", New Year's Eve "hullabaloo", certain (named) clergymen and academics, and even at times his own family : all those who did not share his own tastes.

25 Feb 1926. Tonight wife and I went to a Conservative meeting ... full of people ... a great success. Before the meeting a jazz band played for ½ hour. The first time I've heard jazz. I thought it a devil of a row.

Hallam was a regular churchgoer and strongly principled, but he liked a drink, and called a spade a spade :

31 Dec 1931. Everyone I expect glad to see the end of 1931 which has been a B----R.

As usual, he saw no point in staying up till midnight.

His writing becomes more detailed with the disruptions of the Second World War, and there are particularly poignant entries at the time of his wife's illness and death in 1946. The diaries end without explanation in September 1952; Hallam died in February 1956. More than mere personal records, these 63 note books provide an unusually detailed insight into the social condition of an ordinary working man and his family at the end of the 19th century and over the first half of the 20th. He regularly used his local library (paid for, of course, out of the rates he so disliked paying) and would surely have used the County Archives too, had he lived today.

Bob Hale

Just Catalogued

The last few months have seen a particularly large number of church records catalogued, including a fine series of records from Maidenhead Congregational Church 1760-1996 (D/N 33); and a number of Anglican parishes, including : South Ascot marriage register 1976-1994 (D/P 186); Stratfield Mortimer 1726-1990, including banns 1915-1944; Welford 1725-1982, including registers of baptisms 1813-1948, marriages, 1800-1982, burials 1813-1900, and banns 1813-1837, 1872-1974, and churchwardens' accounts 1725-1895 (D/P 147); and Wickham chapelry 1838-1978, including marriage registers 1838-1978 (D/P 147B).

Parish records for Wokingham 1650-1930, which had strayed from the collection of Canon Long (the rest of which is to be found among the records of Wokingham Borough) in 1943, were also received (D/EZ 110). These include a copy of a parliamentary survey of the rectory and parsonage, 1650, and minutes of Wokingham National School Committee, 1829-1842. A transcript of marriages in Reading St Laurence 1754-1837 was presented.

One of the most interesting collections catalogued recently consists of the papers (D/EX 1410) of Thomas Noon Talfourd, the Reading-born poet and judge, who was also MP for the town in the 1830s and 1840s, 1829-1854, including his journals, 1841-1854, and, perhaps of most interest, the notebooks he kept of the cases he heard at assize courts across the country and the Old Bailey.

Records of the Robert Piggott CE Junior School, Wargrave, 1898-1993 (97/SCH/3) include admission registers, 1921-1991. Private schools are under-represented in our holdings, so we were pleased to receive minutes of meetings of old pupils of Amersham Hall school, Caversham, 1931-1938 (D/EX 1462).

Most interesting of the official records is an admission and discharge book of St Laurence's workhouse, Friar Street, Reading, 1843-1847 (D/EX 1450); this was used as the Reading Union workhouse until the building now known as Battle Hospital was built in 1867. It can also be revealed that in 1904, Reading Borough planned to turn Prospect Park into a cemetery! This came to light in the records of the public Committee for the acquisition of Prospect Park, 1901-1904 (D/EX 1449). Also of interest is the letter book of Reading Corporation and Charity Trustees, 1846-1849 (D/EX 1451). Records of the Blagrave Estate, c.1787-1979, also help to illuminate the history of the development of Reading in the late 19th century (D/EX 1416).

The papers of John and Llewellyn Treacher of Twyford, 1832-1961 (D/EX 564) include a particularly entertaining letter of complaint about the "incessant bellowing" of Llewellyn's cows, culminating in the comment that they "would make much better beef than milkers"! On a more serious note, there are records relating to Twyford District and Wokingham Rural District Councils, particularly relating to the provision of mains water in Shinfield and Swallowfield at the turn of the century. Also catalogued were minutes of a committee to form a memorial to Dr Joseph Stevens, first curator of Reading Museum, 1890-1891 (D/EX 1454), and bound copies of the *North Wilts Herald*, 1928-1981 (D/EX 1438).

Lisa Spurrier

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