The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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What's New?

Visitors will have noticed that refurbishment work has begun in the reception area at Shinfield Park. There are hoardings up over the usual entrance to the building, blocking it off. Never fear! We are still here! The new (temporary) entrance and reception are now just a little further round the building, and are well sign-posted. There are advantages to the new arrangement: the disabled car park is just outside the door, and reception is now closer to the Record Office than it was before. The work is expected to continue through October and into November. There will only be one minor adjustment to our service during the refurbishment period: the Record Office will close at 8.50 on Thursday evenings so that all visitors can be out of the building by 9 o'clock.

Just a reminder that we will be closed for stock taking as usual in the first two weeks of November. We will close at 4.30 p.m. on Friday 30 October and will re-open at 9.00 a.m. on Tuesday 17 November. We shall be using these two weeks to do essential strong room work in preparation for the move to the new Record Office in Castle Hill, Reading, in early 2000.

Elizabeth Hughes

Thomas Noon Talfourd : Reading's Justice

Part Two of our article on the Talfourd papers concentrates on the cases recorded in Thomas Noon Talfourd's notebooks.

There were a number of cases of infanticide, the most tragic being that of Ann Good of Wallingford, tried at Reading in 1853 for cutting off the head of her new-born child. She was found not guilty by reason of insanity. There was a happier ending for the child allegedly abandoned to die in a privy, which survived; Harriett Eve and John Holloway were acquitted at Salisbury Assizes in 1852. Other tragedies included an early case of dangerous driving - James Graham was acquitted at the Old Bailey in 1851 of the manslaughter of Julia Foley by driving over her in his carriage. Talfourd also heard the case of Daniel Gibbs Hathaway, found not guilty of murdering his

wife by arsenic poisoning at Gloucester Assizes in 1851.

One sign of the times which would be of interest to anyone studying social and economic change in the 19th century is the number of cases reflecting labourers' unrest, especially in the countryside. Remember that these cases are a generation after the Swing Riots which swept the south, and shortly after the Chartist movement in the industrial north (and note that Talfourd was involved in the prosecution of Chartists at Stafford Assizes in 1843 - a draft of his speech is found in his diary of the date). Mostly this unrest manifested itself in isolated cases of arson of farmers' haystacks, rather than in anything organised, but it is an interesting glimpse of the underlying unrest. One particularly striking example is Edward Smith, tried at Exeter Assizes for setting fire to the barn and machine house on a farm; was he protesting at the use of machinery for farmwork? The same court saw Joseph Gardner expressing his hatred of the poor laws by firing the outhouse of the Guardians of the Poor at Plympton; he was transported for 10 years for his pains. Another arsonist, William King, was one of the very few criminals Talfourd felt able to sentence to death; King was convicted at York in 1852 of setting fire to Wakefield Gaol while there were people trapped inside. The hardships faced by the poorest in society is reflected in the case of Edward Henry Simonds, tried at Winchester in 1850 for the manslaughter of Elizabeth Biggs, a pauper denied admission to the workhouse. The most harrowing cases to read were those of rape and what would now be called child abuse. In one instance, the victim fainted in the witness box while giving evidence, and then had to see the jury acquitting the accused. Lodgers, fathers, stepfathers and the employers of twelve or thirteen year old maidservants were all brought before Judge Talfourd accused of rape or assault, and all too often let off by an unconvinced jury. One perpetrator, Jacob Tribbeck or Trebeck, was tried at Winchester in 1850 of rape of his stepdaughter, and apparently acquitted; two years later Talfourd presided over the same charges again, and this time he was at least found guilty of the attempt, if not of the crime itself.

Some of the cases have a curiously modern ring about them, such as the cases of insurance fraud. One such was Samuel Best Fort, accused at Exeter in 1850 of burning down his house in order to defraud the insurance company.

Lisa Spurrier

Plus Ça Change

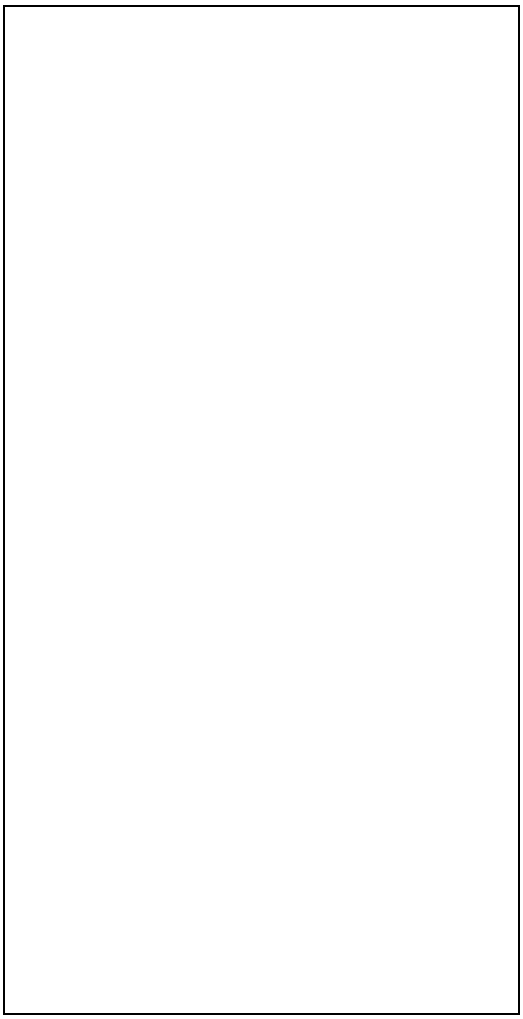
Noted in 15th century deeds connected with some Reading Borough charity records recently catalogued (D/QR4) were signs of evolving surnames. There was, for example Richard Trappe alias Skinner, and John Sawyer formerly John atte Hache. The last example suggests a change of surname from axeman ("hache" is the French for axe) to sawyer. Was a sawyer more skilled than an axeman, and was this a case of career advancement or of snobbery?

A hundred years later we see another change, this time to a property boundary. A house is described in 1518 as being next to a tenement and garden belonging to the abbot of Reading. By the time a new lease was made in 1541, the Abbey had been dissolved, and the neighbour's landlord was now (without comment) "our soveragne lorde the Kyng".

Bob Hale

Just Catalogued

Business records are generally underrepresented in our holdings, so we were delighted when the Reading Co-operative Society decided to deposit its records here. They have now been catalogued (D/EX 1497), and cover the period 1865-1997. The early minutes hold considerable detail of business decisions. As



well as Co-op shops, the Society started a bakery in Sackville St, Reading, in 1887, a restaurant/hotel in Cheapside in about 1918, and a dairy in 1933. In the 1890s they started buying houses to rent or sell to members on hire-purchase principles. There were strong links with the labour movement - as early as 1894, the Society assisted striking Welsh slateworkers, and later employees were obliged to join a trade union. Societies based in Newbury and Maidenhead were incorporated in 1884 and 1927. The business was run solely on behalf of local members, who received regular dividend payments, up to 1965, when it was amalgamated with the national organisation.

Other business records deposited recently are those of the Talbot Serpell Transport Company of Reading, 1922-1946 (D/EX 1489) and stock and shareholder records of the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway, 1881-1923 (D/EX 1495).

Other voluntary organisations to place their records in our care included the Maidenhead Constitutional Club (for local Conservative supporters), 1892-1994 (D/EX 1498), Reading Swimming Club, 1903-1990 (D/EX 1502), and Reading and District Boy Scout Association, 1909-1938 (D/EX 1500). The latter rather startlingly reveal the early use of carbines for drill by the young Scouts! Progress Theatre, Reading, has added additional records, 1947-1994 (D/EX 1151).

Official records are represented by a fine collection from Wargrave Parish Council, 1818-1988 (CPC 145), including the original parish inclosure maps and award of 1818. The minutes of December 1914 include the Council's decision to refuse the requested use of the District School as a place of isolation for infectious diseases since it was already being used as a school, a rifle range, a store for fire brigade equipment, and a temporary reading room for billeted soldiers. The records of Reading National Savings Committee, 1931-1969 (P/NS 2) reveal official efforts to encourage saving. We have also received a copy of the admission registers of Childrey Council School, 1913-1972 (D/EX 1501). Finally, we have catalogued a draft petition from the ratepayers of Reading for the town to be brought under the Public Health Act of 1848, 1849 (D/EX 1459).

Some interesting parish records have come from Cold Ash, 1865-1992 (D/P 130D), including registers of baptisms 1865-1968, and burials 1865-1992, and records of St Mary's Home for Girls, Cold Ash 1891-1932. The records of Caversham St Barnabas (Emmer Green), 1918-1997 (D/P 162D) include marriage registers 1944-1996,

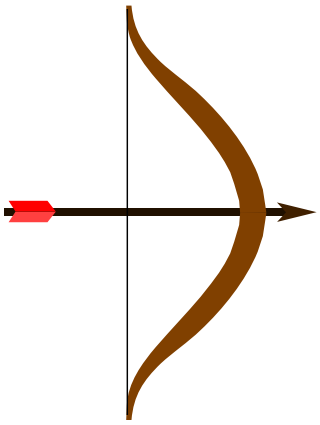
and references to Teenage Dances (for Teenagers, naturally) held in the church hall in the 1950s. The Tidmarsh register of banns 1898-1997 (D/P 131) includes entries for Sulham. Thatcham United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church has deposited its records, 1807-1985 (D/N 37). These include baptisms 1807-1836, 1849-1880, 1945-1973, marriages 1860-1880, deaths, 1819-1821, and burials 1851-1871, many of the entries relating to Bucklebury, including the burial of the latter's celebrated minister John Morton in 1871. Those interested in registers will also be interested to note the inclusion of details of a marriage in Castle Street Chapel, Reading, in 1867, apparently omitted from the proper register.

The large estate collection of the Mount family of Wasing has been supplemented by the addition of newly catalogued deeds and estate papers relating to property in Brimpton, Speen, Oare, Thatcham and Wasing, 1597-1874 (D/EMT). Other deeds and papers have been received relating to property in Ascot 1923, and Cookham 1878 (D/EX 1523), Bray 1679-1742, and Hurley 1615 (D/EX 1491), Maidenhead 1884 (D/EX 1520), Shinfield 1793-1886 (D/EZ 120), Shinfield 1921-1945, and Tilehurst 1905-1972 (D/EX 1494), Waltham St Lawrence 1612-1927 (D/EX 1484), and west Berkshire parishes, 1745 (D/EX 914). Finally rural life in the 1890s is illuminated by the memoir of his "life on the land" written by Charles Hazell in 1946 (D/EX 1505). It includes agricultural, horticultural and animal husbandry advice, and firsthand reminiscences on the life of agricultural labourers which may be of interest to family historians hoping to flesh out their ancestors' lifestyles.

Lisa Spurrier

Bowled Over

Many people are familiar with County Quarter Sessions papers and the wealth of material they contain. Fewer, perhaps, are aware that many boroughs also held Quarter Sessions courts which covered crimes committed within their boundaries.



The Maidenhead Quarter Sessions minutes of 14 July 1749 (M/JQS 1) record the conviction of Edward Parrier for "keeping and maintaineing a Comon Bowleing Alley for playing a Game called Nine pins prohibited by Law And for which Offence he and his two Suretys stood on their Recognizances". He was fined £5. The law against which Parrier offended seems to have been the "Bill for the maintaining Artillery, and the Debarring of unlawful games" (33 Henry VIII c.9) of 1541. This prohibited "bowling, coyting [quoiting?], cloysh-cayls [according to the OED an obsolete game, possibly like nine-pins, although according to Dutch descriptions it closer resembled croquet], half bowl, tennis, dicing table or carding" on the grounds that archers could not afford to keep up their bows because of the gambling associated with such games. Gaming also incited the archers to violence and kept them from church on Sundays.

Lisa Spurrier and Elizabeth Hughes