The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

NO. 11 AUTUMN 1999

What's New?

While our public service continues as normal, we are working hard behind the scenes preparing for our move to the new Berkshire Record Office at Castle Hill. We have completed our inventory of every document in our strong rooms and are now entering it onto computer to help us with planning the location of each one in the new strong rooms. The computer programme we are using is called CALM, and is a system developed jointly by an IT company and archivists for document control and cataloguing. Although at the moment we are only using it to record document locations, we hope to extend its use in future, staff time permitting.

The new building is still on schedule to be handed over at the end of the year. If all this happens on time, we will begin moving documents to the new building in January. **We will be open for research during January and February but the service we can offer will inevitably be disrupted and access to original documents will become more and more restricted as the move progresses. We strongly recommend that you check with staff in advance to make sure that you will have a worthwhile visit.**

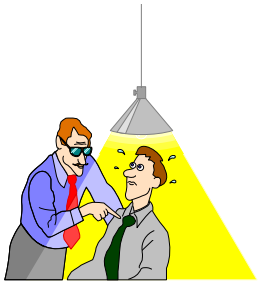
The Record Office will be closed for the whole month of March and if all goes to plan we will re-open at the beginning of April 2000. To make up for this disruption, we will **not** close for our annual stock-taking in November.

In September we said goodbye to two members of our Conservation staff. Tony Ward began a well-earned retirement after 24 years at the Bindery, and Roberta Ciocci left to take up a post at the Scottish Record Office. We wish them both all the best for the future.

Elizabeth Hughes

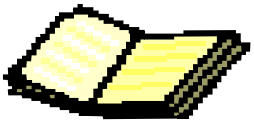
Have Your Say!

ober we will be taking part in a national survey of visitors to British archives. The results for each office will be analysed separately so that we can look at ways of improving our service. The results will also be fed into a national database so that we get a better view of the national picture and how we measure up to it. The first survey was held last year as a pilot, and was so successful that it is hoped to repeat it on an annual basis. All 98 participating record offices will be issuing questionnaires to visitors during October, so if you use more than one record office, you may be asked to fill in more then one questionnaire. We appreciate that it takes time to answer but if you can find a few minutes to do so it will be much appreciated.



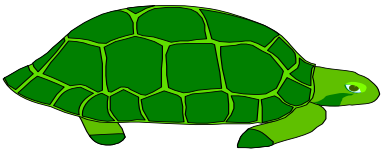
Elizabeth Hughes

Off the (Library) Shelf



An anonymous diary, published in 1887 under the title *Reading Seventy Years Ago; a record of events from 1813 to 1819* was recently presented to the Record Office Library. Here are some extracts illustrating goings-on this month, years ago.

1813 Octr. 10 Quarter Sessions, when Mr Terriere was tried for a riot and breaking the windows at the house of D. Fenton, Esq., and others, at the last Election; fined £25, and two of his accomplices a week's imprisonment each.



1814 Octr. 3 Wm Andrewes, Esq., was sworn into the office of Mayor…[he] afterwards gave a sumptuous entertainment to the town; amongst a profusion of delicacies was a large turtle from St Vincent's, presented by His Excellency Sir C. Brisbane.

1815 Octr. 12 This evening a new farce was acted at our theatre, called "Freemasonry: or, more secrets than one"; it was written by – Talfourd, a native of this town. No one expressed a wish to have it repeated.

1816 Oct. 10 A meeting at the Blue Coat School. There were only fifteen boys in the School who, according to the rules of the School, should have been apprenticed at an earlier age, but the chamberlain (Mr Andrews) neglected to do it. Yesterday, the master, hearing a great noise among them, went and demanded the cause; they refused to tell him; he gave them ten minutes to consider of it; they still remained mute; he sent them to bed without their supper; this morning fourteen of them ran away.

Oct. 28 The packet boat left her moorings to go through the country to Bristol; this was the first sea vessel that ever came up our river.

You can find this volume in the Record Office library index under 'Reading' or 'Diaries'.

Bob Hale

The Pressures of Public Office?

While working on the churchwardens' presentments among the Berkshire Archdeaconry records, I was diverted to see Richard Brewer, churchwarden of Burghfield in 1725, report that although the church was in good repair, and "all other matters to bee in good order", his fellow churchwarden Henry Pearce was unable to sign the presentment with him, "being at this Time Lunatick" (sic). Pearce and Brewer had also served as churchwardens the previous year, and one can only hope that it was not the responsibilities of the job that had caused the unfortunate man's illness.

Lisa Spurrier

Just Catalogued

The highlight of the last few months, and the fruit of work over several years, by a number of members of staff, has been the cataloguing of the records of Reading Borough Quarter Sessions, 1682-1969 (**R/JQ**). This had the same powers as the county Quarter Sessions, but with jurisdiction over Reading only. There is unfortunately very little from the period before 1836, when the borough was reformed, but from that date onwards there is an excellent series of sessions papers, including court minutes and calendars of prisoners to 1969, and papers such as depositions and convictions in criminal cases to 1909.

The papers also supplement the records of Reading Petty Sessions, as there are copies of summary proceedings at Reading Petty Sessions filed at the superior court, which are earlier in date than anything in the records of that court. For the earlier period, there is a sessions diary for the 1680s, and some miscellaneous but interesting survivals from the late 18th century. These include bonds and agreements relating to the transportation of convicts to America in the 1760s and 1770s and papers on the nuisance of privies emptying into Gunters Brook in 1817, fouling the water supply of the town as a result. There is also an early example of compulsory purchase in the case of the Red Lion public house, demolished to allow the widening of the road, and papers relating to the Corporation's successful appeal to maintain a separate court of Quarter Sessions.

Reading's water supply is also covered by the recent acquisition of some posters and handbills relating to Reading Waterworks, 1809-1838 (**D/EX 1564**). These testify to the "great neglect and gradual decay" of the existing system in 1809, and also record an acrimonious dispute with Jerry Tibble, former turncock to the Waterworks. In 1826 he set up in business on his own account as a plumber, and was accused of misrepresenting himself as still being employed by the company. Tibble issued a handbill refuting the allegations.

Deeds have been listed relating to a large number of parishes, especially in the west of the county. These relate to Newbury, 1822-1903, including the site of the First Battle of Newbury (1643), Sandhurst, 1885-1923, and Wantage, 1730-1903, (**D/EX 145**); Beenham, Bradfield, Padworth and Ufton Nervet, 1913, East Ilsley, 1852, Inkpen, 1824-1928, Stratfield Mortimer, 1906, Thatcham, 1772-1891, and Wokingham, 1856-1974, including Wokingham Laundry (**D/EX 204**); Ashbury, 1600-1662, Clewer, 1861-1894, Letcombe Regis, 1790-1792, Shrivenham, 1741-1866, and Thatcham again, 1741 (**D/EX 366**); Thatcham, 1613-1845, including Chamberhouse manor, 1613-1845 (**D/EX 617**); Hurst, 1897, Inkpen, 17361-1969, and Kintbury, c.1919-1978 (**D/EX 1045**); and Clewer, 1679 (**D/EX 1566**). We have also made available deeds of Bradfield and some papers of the Connop family, 1665-1942 (**D/EX 503**). Of particular interest was a map showing an army night march past Stonehenge in 1942.

Another collection is predominantly of deeds relating to Bray, 1814, Sunninghill, 1921-1960, Wargrave, c.1917-1927, and Winkfield, 1875-1890 (**D/EX 1548**). This collection includes an inventory of Kingswood House, Hare Hatch, which records the presence of a piece of Boer shrapnel, an American motor car, and a stool and velvet used at the coronation of King George V. It also includes some marriage settlements and papers for the Barnett family of Reading, the Crutchleys of Sunninghill and the Rogers family of Cookham.

A number of churches have added to their holdings here in recent months. These include Aldworth (**D/P 4**), 1964-1996, with marriage registers, 1978-1996; Aston

Tirrold (**D/P 10**), with the register of marriages, 1837-1978; Coleshill (**D/P 40**), which has deposited a probably 18th century watercolour sketch of a stained glass window brought from Angers, France, by the 1st Earl of Radnor in 1787; Kennington (**D/P 95B**), 1829-1988, including registers of baptisms, 1829-1966, marriages, 1866-1988 and banns, 1907-1987; Mortimer West End (**D/P 120C**), 1978-1979; Padworth (**D/P 89**), 1905-1989; Reading St Giles (**D/P 96**), 1925-1989; Reading St Luke (**D/P 173**), 1982-1994; Dry Sandford (**D/P 187**), 20th century; Sulham (**D/P 123**), 1969-1995; Theale (**D/P 132B**), 1920-1986; Welford (**D/P 147**), 1880s-1920s; Wickham (**D/P 147B**), 1922-1992; and Woolhampton (**D/P 156**), 1822 (see illustration).

Woolhampton Church,1822, before its restoration (D/P156/28/20/2)

The most interesting deposit has come from North Moreton (**D/P 86**), 1813-1991. The register of burials, 1813-1991, includes the burial in November 1813 of three members of the Bland family, 24 year old Harriet, 36 year old Mary, and baby Elizabeth, all of smallpox, the suicide by hanging of Richard Woolley, 68, in 1816, and the 1844 death and burial of "John Lamb alias John Moorhen", a travelling bottomer of chairs, who died in Wallingford workhouse aged 27. There are also some rather charming prayers for an election ("pray that all candidates, agents, canvassers, and electors, may avoid every temptation to impute unworthy motives … and may refrain from making, or embracing, unfounded promises").

Miscellaneous items recently catalogues include additional papers relating to Crookham Court School, Thatcham, 1972-1973 (**D/EX 1512**); albums recording the campaigning of the King Edward VII Hospital (Windsor) Defence Committee, 1988-1995 (**D/EX 1563**); and 1999 sale catalogues of the Hall, East Ilsley (**D/EX 1565**), Datchet House and Summerfield House, Wargrave (**D/EX 1575**), and Folly Farm, Sulhampstead (**D/EX 1578**).

Lisa Spurrier

Just William

Baptised at Speen on 21 August 1831 was Plainbill, son of William and Mary Duck of Shaw Crescent. This is not a mistake; the poor child appears in the burial register on 28 February 1835 bearing the same name. Perhaps the priest wanted to christen the lad William but his parents insisted that he was just "plain Bill".

Elizabeth Hughes

Berkshire Record Office, Shinfield Park, Reading RG2 9XD. Tel. 0118-901-5132
Fax 0118-901-5131 *Email ARCH@Reading.gov.uk*