The
Berkshire Echo
The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

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Stocktaking closure and Heritage open day

After a 2 year break, we will be resuming our annual closure for stocktaking this November. As before we will close for the first two weeks of the month, which means that after Friday 2 November we will not reopen until Tuesday 20 November. The annual closure allows us to dedicate time to large tasks which will improve our service to you. This year we will catch up with jobs carried over from the move, including updating our document location index and attending to building equipment maintenance.

Thank you to everyone who came along for our open afternoon on Saturday 8 September as part of this year's Heritage Open Days, organised by Reading Borough Council and the Civic Trust. We welcomed 103 people to see our displays in the searchroom and conservation unit, and to have tours of the strongrooms. Thank you also to everyone who completed a questionnaire. We will be feeding the results of this survey into our Best Value review.

Mark Stevens

Staff moves

In August we said farewell to archivist **Sarah Edmondson** who left for a post at Boots (the chemist) in Nottingham. Sarah will have been familiar to users of the Record Office through her work in the searchroom and as the office's contact for talks and visits. We wish her well in her new post.

Also in August we offered our congratulations to **Mark Stevens** on his promotion to Senior Archivist (Public Services). Mark has been with us since 1998, when he was appointed Senior Archivist (Official Records). He was closely involved with planning and supervising the move to the new building, and since then has been busy on a number of fronts, including building maintenance and our Best Value Review. He will now be responsible for managing and developing our services to users.

We are also pleased to welcome two new colleagues to the searchroom team. **Neila Warner** and **Kim Shahabudin** joined us in September and will be working on the enquiry desk until Christmas. Neila takes the morning slot, while Kim will be working in the afternoons. The regular enquiry desk team of Julie Grisman and Jane Powell will not be disappearing, however: they will simply be working at the other end of the room for a few months.

Peter Durrant

Bran Tubs and Sack Races

> That ancient piece of antiquity (in this neighbourhood) the White Horse was cleaned for many years by William, Lord Barrington, but the grounds on which the Horse is cut being allotted by the Commissioners for the Uffington inclosure 1775 to William, Lord Craven His Lordship has since that time cleansed it annually at His expense and has twice celebrated the Scouring of the Horse with many country diversions viz horse racing, ass racing, men running in sacks, men running down the steep part of the hill for a cheese, boys dipping in a tub of meal for a bullet etc etc etc. At both which sports there were computed to be upwards of 30,000 spectators. His Lordship gave a most elegant cold collation in a large booth to all the gentlemen of the neighbourhood who were present and likewise strong beer to the common people.

This is one of a number of memoranda of unusual events to be found in the Uffington parish register of baptisms, 1782-1801 (D/P 112/1/7). This particular note was made in c.1781-2. I like the way the gentlemen get the elegant cold collation and the common people make do with strong beer!

Sabina Sutherland

A Double Standard

An example of the Victorian double standard applied to unmarried mothers and the men responsible for their plight is revealed in the recently deposited records of Pangbourne Congregational Church. A church meeting on 6 July 1879 (D/N 45/1/1/1) heard the following case:-

> The case of Bessie Bragge (Number 42) and William Wells (No 45) were [sic] brought before the Church. The Pastor said it was with feelings of deep grief he brought this matter before the Members – but a sense of church discipline compelled it. Bessie Bragge was sent away from Mr Selwood's employ – as it was reported she was in the family way – by William Wells.
> The case was thoroughly investigated and the decision of the Church was that Bessie Bragge be expelled. William Wells was suspended untill [sic] further consideration.

The young lovers had both joined the church on 6 April 1879, and at this time were both servants in the house of Mr Selwood in Whitchurch, Oxfordshire. William later moved away to take up work in Wareham [in Dorset].

Lisa Spurrier

Literacy in Little Wittenham, 1815

A regular Record Office user has drawn staff attention to an interesting occurrence in Little Wittenham, recorded in the parish register of baptisms and burials, 1756-1812 (D/P 152/1/4). The Vicar had gone round the parish and asked at each cottage who could read and if they had any books – the books owned tended to be Bibles (or New Testaments) and prayer books, though ownership was frequently qualified with comments that the book was very old, only part of a book, or too small a print for the cottager to read. Women were more likely to be literate than men. This literacy survey is believed to have taken place around 1815. A few pages further on there follows a list of households with the numbers of children in each, which is dated 1813.

With thanks to **Angela Hillier**

Just Catalogued

The recently catalogued records of the Darby Pension Fund, 1897-1983 (D/QDA) cast a valuable light on employment and entrepreneurs in Cookham and Maidenhead in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Later records are closed for a period of 50 years as applicants for pensions supplied considerable personal information to do with their former business, family circumstances and reasons for current poverty. The charity, established in 1912 under the wills of the Darby brothers, provided a small pension for former businessmen and employers of labour who had since fallen on hard times. Most of the successful applicants were small shopkeepers, but others included builders, publicans and farmers, and a German-born hairdresser who attracted xenophobic comment from a rival. One man gave his occupation as inventor, and another had been the local registrar of births, marriages and deaths. Women were also eligible, and those applying in their own right (rather than as widows) included dressmakers, laundresses and a private schoolmistress (widow of an improvident clergyman).

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Mr Blowfield (above) later applied for a Darby pension

An album of photographs of electrical fittings supplied by Baughans of Reading to a number of local businesses shows premises including Burberrys, McIlroys, Suttons Seeds and many others in 1911 (D/EX 1655). We have also received some papers relating to Huntley and Palmers biscuit factory in Reading, particularly to its Home Guard Association and fire brigade, 1936-1970 (D/EX 1615. A small collection of printed miscellanea, 1938-1976 (D/EX 1650) includes catalogues from a number of local seed and garden firms. Scrapbooks relating to the opening of the C & A department store in Reading, 1974 (D/EX 1658), include a reminder of 1970s fashions. Also lately catalogued are some plans of gas works belonging to Reading Gas Company, 1881-1957 (D/EX 1593).

The very fine archive of manorial and estate records of Heywood manor in White Waltham, and papers of the Sawyer family, is now available for research, covering the period 1551-1916 (D/EX 1625). It includes material on the rebuilding of Maidenhead Chapel, 1822-1827. We were pleased to acquire a very rare early map of Earley common fields, drawn by local mathematician Edward Blagrave in 1669, apparently one of several copies made for the owners of common rights (D/EX 1648). A very large collection of deeds and other records of property in west Berkshire, especially Thatcham, has been listed (D/EX 1466). Among other property of interest is the Castle Hill estate in Reading, which seems to include the Record Office site. Other deeds have arrived relating to property in Ascot, 1881-1948 (D/EX 1635), Earley, 1904-1906 (D/EX 1647), Emmer Green, 1931-1932 (D/EX 1653), Hurley, 1647 (D/EX 1133), Letcombe Regis and area, 1620-1854 (D/EX 271), Newbury, 1904-1967 (D/EX 1637), Reading, 1810-1979 (D/EX 613, 1642, 1647, 1661), Sonning (Holme Park, 1914-1945) (D/EX 274), Sutton Courtenay, 1684-1845 (D/EZ 135), Wantage, 1803-1874 (D/EX 147), and Wargrave, 1733-1793 (D/EX 1663). We have also acquired very detailed

inventories and valuations of the contents of two large houses, 192-1942: Toutley Hall in Winnersh and Ridgeways, Crowthorne (D/EX 1662). More recent in date, but of use to future historians, are contemporary sale brochures for historic buildings in the county: Ufton Nervet church (D/EX 1620), St John Baptist Convent, Clewer (D/EX 1627) and the Henry Lucas Hopsital (almshouses), Wokingham (D/EX 1666).

Official records include those of Bradfield Civil Parish Council, 1894-1951 (CPC 22). Records from Old Windsor Hospital, formerly the Windsor Union Workhouse (D/H 2) include a late 19th century plan of the buildings and the chaplain's visiting book, 1953-1991. The annual accounts of Wallingford Board of Guardians, 1890-1891 (D/EX 1665), include a complete list of paupers chargeable at the time, including one two-year-old who had spent his entire life in the workhouse. South Bucks and Berks Housing Consortium minutes, 1964-1973 (J/HC) shed light on the co-ordination of housing and house-building policies in east Berkshire. We have also had some additional records of Reading National Savings Committee, 1916-1978 (P/NS 2). The Berkshire Education Committee syllabus for religious education in council schools, published in 1913 (D/EX 1659) shows in detail what young children were expected to study, and the lessons it was hoped they would learn. The life of Joseph, for instance, was taught to show that "Unkind Thoughts unless checked lead on to Terrible Crimes".

Recent deposits from churches have included parish records from Chilton, 1932-1997 (D/P 36), and Shaw-cum-Donnington, 1934-2001 (D/P106), and the 1895-1931 burial register of Chieveley (D/P 34), notable for its use of a register designed for civil burial grounds. The archives of Pangbourne Congregational (later United Reformed Church), 1841-2001, are a fascinating example of rural nonconformity (D/N 45). We have also received additional records of Theale URC, 1963-2000 (D/N 40), and an unfortunately rather fragile scrapbook, 1891-1962, from Trinity Congregational Church, Reading (D/N 10).

Papers relating to Ascot Boys Club, c1928-1938 (D/EX 1652), show lads from poor backgrounds playing sports and games and working together to "more or less run the club themselves … [and] build up their characters in such a way that they will not be able to help becoming very fine citizens in the future". Finally, we have received the records of Reading Guild of Artists, 1930-2000 (D/EX 1656), additional records of Reading Literary and Scientific Society, 1887-1927 (D/EX 1432), and the private accounts of A J Martin of Bracknell, 1936-1938 (D/EX 1664) which include references to leisure activities of the day such as dances, the cinema, and hair waves and cuts.

Lisa Spurrier

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