The
Berkshire Echo

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The BRO opens its doors to heritage

Ivone Turnbull, Visitor Services Archivist

The office provided behind the scenes tours on Saturday 9th September as part of the Heritage Open Day events. The turnout was double that of last year and visitors were able to take a look inside the strongrooms and the conservation suite as well as documents that had been laid out for viewing. It was an enjoyable day for all and we look forward to doing it again next year.

Dates for your diary

Ivone Turnbull, Visitor Services Archivist

An introduction to explore your history

The introductory visits to the BRO and its sources continue to be popular and the dates for 2007 are: 5th February, 16th April, 9th July and 8th October. If you would like to book a place on a visit and learn how you can use the BRO to explore your family or local history, please ask at Reception or call 0118 901 5132 to put your name down on the list.

News

Civil registration gets up-to-date

Ivone Turnbull, Visitor Services Archivist

The BRO has just purchased microfiche copies of the General Register Office (GRO) index of births, marriages and deaths for 2001 to 2003. This means our copy of civil registration in England and Wales now covers 1837 to 2003 making starting your family history even easier.

Take a note of local schools

Jeremy Taylor, Archivist

A free guide to records of schools in the Bracknell area is now available; the first in a new series of source guides on schools. The series is designed to supplement our searchroom schools card index and provide, in leaflet form, a summary of school records held at the BRO for each modern local authority area.

Use of yearbooks, directories, indexes and original documents has made it possible to trace the evolution of each school, identify it using its most recent name and list its records. The guide is arranged in order of place and then by record type, including admission registers, architectural drawings, log books and photographs. Most of the records are from the 19th and 20th centuries.

We hope the Bracknell guide will prove useful to anyone interested in the history of schools in the area. The guide is available in the searchroom at the office.

Illustration: local schoolchildren greeting the Queen on her visit to Bracknell, 1962 (document reference C/EZ 50/9).

Stories from the archives

Murder and mayhem in Marcham (part 2)

Lisa Spurrier, Archivist

In the last issue, the story of a long dispute between the Revd David Jones and the churchwardens of Marcham was reported. Here the story continues.

In 1703 the vicar accused a "London brewer" called Felix Calvert of interrupting a sermon and for "Sending Ale into Church for certain persons to drink his health with". In 1704 he was presented (people were 'presented' to the archdeacon or bishop if they were suspected of breaking church law) as a "Sower of discord among his neighbours, & for bringing actions against his Minister in other mens names, & for telling several lies of his minister". By 1707 his alleged offences included adultery with Elizabeth Stone, a recent widow.

The churchwardens themselves were heavily criticised by Jones who claimed that they provided bread and wine for communion that was "So full of filth & gravel that it was not fit to be eat or drunk". He also accused them of allowing books to be stolen from the parish library, allowing dogs into church during the service and failing to present wrongdoers such as Calvert. In 1707 he complained that John Shury and John Sawyer had commandeered the office of churchwardens.

Another parish official at odds with the vicar was the parish clerk Charles Higgins, whose offences included not attending church, "behaving unmannerly" when he was there, and allowing people to ring the bells against Jones' "express command". In 1703 Jones presented Richard Brown for "refusing to do the office of Sexton, by bringing water into the Font when persons of riper years are to be baptized".

Between 1712 and 1718 there was a temporary halt to the 'mayhem', but by 1719 the vicar was in trouble again for leaving the church in the middle of the service. This happened more and more frequently during the early 1720s and may reflect Jones' increasing disillusionment. He was last presented in 1724, the year in which he died.

Cataloguing news

Fair Mile Hospital archives now available

Kate Tyte, Project Archivist

The records of Berkshire's former mental hospital, the Fair Mile Hospital, Cholsey, 1870-1980, (catalogue reference D/H 10) have just been catalogued and conserved as part of our Mental Health Records Project thanks to the award of a grant from the Wellcome Trust.

Illustration: Photograph of the Lodge at Fair Mile Hospital, 2001 (document reference D/EX1678/1/1/1).

Fair Mile Hospital opened in September 1870 and was the only hospital of its type in the county until it closed in 2003. The surviving records provide a picture of a typical county mental hospital, functioning as a large and almost self-sufficient community. Like other county mental hospitals Fair Mile initially treated its patients through the 'moral method', with plenty of food, exercise, entertainments and work on the farms and gardens, or in the kitchens and laundry. In 1948 the hospital was incorporated into the NHS and became part of the Berkshire Mental Hospitals Group, which included a number of smaller units, children's homes, and institutions for the 'mentally defective'. From this time onwards Fair Mile began to use new methods of medical and non-medical treatment, including Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT), new drugs, and psychological therapies.

The catalogue is available in the searchroom and details the collection, which includes records related to hospital administration, land and buildings, staff, and patients. The highlight of the collection is an almost complete set of the statutory patient records from 1870 to 1944, including admission registers, records of medical treatment, case books, and registers of discharges and deaths. The case books in particular offer a fascinating insight into the development of mental health care, showing how changing methods of classifying, understanding and treating mental illness were put into practice in the treatment of individuals.

An online gallery has also been created providing a brief history of the hospital, along with some of the highlights of the collection. This can be seen on our website at: www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/collections.

Broadmoor Hospital

Following on from the Fair Mile project, we have been awarded a further grant from the Wellcome Trust to undertake a two-year project to catalogue and conserve the records of Broadmoor Hospital. This project is now underway and should hopefully be completed by the end of 2008.

Just catalogued

Lisa Spurrier, Archivist

Many records of local government have been catalogued including those of Wokingham Rural District Council (catalogue reference RD/WO; further catalogue references in this article are supplied in brackets). This authority governed the current Wokingham District area with the exception of the town of Wokingham itself from 1895 to 1974. Responsibilities varied, but included highways, water supply and sewerage, planning, provision of council houses, waste disposal and other public health matters, the fire brigade, and civil defence. There is a good series of rate books (some going as far back as the 1870s), recording owners and occupiers, which could be useful when undertaking house history.

Minutes of Wallingford Borough Council, 1835-1974 (WA/) have also been catalogued which involved the reclassification of some volumes. Among these are minutes of the Council acting as Burial Board, 1859-1935, as Local Board of Health, 1863-1873, as Urban Sanitary Authority, 1873-1894, and as Urban District Council, 1895-1941. The minutes of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, 1973-1999, have been catalogued (DC/WO), though most will not be widely available for research due to the inclusion of sensitive information.

The records of St Birinus Group Hospital Management Committee, formerly Berkshire Mental Hospital Management Committee (P/HA2) have been catalogued as part of our Mental Health Records Project (see the previous article regarding the Fair Mile archives). This body managed Fair Mile and other institutions for the mentally ill and those with learning disabilities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire from 1948.

We have received additional parish records from Chilton (D/P36); Cox Green (D/P183); Farnborough (D/P54); Grazeley (D/P124B); Milton (D/P85); Reading All Saints (D/P168); Reading Greyfriars (D/P163); Reading St Mary (D/P98); Reading St John (D/P172), including the text of an anti-Catholic sermon preached at the church in 1865; Sonning (D/P113); and Windsor Holy Trinity (D/P166). Records produced by the Church Commissioners relating to Berkshire parishes include deeds of property in Ashbury, 1798-1875, plans showing new ecclesiastical districts, 1859-1876, and plans for parsonage houses, 1840-1949 (D/QC). We have also received records from Winnersh Parish Council (CPC73C).

A fascinating photograph album compiled by Charley Kemp of Wiltshire in 1897 includes views of places in the Lambourn, Great Shefford and Hungerford area (D/EX1936). Other records include an inventory of the plate, jewels and effects of Sir Francis William Sykes of Basildon Park, 1805 (D/EX1921) and the diaries of Edith Mellor of Windsor, 1954-1958 (D/EX1959). Miss Mellor transcribed books into Braille for the National Library For The Blind.

Contact Us:
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

The Berkshire Record Office, a countywide archive service supported by all local authorities in the Royal County of Berkshire:

Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough,
West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham.

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