

## The Berkshire Record Office

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THIS description of the work of the County Record Office contains the following sections: (1) a general account of the growth, aims and activities of this office; (2) a brief survey of its main contents; (3) a more detailed account of important collections already catalogued; (4) a short paper with full transcript regarding a brief but important document which has come to light. It is hoped that (3) and (4) will form more or less regular items in this Journal, though the former will normally be a list of the major accessions of any calendar year. As for the latter, I hope to be able to offer a series of brief articles on selected documents, each being an item of special interest which has been found among the material in the office.

### (1) GENERAL ACCOUNT.

There is a sense in which the history of any local record office began with the Law of Property (Amendment Act) of 1924, which urged local authorities to set up County Record Offices recognised by the Master of the Rolls as places fit for the deposit of manorial records. This Act heralded the proper establishment of such offices in this country, a legislative wish ably supported by the pioneer work of Dr. G. H. Fowler, in Bedfordshire.

In Berkshire, however, no immediate official action followed, though in due course the Reading University Library was recognised as a Manorial Repository. Then in the early thirties, the Archaeological Society became seriously interested in the project of a County Record Office and urged the County Council to take action. Matters reached a head about 1936 when the University Library felt unable to continue as the official county manorial repository, and at the request of the County Council, the Master of the Rolls agreed to recognise the Strong Room of the Clerk of the Council as a fit place for the deposit of manorial records—a recognition followed by the transfer of certain records from the University to the Shire Hall, Reading.

With that act the die was finally cast, and, but for the outbreak of war in 1939, a properly established Berkshire Record Office, with a County Archivist in charge, would now have been nearing its tenth year of activity. Other more serious matters intervened and it was not until the end of 1947 that the County Records Committee felt able to recommend that the decisions of 1939 should be put into effect. On 10th August, 1948, the new Berkshire Record Office began its work.

It should not be imagined, however, that the war years were an entire loss. During that period the British Record Association and various interested persons had deposited a quantity of historical records at the Shire Hall. The most important collection thus received was the Berkshire MSS. of the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Craven, deposited by his solicitors through the British Record Association.

The first task, therefore, has been one of reorganisation and the listing of material already in the office, but before describing briefly the contents, it will be well to review the aims and activities of the office. Primarily, a record office, whether national or local, is a place of custody for the legal records of the authority to which it is attached. There is, therefore, a principal utilitarian aim of making the official county records more accessible and of caring for their better preservation, so that members of the staff or others whose duty it is to consult them are aided to the greatest extent.

Secondly, there is the aim that a local office shall house as representative as possible a collection of records for the county. The official county records are already here, the status of manorial repository has been referred to above, and recently the Bishop of Oxford agreed to recognise this office as the repository for parochial records in the hands of incumbents within the Archdeaconry of Berkshire. The stage is set, therefore, for the possible accumulation of a considerable quantity of Berkshire records of all kinds within the muniment rooms allocated to the Record Office. Certain owners have already shewn great public spirit in depositing their records on a permanent loan basis. In return such archives will be catalogued, carefully stored, and, in time, repaired if necessary. The accession of an important collection belonging to the Earl of Craven has been noted, and to this should be added the equally valuable archives received on deposit from the Rt. Hon. Lord Braybrooke, and numerous smaller accessions from other sources.

Mere collection would be rather negative unless use is made of the material thus brought together. A very important educational aspect of the work arises therefore and it is hoped that, as cataloguing gradually makes more documents available, an increasing number of persons will visit the Office as students and searchers. The opportunity thus offered is considerable—interest in a family, an old house, a parish, or some wider field of research, can all be aided with the written and printed records thus accumulated. A record office may be regarded as the laboratory of history and the greater number of persons working on original material and learning how to piece together the threads of evidence hidden therein the better in this age of dogma and counter-dogma. Therefore, I do invite and urge members of the Archaeological Society to assist the work of the County Records Committee by encouraging would-be depositors, by preventing the destruction of any

potentially interesting records, and by using the material made available in the Berks. Record Office. It is still so early in the life of the office that little has yet been accomplished in the way of cataloguing and indexing but this is a continuous process and I look forward, already, to the ultimate publication of a printed *Guide* to the archives deposited here. At the same time, I hope that teachers of history will also be able to derive considerable benefit and assistance from the material available and that small exhibitions of selected records will help to make the past live for some of the pupils of our schools.

## (2) CONTENTS OF THE OFFICE.

The following list of classes of records shows in broad outline the main classes in the Record Office in January 1949—it does not pretend to be a detailed schedule of documents or collections.

### I. OFFICIAL ARCHIVES.

- (a) County Council records from 1889. (These are not generally available for research and therefore need not be listed here).
- (b) Quarter Sessions records, 1703–1889. (The later records of this court come under the same restrictions as those in (a) above). The principal extant classes are :—
  - Sessions rolls, 1734–1889
  - Petition & Order rolls, mid-18th century
  - Order books, 1703–1889
  - Minute books, 1731–1795
  - Administrative records—bridges, gaols, etc.
  - Religious oath rolls
  - Qualification rolls for justices, deputy lieutenants, etc.
  - Registers of electors, 1839–1889
  - Enclosure Awards and maps for about 90 parishes.

It is greatly regretted that no earlier Quarter Sessions records remain in official custody, though occasionally early records may be found in private collections.<sup>1</sup>

- (c) Transferred records—comprise chiefly Guardians records, 1835–1930, for all Unions except Reading, and volumes of minutes for some Highway Boards and Rural Sanitary Authorities. Under this class also is a series of minutes, etc., for the Reading Petty Sessional Division, 1854–1930.

### II. ESTATE AND FAMILY ARCHIVES.

It is impossible to give a satisfactory description of the contents of this class for it can contain almost anything. Besides, each collection stands by itself and only a small number of collections have yet been catalogued. The following may give a

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<sup>1</sup> See (4) below for an account of such a document.

rough outline of the types of records found in these collections :

- (a) Manorial records—court rolls, estreats, rentals, surveys, and bailiffs' accounts (*compoti*), etc., 1300-1947, for a number of manors mainly in West and North Berks.
- (b) Title deeds—a considerable quantity c. 1200-1890, including some for nearly every parish. The principal groups are those for the Craven and Archer-Houblon estates in West and North Berks, and for the Neville and Aldworth estates in East Berks. Very many remain to be examined and listed.
- (c) Family papers—includes accounts, terriers, documents relating to the holding of public office, as well as more personal items. A very miscellaneous class but often of great interest and importance.
- (d) Maps—very few estate maps have so far been received other than an exceptionally fine series for the Craven Estates 1775-85. A fairly comprehensive collection of printed county maps is available for examination as is also a complete set of the 1st Edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey.

### III. PAROCHIAL AND BOROUGH ARCHIVES.

Very little work has so far been done with regard to these records, but the office houses a few documents for Bray, White Waltham, Faringdon and East Hendred parishes, and for Abingdon, Wallingford and Windsor boroughs.

### IV. RECORD OFFICE LIBRARY.

A small but useful library of reference books, county and parish histories, etc., is being gradually built up and may be consulted in the office.

#### (3) PRINCIPAL ACCESSIONS, 1948.

The following detailed list includes some items received 1937-48 but only recently catalogued. As indicated above, a large quantity of deeds, etc., still remain to be sorted and catalogued.

*Neville MSS.* (Deposited by the Rt. Hon. Lord Braybrooke).

Manorial. Court roll of Wingfield, 1422-61; *compoti* of Billingbear in Waltham St. Lawrence, 1430-55; rentals, surveys, estreats and misc. papers of Waltham St. Lawrence, Wargrave and Warfield, c. 1375, c. 1575-1722; surveys of Old and New Windsor, 1605; rental of Bishop's Harwell, 1684.

Deeds. 690 mainly of Waltham St. Lawrence, Wargrave, Warfield, Hurst, Ruscombe, Binfield and Wokingham, 1448-1854; and small numbers for Old and New Windsor, 1631-1756; Arborfield and Finchampstead, 1701-1844; Harwell, 1700-37; and Shiplake (co. Oxon), 1571-1796.

Family papers. Personal, estate, legal and official papers of members of the Neville and Aldworth families including—marriage settlement between

Ralph Lord Nevill and Thomas Earl of Kent, 1394; armorial pedigree of the Staverton family of Bray and Warfield, c. 1623; correspondence and papers of Sir Hen. Neville, father and son, who were justices and lieutenants of the county and verderers of Windsor Forest, c. 1575-1620; Windsor Forest papers, c. 1575-1817; papers relating to purveyance composition money in the hundreds of Cookham and Bray, 1593; and Parliamentary election poll books, etc., for Berks. and Windsor borough, 1711-1820.

Maps. Windsor Forest, 1823.

*Craven MSS.* (Deposited by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Craven).

Manorial. Court rolls, etc., of Hampstead Marshall, 1668-1840, with estreats, 1620, 1676; Benham Valence cum Westbroke in Speen, 1447-1838, with extent, 1343, and compoti, 1444-53; Woodspene in Speen, 1593-1757; East and West Enborne, 1663, 1720-1841, with estreats, 1663-4, and rentals, 1661-4; Holt *alias* Kintbury Eaton in Kintbury, 1663-1840, with estreats, 1663-4, and rentals, 1663-4; Inkpen or Inkpen East Court in Inkpen, 1307-1479, 1609-1840, with rental, 1408, survey, 1579, and compoti, 1300-1473; Lambourn (hundred and manor), 1663-1840, with estreats, 1660-70, and rentals, 1662-1701; Ashbury, 1572, 1663-1841, with estreats, 1661-72, and rental, 1661-2; Uffington, 1720-1811, with survey, c. 1620; Garford in Marcham, 1740-57; Sutton Courtney, 1476-9, 1525, 1720-86; Hagbourne, 1663-1757, with rental including Aston and Garford, 1689.

Deeds. 2,300 mainly for Hampstead Marshall (70), 1572-1793; Speen (46), 1630-1801; Enborne (60), 1637-1811, Inkpen (97), c. 1300-1853; Kintbury (86), 1542-1822; Lambourn (176) 1515-1859; Ashbury (300), 1544-1867; Uffington (165), 1578-1872; and Sparsholt (205), 1632-1853. Also smaller numbers for Compton Beauchamp, 1772-1865; Shrivenham, 1683, 1715; Wantage, 1718-20; Steventon, 1693; East Hendred, 1697-1736; West Hendred, 1708-10; Hagbourne, 1627-1823, Marsham, 1545-1662; Abingdon and Beedon, 1760; Yattendon and Hampstead Norris, 1448-1766; Reading and Shinfield, 1628-30; Sonning, 1759, 1784; Twyford, 1702; White Waltham, 1664; Wokingham, 1805, 1815; Old Windsor, 1697-1818; Caversham (co. Oxon), 1632-81. In addition there are 947 leases for lands in most of the above parishes.

Family papers. The majority relate to estate matters and include detailed maps and terriers, 1775-85; timber accounts, 1727-57; agreements for rights of common, enclosure and improved tillage at Ashbury, Inkpen and Compton Beauchamp, 1699-1795; estate accounts, 1722-46; tax roll for Faringdon and Shrivenham hundreds, 1658; estreat roll for Abingdon Epiphany Sessions, 1666; Kintbury poor rate, 1691; petition, etc., for charity school at Ashbury, 1724.

*Documents of Greenham in Thatcham.* (Deposited by the Executors of the late L. H. Baxendale, Esq.)

Manorial, Court rolls etc. of Greenham, 1587-1913, with survey, 1559; Stratfield Mortimer, 1658-1714.

Deeds. 8 of Thatcham, 1590-1795.

Family papers. Marriage settlement between Henry St. John and Frances Winchcombe, 1701, and decretal order regarding the Bolingbroke estate, 1718; estate accounts of Sir Arthur Croft, 1780-81.

*Rentals of the Earl of Abingdon's Estates* in Wytham and elsewhere, 1760-80. (Presented by the Keeper of the Western MSS., Bodleian Library, Oxford).

*Berks. Assize Roll*, Easter 1649-50. (Presented by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury).

## (4) SELECTED DOCUMENT.

An early Berks. Justices' Order, 1586.

Below is given the full text of a brief but interesting document recently received in the newly established Berks. Record Office at the Shire Hall, Reading.<sup>1</sup> Students of local history are well enough aware that the most important series of records in any county is that emanating from the Court of Quarter Sessions and the Justices of the Peace. It is more than disappointing when, as in Berkshire, these official records do not survive for the Tudor and Stuart period.<sup>2</sup> Careless custody in the past may well account, in part, for this loss, for documents might be kept in private houses rather than officially by the Clerk of the Peace. In 1737 the then treasurer for the Vale Division of the county<sup>3</sup> reported to Quarter Sessions that he had examined all the records of his predecessors which were at his house,<sup>4</sup> documents the whereabouts of which no one now knows, if indeed they exist. In much the same way this original order of 1586, by far the earliest official justices' record so far discovered for this county, was preserved among the papers of Sir Henry Neville of Billingbear in Waltham St. Lawrence, himself lord lieutenant, a justice, and a verderer of Windsor Forest. By devious routes and complicated family connections these papers found their way to Audley End mansion in Essex and have now returned to the county to which they relate and for which they have a special significance. They provide yet one more example indicating that possessors of old papers should not destroy them but should get into touch with some interested person who can advise on the best means of preserving what is of value.

The order given here was for the erection of Houses of Correction in this county and indicates that the Berks. justices were alive to the problem of poor law in Tudor days and to current solutions for the problem and reminds us of a famous meeting at Speenhamland two centuries later when a very different order was made. The first Act requiring justices to set up Houses of Correction after the manner of the London Bridewell, was passed in 1576<sup>5</sup>, and it may well have taken a decade for the counties to begin serious work.<sup>6</sup> Even after this order was made there is no means of telling if action was taken, and that justices generally were not over anxious to incur the expense of such work is suggested by the further Act of 1610 when a time limit was set for erection.

<sup>1</sup> Catal. Mark : D/EN OI. Found among the valuable collection of MSS. deposited with the County Council by the Rt. Hon. Lord Braybrooke.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest official county record in the Berks Record Office is the Sessions Order Book for 1703. Some of the boroughs have earlier records extant.

<sup>3</sup> Berkshire was divided for convenience in the Vale, Hill and Forest Divisions.

<sup>4</sup> B.R.O. Q/SRp 1/1.

<sup>5</sup> 18 Eliz., c. 3.

<sup>6</sup> in Essex the earliest reference was 1587 (see *Guide to Essex Record Office*. Part I (1946), p. 22).

It says something for Berkshire that money had already been collected for this purpose as early as the Spring of 1586.

Among the signatories are some well known persons including Thomas Parry of Hampstead Marshall, son of the treasurer of Queen Elizabeth's household. He was Member for Berkshire at this date, Sheriff in 1576 and 1588, deputy lieutenant from 1596 and ambassador to France, 1601-1605. Bessels Fettiplace, a member of a notable Berkshire family, was sheriff in 1585, while John Dolman, son of a Newbury clothier and lord of the manor of Shaw, was also sheriff in 1588.<sup>2</sup> Other names of interest are Sir Reade Stafford of Bradfield, and Humfrey Forster of Aldermaston who gave hospitality to Queen Elizabeth in 1592. On the other hand the first name is very uncertain. No trace of a Benton family has been found to confirm the suggestion made here but the caligraphy is difficult and this solution is therefore only tentative.

In the transcript below, abbreviations have been extended and a minimum of punctuation added, capitals remain as in the original.

### xij<sup>o</sup> Aprilis 1586

Bark Yt is Agreed that there shall in every Devisioun be [A *struck through*] houses of correction erected for the settinge of the poore on work and for the poonyshing of Roges, the same to be erected in soche place as the Justices of every Devisioun shall thinke good, And with good ordres [as *inserted above*] by their discescons shalbe thought mete And the somme of monney alreddy collected in every Devisioun to be employed Abowte the same by the said Justices

Edward [?]Benton

Tho. [?]Parry

Bessels Fetiplace

Rede Stafforde

Humfry Forster

Chrys. Pytcott

Edward Bacon

Jhon (*sic*) Dolman

<sup>1</sup> 7 Jas. I, c. 4.

<sup>2</sup> From the information given in Vict. Co. Hist., vol. 1, it appears that there were two sheriffs in 1588.