

## THE BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

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The Berkshire Record Office, which is in the Shire Hall in Reading, was established by the Berkshire County Council in 1948 as the county repository for historical documents. Items had been accepted by the County Council from various owners from 1936 onwards but the opening of the Record Office and the appointment of an archivist had to be deferred until three years after the end of the war.

A *Guide* to the contents of the Record Office was published in 1952; this affords a survey of the main types of records held, particularly those of Quarter Sessions, but it is now out of print. As a large amount of material has been received since its publication, reprinting is not worthwhile; a new, revised edition is required to do justice to the additional records but this will take some years to prepare and is not being undertaken at present because other work is of more immediate importance.

Meanwhile, a comprehensive system of indexes provides a guide to the records and these indexes are available to readers in the Record Office. The main indexes are to subjects and places—the latter usually the ancient parishes—which are then further classified by subjects within the parish. A third index is of names of persons mentioned in documents, though not every document is indexed in this way. The indexes are based on the catalogues which are detailed lists of the records. Others include those of manors and manorial records and documents on the enclosure of commons and open fields.

By the terms of the Local Government Act, 1972, the parishes north of the Berkshire Downs were transferred to Oxfordshire on 1st

April, 1974. With the exception of the working records of the County Council, many of which were transferred to the Oxfordshire County Council, the Act has made little difference to the archives in the care of the Berkshire Record Office. Deposited and private records dating from before 1st April, 1974 have not been transferred. This follows the general procedure adopted, it is understood, by the relevant record offices when the Greater London Council included within its area parts of the neighbouring counties in 1965. Separation of archives, even when it happens to be physically possible, is often inadvisable as it breaks up the unity of the archive group. The Bodleian Library (Department of Western Manuscripts) and the Oxfordshire County Record Office both receive copies of catalogues at Reading as these are completed.

The official records of the county up to 1889 were those of Quarter Sessions, which then possessed both judicial and administrative functions. Unfortunately, these records have survived in Berkshire from 1703 only; in the latter part of the eighteenth century they are a source for very varied aspects of the social and economic history of the county. In 1889, when the County Council was established as the county administrative authority, the court of Quarter Sessions became exclusively a judicial body until its abolition in 1971. As public records, the archives of this court are available, subject to a thirty-year limit.

The record office is approved as the Diocesan Record Office for parish records of parishes within the Archdeaconry of Berkshire. These records are very varied; in addition to early parish registers of baptisms, marriages

and burials there are often records of parish administration, such as accounts and rate books of the overseers of the poor and of parish surveyors of the highways. A large proportion of the surviving parish records is now deposited in the record office. Among them are the churchwardens' accounts of St. Laurence, Reading, from 1432. The sixteenth century accounts of the ancient parishes in Reading show the influence of doctrinal changes at the Reformation in alterations in church furnishings and service books.<sup>1</sup>

Medieval records are among the archives of one of the oldest boroughs, Wallingford. These exist from the early part of the thirteenth century and were the subject of one of the early Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.<sup>2</sup> Archives of the boroughs of Maidenhead and Wokingham and of the town of Hungerford are also deposited in the record office; these survive from the sixteenth century or later. The boroughs of Newbury and Windsor keep their own borough archives. Certain classes of the records of the borough of Abingdon were discarded by the borough in the mid-nineteenth century but were purchased by a local inhabitant; these are now held in the Record Office. The archives of the former County Borough of Reading are also now in its care.

Of other groups of records, probably those of families and their estates are of greatest interest. Berkshire is not particularly rich in accumulations within the county of the records of great estates, for several reasons—extensive Crown estates, corporate possessions such as those of the Oxford colleges and, earlier, monastic houses. The lack of continuity in ownership of secular holders of lands often produced in its turn a lack of care of records.

The Crown estates were extensive and not only near Windsor. Unless the lands were later sold, as some were, the records found their

way eventually to the Public Record Office. The exceptions were manorial records of the manors of Cookham and Bray which were both sold in 1818, when many Crown lands were offered for sale. Although there are records of these manors in the Public Record Office, a considerable quantity of both the medieval and later archives was handed over at the time of the sale to the respective purchasers of the estates; these are now in the Berkshire Record Office where they are deposited in the names of their respective owners.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to know whether estates of the Oxford colleges were any more extensive than in other counties; in the parishes of what was formerly north Berkshire, nearer to Oxford, they may well have been greater.

Although in many cases the records of an estate, if not of a family, were handed over to the purchasers, the observation made by Daniel and Samuel Lysons in the early years of the nineteenth century, that "there are but few large estates which have continued many generations in the same family"<sup>4</sup> in the county is very pertinent to the survival of manuscript material. While the title deeds or "evidences" of the estate would necessarily be handed over, and also, while manorial courts were still an effective source of profit, the manor court rolls and books, the records of a family whose last representative had died or removed from the county were often only preserved through personal interest or perhaps the family piety of a married daughter.

Few extensive groups of medieval estate records, therefore, are in the Berkshire Record Office and medieval court rolls and other records of manors in the county are much more plentiful in the Public Record Office than locally. Even so, the county record office has some estate and family archives of considerable extent and interest, including some of the medieval period.

<sup>1</sup> The churchwardens' accounts of St. Mary's, Reading were transcribed and printed in 1893 by F. N. A. Garry and A. G. Garry as *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of St. Mary's, Reading, Berks. 1550-1662*.

<sup>2</sup> H.M.C. *Sixth Report*, (1877-8), 571-594.

<sup>3</sup> Cookham: B[erkshire] R[ecord] O[ffice] D/EAr (owned by the National Trust; formerly by the Maidenhead and Cookham Commons Preservation Committee); and D/ESk. Bray: D/EG and D/ESr. These three were deposited by other private owners.

<sup>4</sup> S. and D. Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, (1806), I, 179.

Of these, the Bouverie-Pusey papers are among the earliest in date. The Pusey family held the manor of Pusey, a few miles east of Faringdon, "from time immemorial"<sup>5</sup> until the present century. Their papers, the subject of a brief note in a Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission,<sup>6</sup> include a cartulary or register of twenty-eight deeds entered on a parchment roll; this was compiled in the thirteenth century—the deeds date from 1204. As a secular cartulary, one of the comparatively few made for private owners, it is of particular interest.<sup>7</sup> Another unusual item among these papers is an agreement, made in 1298, between two knights, Sir Nicholas Kingston, apparently of Pusey and with connections with Kingston Bagpuize and Sir William Mansell of Gloucestershire, for mutual protection in peace and war.<sup>8</sup> Though these are documents which are relatively rare, the later papers in this group are typical of many other family collections.

Philip Pusey, elder brother of Edward Pusey, one of the leaders of the Tractarian movement at Oxford in the nineteenth century, was a member of Parliament for Berkshire, an agriculturist of note and one of the founders of the Royal Agricultural Society. Many of his papers are among those of the family in the record office; they include various papers by other writers on agriculture in addition to accounts for the Pusey estates, plans for labourers' cottages and other like papers.

Another family whose history can be traced for several centuries is that of the Nevilles, formerly of Billingbear in Waltham St. Lawrence. They were descended from Ralph Neville, first Earl of Westmorland (1364–1425) whose own agreement with Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, in 1394, for a marriage between

his son John, and one of the two daughters of the Earl of Kent is among the family's papers deposited in the record office.<sup>9</sup> Most of the papers, however, are of a later date, mainly of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries.

In the latter half of the sixteenth century Sir Henry Neville was a justice of the peace for the county and a keeper of part of Windsor Forest; the latter office he claimed to be hereditary. A number of letters and orders show the duties which he and his successors carried out in preserving the forest trees and game; arrangements were made for supplies of venison and in 1582 oaks were felled for repairs to Windsor Castle.<sup>10</sup> Several members of the family held public office; their official papers are in the Public Record Office but their papers on local affairs and appointments as High Stewards of Windsor and of Wokingham are with the family papers in the county record office.

In the eighteenth century a marriage with Richard Aldworth of Stanlake in the parish of Hurst brought the Berkshire estates of the Nevilles to the Aldworth family, together with their own archives. The son of this marriage, Richard Neville Aldworth, later took the additional surname of Neville; he followed both his Aldworth and Neville ancestors as a member of Parliament and sat for Reading, when he held office as an under-secretary of state, and later for Wallingford.<sup>11</sup> His notebooks, containing brief notes of debates in the House of Commons (1747–1766),<sup>12</sup> are of particular interest. These papers, and others on the Essex estates of the family now in the Essex Record Office, were deposited by the present owner, Lord Braybrooke.

Another Berkshire family established in the county for several centuries was that of Pleydell; Thomas Pleydell is said to have built a chapel in the parish church of Coleshill at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The Coleshill

<sup>5</sup> *V[ictoria] C[ounty] H[istory] of Berkshire*, IV, 472.

<sup>6</sup> H.M.C. *Seventh Report*, (1879), 681.

<sup>7</sup> B.R.O. D/EBp Tl. See G. R. C. Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain*, (1958), 152 (no. 1309).

<sup>8</sup> The agreement is printed and discussed by K. B. McFarlane, "An Indenture of Agreement between two English Knights for Mutual Aid and Counsel in Peace and War, 5 December 1298", *Bulletin I.H.R.*, XXXVIII No. 98, (1965), 200–210.

<sup>9</sup> B.R.O. D/EN Fl.

<sup>10</sup> B.R.O. D/EN o12.

<sup>11</sup> He served as a Member continuously from 1747 to 1774; (from 1761 as member for Tavistock).

<sup>12</sup> B.R.O. D/EN o 34/1–24.

<sup>13</sup> *V.C.H., Berks.*, IV, 522.

estate, which was then held by Edington Priory, came into the ownership of a later Thomas Pleydell, through his mother's marriage, at the end of the seventeenth century and eventually passed, again by marriage, to the Pleydell-Bouverie family, Earls of Radnor, in 1768. The estate is now owned by the National Trust, which placed certain of the family and estate papers in this record office; others were deposited there by members of the family.<sup>14</sup> The correspondence of William, third Earl of Radnor (who died in 1869) forms a considerable part of this collection of papers and reflects his work as Chairman of the County Quarter Sessions and his many philanthropic interests in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The estate records include weekly statements by the bailiff of work on the grounds at Coleshill between 1795 and 1801,<sup>15</sup> referred to as a "complete alteration", and "laid out according to the present taste of landscape gardening".<sup>16</sup> Later plans, with a report, both prepared by the landscape gardener and writer, John Claudius Loudon, shortly before his death in 1843, show details of several proposed schemes for the gardens.<sup>17</sup>

Many of the other papers are those of families which settled in the county in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. Having made money in their professions or in trade, they chose Berkshire as a county in which to purchase an estate and live as country gentry. Pleasantly rural, the county yet had reasonably good means of communication with other areas. William Pearce, writing in 1794, spoke of its "ready communication with the Metropolis" and its "excellent roads".<sup>18</sup> Early in the nineteenth century it was said that "few

places in this county are above three miles from some good turnpike road",<sup>19</sup> so that even before the construction of the Great Western Railway in the early 1840s most of the county was within relatively easy reach of London.

In the first quarter of the seventeenth century members of the Craven family purchased the manors of Hampstead Marshall and Uffington, to which other estates then in west and north-west Berkshire were later added. Sir William Craven, father of the first Earl of Craven, was a member of the Merchant Taylors' Company of the city of London; an indenture of partnership with two others of the Company in 1616 for trading in woollen cloth survives among the family's records.<sup>20</sup> Very few papers on the family itself are among this group, which was deposited in the record office by their solicitors but the estate records for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are full, though not completely continuous throughout that period. In particular, two volumes of surveys of most of the Berkshire estates give details of the farms leased out (1775-1785), and are bound with very finely-drawn maps of each parish by Matthias Baker.<sup>21</sup> Early eighteenth century agreements with tenants for enclosure of open fields are also among these papers.

At about the same time that Sir William Craven was buying estates in the west of Berkshire, William Trumbull, Clerk of the Privy Council under Charles I, received a grant of the royal manor of Easthampstead, near Wokingham. Trumbull was a former envoy to the Netherlands; his grandson, Sir William, an ecclesiastical lawyer, was ambassador to Turkey under James II and William and Mary and later a secretary of state. His years of retirement from official duties were spent at Easthampstead, where he became a friend and patron of the young Alexander Pope, then living at Binfield. The local estate papers of the family, together with their official

<sup>14</sup> Miss K. Pleydell-Bouverie and her sister, the late Miss M. E. Pleydell-Bouverie.

<sup>15</sup> B.R.O. D/EPb E25.

<sup>16</sup> J. Britton and E. W. Brayley, *A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Berks.*, (from *The Beauties of England and Wales*), (1801), 132.

<sup>17</sup> B.R.O. D/EPb E60 and D/EPb P18-22.

<sup>18</sup> W. Pearce, *General View of the Agriculture in Berkshire*, (1794), 9.

<sup>19</sup> W. Mavor, *General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire*, (1809), 422.

<sup>20</sup> B.R.O. D/EC B2.

<sup>21</sup> B.R.O. D/EC E11/1,2.

correspondence, form one of the largest private collections in the record office;<sup>22</sup> the papers are subject to a stipulation by the owner which, while not limiting access to them, affects the taking of copies.

In the south of the county, abutting on Hampshire, Henry Lannoy Hunter purchased an estate at Beech Hill in 1740; the family continued there until recently. One of the earlier members of the family, Henry Hunter, was a London merchant trading with Turkey; his records, kept in several volumes between 1660 and 1709,<sup>23</sup> give details of his transactions. Broadcloth was exported and from Aleppo and Smyrna spices (cloves, cinnamon and pepper), Burma silk and mohair were imported. The papers also include local items; the accounts for work on a later Henry Hunter's farm in the mid-eighteenth century, probably kept by his bailiff, are of interest.<sup>24</sup>

Another London trader, and a prosperous laceman, was Bryant Barrett who purchased Milton House, not far from Abingdon, in 1764.<sup>25</sup> The papers include the business records of the lacemen, who supplied gold lace to the Prince of Wales (later George IV).<sup>26</sup> As a Roman Catholic family they were in some ways unrepresentative of the landed families in the county, though they were by no means the only substantial Catholic family in Berkshire at the time. Bryant Barrett's marriage in 1750 with Mary Belson brought the archives of the Belson family of Brill in Buckinghamshire into his possession. Among its earlier generations it numbered Thomas Belson, who was executed in 1589 for aiding Roman Catholic clergy. The papers include many on religious controversies of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not with any direct local connection.

A business link with Roman Catholics in the mid-eighteenth century was formed by a

family which provided staunchly orthodox Anglican clergy in two Berkshire parishes, the Stevens family of Bradfield.<sup>27</sup> Henry Stevens, a proctor of Doctors' Commons, was involved as a trustee, with other lawyers, in holding estates for Roman Catholics in many parts of the country, a practice which was designed to overcome the disabilities of Catholics with regard to ownership of land.<sup>28</sup> Others in the family were London merchants, sea captains and lawyers in various branches of the law, while at Bradfield they continued as rectors for several generations. Their papers are varied and particularly of interest for local studies.

The Stevens family had a tenuous connection, through marriage, with Nathan Wrighte, whose father, Nathan, married the heiress to the Englefield estates. After the younger Nathan's death Englefield passed to the second husband of his brother's widow, Richard Benyon of Gidea Hall in Essex, who had been Governor of Fort St. George (Madras) under the East India Company during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The extensive papers of the family<sup>29</sup> include documents and maps on India, the affairs of the Company and private trading. They are particularly full on estate management, with accounts and manuscript maps of various parts of the Berkshire estates of the family, mainly in Englefield and Stratfield Mortimer. Since several later members of the family held public office in the county, there are also numerous nineteenth century papers on these and various local philanthropic interests. Accounts for rebuilding St. Mary's church at Mortimer,<sup>30</sup> 1866–1868, are one example of these.

<sup>22</sup> B.R.O. D/ED and Trumbull Additional Manuscripts, etc.

<sup>23</sup> B.R.O. D/EHr B1–3 and D/EZ 5 B1–6.

<sup>24</sup> B.R.O. D/EHr E2.

<sup>25</sup> The papers were deposited in the record office by the present owner, Mrs Mockler of Milton Manor, a member of the family.

<sup>26</sup> B.R.O. D/EBt B24.

<sup>27</sup> B.R.O. D/ESv (M): papers deposited by Mrs B. Stevens and D/ESv (B): papers deposited by Mrs Ward of Bradfield. Members of the family held the Bradfield living from 1740 until 1888; Henry Stevens was vicar of Buckland, 1828–1830.

<sup>28</sup> B.R.O. D/ESv (M) B3–4.

<sup>29</sup> B.R.O. D/EBy. The papers, deposited in the Berkshire Record Office, are owned by Mr W. R. Benyon, M.P., as are also others in the Essex Record Office and the Greater London Record Office.

<sup>30</sup> B.R.O. D/EBy Q19.

It is perhaps invidious to select these families for mention when there are others of just as much interest in the county and with as extensive estates, whose archives are also deposited in the county record office. To mention them all would take up too much space. Many of the smaller family collections contain items of as much interest as the largest. A small group of the papers of John Walter, then owner of *The Times*,<sup>31</sup> consists mainly of detailed and precise instructions from horticulturists to the head gardener on laying out the grounds in 1817-1822, soon after purchase of the site on which the present mansion of Bear Wood was to be erected between 1866 and 1874. The early work included not only the establishment of plantations and the planting of flower gardens but also the enlargement of a pond and lengthening of another "till it reaches the Cascade"; the two ponds were being linked together in 1822<sup>32</sup> and probably formed the nucleus of the later lake. One would like to know what the earlier house at Bear Wood was like; nothing has been found on it among these papers.

Politics are often mentioned in passing in family letters; there are also numerous papers on elections in some family collections but this is a subject too large to admit of treatment here. Another which has not been mentioned specifically is business records. It will be obvious from what has been mentioned as to family papers that the archives of a business are sometimes among the other papers of a family; until the creation of limited companies and the later gradual extinction of many family firms there was no necessarily rigid division between family letters and papers, records of estate administration and of any public office held and the records of the profession or trade in which one or more members of the family might be engaged.

Records of business enterprises have been deposited in the record office, though not in great quantity. Among them are the early

ledgers of the firm of John Wilder of Wallingford, agricultural engineers, from 1859. The earliest volume lists work and implements supplied to each local customer.<sup>33</sup> Though there are few long series of records of businesses, several individual volumes of merchants' accounts for various trades do survive for the seventeenth century and later. Paper making has been a Berkshire industry for several centuries and there are some title deeds and leases of paper mills (run by water power) along the Kennet and Loddon rivers, indentures of apprenticeship to paper makers and various other references to paper mills.

Some of the most useful records for local topography are manuscript maps, of which the record office holds a considerable number. These are mainly of various dates in the eighteenth century, though a map of Hurley is dated 1609 and maps of the latter part of the seventeenth century are not unusual in Berkshire; some other counties had surveyors producing earlier maps than these. It was only after the use of printed maps became usual, in the mid-nineteenth century, that manuscript cartographic work declined, from an aesthetic point of view. Most maps were compiled for individual owners of farms or estates, large or small areas in one or more parishes. Those which cover a whole parish or a large area within it are the maps prepared for the enclosure of open fields and common land; the majority of these in Berkshire are between c. 1770 and 1860. For tithe maps, prepared between 1838 and the 1850s for the commutation of tithes in each parish, copies exist for a large number of parishes though a complete set is not held.<sup>34</sup> In addition, there are sets of the first edition of the Ordnance Survey maps on the scale of six inches to the mile (c. 1878-1883), with later editions on this scale. Reasonably comprehensive though not complete sets of the early editions on the scale of twenty-five inches to the mile and a few

<sup>33</sup> B.R.O. D/EWf B1.

<sup>34</sup> The diocesan copies may be seen by arrangement, in the Map Room of The New Bodleian Library, Oxford.

<sup>31</sup> Presented by Mrs R. Walter.

<sup>32</sup> B.R.O. D/EWal E6 and E9.

larger scale sheets for certain urban areas are also held.

In 1824 William Nelson Clarke of Ardington published his *Parochial Topography of the Hundred of Wanting*, [Wantage],<sup>35</sup> for which most of the material was taken from the public records, not then assembled together in the Public Record Office. He realised that "many chasms" in his account "might be supplied by information derived from private records; but this advantage I have enjoyed in no other instance"<sup>36</sup> than deeds at Worcester College, Oxford, for Denchworth and Lyford. The position of local historians has changed much since those words were written, and this mainly through the public spirit of owners who place their documents in the care of the

County Council, though many still remain in private hands. The words of Bishop White Kennett, quoted by W. Nelson Clarke,<sup>37</sup> may perhaps serve as our apology, as well as his, to those doubtful of the value of local studies: "I am sensible there be some who slight and despise this sort of learning. . . . I leave such to their dear enjoyments of ignorance and ease. But I dare assure any wise and sober man, that historical antiquities, especially a search into the notices of our own nation, do deserve and will reward the pains of any English student, will make him understand the state of former ages . . . the fundamental reasons of equity and law, the rise and succession of doctrines and opinions . . . and, indeed, the nature of mankind".

<sup>35</sup> The family's papers deposited in the record office by Group Captain F. W. Wiseman-Clarke include letters on W. N. Clarke's researches: D/ECw F15, and an annotated copy of the printed work: D/ECw Z4.

<sup>36</sup> *Parochial Topography of the Hundred of Wanting*, (1824), iii-iv.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.*, iv-v.