

READING RECORDS
AND
A "HISTORY OF READING"

C. F. SLADE

WHEN the Reverend Charles Coates completed his *History and Antiquities of Reading* in 1802 he had accomplished a work of which he could be justly proud. But it is likely that his pride would have become amazement had he been told that his work would still after one and a half centuries be the standard history of Reading. What, in fact, has appeared since Coates produced his slim volume of *Supplement and Corrections* in 1810? Man's *History of Reading* (1816) has all the faults of its day without the scholarly qualities of Coates; Doran's *History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading* (1835) likewise falls below the standard of Coates; Child's *The Town of Reading in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century* (1910) is a scholarly but slim volume; his *The Story of the Town of Reading* (1905) and Hinton's *History of the Town of Reading* (1954) are both designed for junior readers and made no claim to be original work; the Victoria County History (1906-27) account of Reading is only a long article. Studies on various aspects of Reading's past have appeared from time to time and can be seen in the local collection at the Reference Library. Some are good, some trivial, some exotic but by no stretch of imagination can they be regarded as the basis for a History of Reading. Such a history must be based on the records of the past. This was realised by Coates, but while we can admire his industry and scholarship we must admit that great advances have taken place in historical study since his time—in availability of records, knowledge of their provenance, publication of parallel material, standards of documentary criticism and so forth. A modern historian of Reading, if his aim is a scholarly and original work, faces a task in many ways greater than that which faced Coates, not necessarily in the writing, but in digesting the records on which such writing must be based.

The borough records in their widest sense fall into two groups: those produced within or at the request of the town and those produced outside, a division true for any period. Those produced outside may be concerned with Reading specifically or with Reading incidentally but in either case the borough is fitted into a wider grouping, be it district, area or nation, and the records produced are those resulting in the main from invocation to or orders from a higher authority. Many are in print; many are available to historians including the large number now in the Public Record Office; but some were sent to the town and are preserved with the other group. This other group of records, produced within or at the request of the town, is mainly still in the town's possession. Today, in the custody of the Borough Librarian they are admirably and safely preserved either at the Central Library or in the excellent repository at Tilehurst. Such, unfortunately, has not been their lot in the past: they have encountered destruction, as in the Civil War period; decay through bad

storage and neglect; casual loss as in the disappearance of some dozen fourteenth-century account rolls since the Historical Manuscripts Commission report of 1887. But although the safety of the records is now assured, their accessibility is another problem. They are, of course, readily accessible in the sense that the library staff will go to very great trouble to meet the documentary requests of any genuine enquirer. But this is only one aspect of accessibility: they cannot, obviously, be removed from the library; the enquirer has frequently to copy a document when a simple reference to a printed text would suffice for his purposes; many can be read only by a trained palaeographer, and the older demand knowledge of medieval latin. The steps taken to make these records accessible in print are few, far fewer than for many comparable boroughs. One big advance made during the last century was the publication of four volumes of the *Corporation Diary*, covering the period from 1431 to 1654, but work on this ceased with the death of its editor, the Rev. J. M. Guilding, Vicar of St. Lawrence's. In 1926 an extract from the next volume of the Diary was published by J. H. Sacret in the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*. In *Reading Charters Acts and Orders, 1253-1911* (1913) the official acts of the Corporation from 1253 to 1911 were published in one volume. In 1950 K. G. Burton published the *Memorandums of John Watts Esq., Mayor of Reading 1722-3, 1728-9*. The *11th Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission* (1887) contains a few extracts from various records, including some no longer to be found. This brief list exhausts significant publication.

The records so far considered have been, by implication, official records. But although the borough can be regarded as a corporate entity it must also be looked at from the point of view of the individuals and interests there. A borough history that omits any mention of individuals in their own right is a lifeless thing, but family records, diaries, letters and so forth, tend to remain family possessions, rarely getting to official repositories and suffering severely with the passage of time. It is likewise with the records of activities carried out by individuals or groups in the borough as traders, entertainers, professional men, etc., which though an essential part of the life of the borough are not coincident with borough affairs. These records of individuals and interests are rarely of even sufficient local concern to merit publication in full although there are, of course, exceptions. They are, however, important to the historian for their illustrative value and any known should at least be reported to some responsible archive authority. There are also the records of corporate organisations where their activities take place within the borough. Obvious examples are borough churches of whatever denomination, or transport undertakings whether stage-coach companies or British Railways. Some are more closely identified with borough life than others, the most closely identified being the churches. Churches are records in themselves, in their fabric and inscriptions, apart from any registers or accounts kept in connexion with them. In addition to references to the churches in the general works already quoted, portions of their accounts and registers have been published—*Churchwardens' Accounts of the Church of St. Mary, 1550-62* (1893); *Registers of St. Mary's 1538-1812* (1891, 2); *Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Giles Church, 1518-46* (1881)—while *A History of the Municipal Church of St. Lawrence* by the Rev. Charles Kerry (1883) deals fully with the inscriptions, selectively with the written records of that church, and extracts from its registers, 1605-99, appear in the *Berkshire*

Archaeological Journal (1919). There is also *The Parish of St. Giles in Reading* by Leslie Harman (1946). A useful start or even more than a start, has thus been made with the church records.

Mention of churches leads to consideration of another variety of record, sometimes called the material, sometimes the archaeological. Either term is satisfactory if the common misconception be avoided—that archaeology is confined to matters of prehistory. In this class come objects or buildings, things, in fact, that are seen or handled as opposed to being read. Reading Museum has a large and growing collection of the smaller objects dropped or abandoned in Reading's past—a small selection is tastefully exhibited in the Museum—and photographs of some buildings no longer standing. Old buildings still standing are fewer than for any other borough of comparable size and are rapidly being reduced. When an old building is destroyed unrecorded a piece of history is gone beyond recall. Photography is a comparatively recent aid to the historian, but already photographs are becoming a distinct class among historical records. An old negative or photograph of a building, a street scene or suchlike should not be thrown away without its being looked at by some competent authority. Finally, to complete this survey of types of historical record, there is the literary. This embraces the work of chroniclers, travellers, and, indeed, of writers of all kinds who have some comment to make on Reading or Reading affairs, and a quantity is in print. Into this class but overlapping into others come newspapers. Reading has possessed local newspapers since the early eighteenth century, and they now form a very bulky but valuable source for Reading's more modern history. Here, obviously, there is no question of printing them again in full as source material, and the historian's problem is the major one of digesting their contents.

People have lived here in an organised community for well over a thousand years, and for an unknown time before that there is evidence of scattered occupation. Records for the earlier times are purely archaeological, and the first written references come from outside the town in literary works, like the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, or in Government records, like Domesday Book. The earliest borough records produced within the town are of the mid-thirteenth century, but many details of Reading can be found for the century and a half before this in the surviving records of Reading Abbey. Founded by Henry I in 1121, the Abbey dominated the borough and was involved from the beginning with persons and properties in the town. But these Abbey records, now in the British Museum, have never been systematically sifted for Reading history. From the late thirteenth century the surviving corporation records increase steadily in bulk and continuity and in their latest phase there come the current files of the present-day borough government. There is a similar proliferation of records of other kinds as we move into modern times.

This survey does not aim to give a handlist of unpublished records, nor does it aim to give a bibliography of published records or of writings on Reading or special aspects of Reading: the former may follow in due course, the latter may be seen at the Reference Library. It is designed to indicate the nature and scope of the problem of the records of Reading and a future history of the borough. The records discussed in this article clearly fall into two main groups, those that have to be sifted for occasional mention of the Borough and those in which Borough affairs and persons are the

central theme. Publication is desirable for all in this second group but there is a special priority for the corporation muniments, the medieval and early modern documents in national repositories, and the pertinent Abbey records. The arguments in favour of publication are undeniable: it removes inconvenience to the user and danger to the original; it makes records easily available to those who are interested in their locality – and curiosity is a major characteristic of humanity – and to historians working in parallel or general fields; it is also the essential preliminary to a new “History of Reading”. Civic pride, local interest and general history will all benefit from an up-to-date history of this ancient and important borough, and that is the eventual aim of the plan now proposed for the publication of Reading records. It is a co-operative effort between Reading Public Libraries and the History Department of Reading University, and the aim is to publish a small selection of records in each volume of the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, which has generously offered the hospitality of its pages. The form of publication will vary from case to case. Some documents are best published in full; for others, where common form predominates, abstracts suffice. But those not in English will be accompanied by translations. There is at this early stage no plan to publish records in any chronological order: it merely happens that the first appearing are medieval. Should anyone wish to join in this work of publication he or she should get in touch with either Mr. Horrocks at the Central Library or Dr. Slade at the University, for there is work to be done to fit any degree of expertise.

READING RECORDS (1)

MAYOR'S ACCOUNT 1364-5

BY C. F. SLADE

Compotus Willelmi Warde maioris Radynges a festo sancti Michaelis anno regni regis E. tercii a conquestu xxxviij usque eundum festum proximum sequens.

RECEPTE DENARIORUM

Idem compotum reddit de Johanne le Catour maiore vijs. xd. de remanent[ibus] compoti sui.

FINES BURGENSEIUM

De Thoma le Botiller	vjs.	viijd.
De Roberto Doke	vjs.	viijd.
De Jacobo Prachet	iijs.	iiijsd.
De Willelmo Koc'	xs.	
De Thoma Burchurst	xs.	
De Johanne Baler' nihil quia ammerciamantum condonatur		
De Johanne Gosewell'	xs.	
De Thoma le Fisshere	vjs.	viijd.
De Johanne Bungeye	xs.	
De Johanne Ponyng'	xs.	

De Nicholao atte Hethe	xs.	
De Nicholao Robekyn	vjs.	viijd.
De Johanne Malden'	vjs.	viijd.

Summa receptarum ciijs. vjd.

EXPENS'

Idem comp[utat] de redditu Gildhalle vjs. viijd. Item pro stipendio Thome clerici iijs. Item pro stipendio Roberti Botiller xld. Item in expensis apud Walyngford' et Wynterbrok pro communis negociis vijs. vjd. Item eodem die in vino et panne xvjd. Item solut' Ricardo Heghfeld et Petro Fukelayn pro correctione latrini et fori in Gildhall' pro v diebus vs. Item Roberto Bottiller pro labore suo per v dies viijd. Item in ij sarrator[ibus] per tres dies ijs. vjd. Item solut' Willelmo Wymonham pro mundacione latrini iiijd. Item eidem Willelmo pro mundacione fori bladorum viijd. Item solut' Willelmo Redheued et sociis suis in auxilio salariorum suorum ijs. Item dat[is] Grencham et clericis de castro de Wyndesore iijs. iiijd. Item dat[is] Ricardo Tailleur et socio suo viijd. In expensis citra gentaculum Ricardi filii Aleyn iiijd. Item in expen[sis] Willelmi Warde et const[abularii] apud Wyndesore xijd. Item solut' Johanni Cosgrave pro expensis constitutis xijd. versus Wyndesore. Item in vino misso Nicholao Carrew versus Pourle j lag[ena] de malvesyn precii xvjd. Item ij lagene vini rubei xxd. Item j lagena et dimidia vini rubei ad domum Willelmi Catour xxd. Item eidem et uxori sue apud la Volte j lagena rubei precii xd. Item misso domino Ade clerico de Wyndesor' j pyk' empt' de Willelmo Page precii xld. Item eidem ij lagene vini rubei precii xxd. Item misso predicto Ade alia vice j peciam de cunger recepta prece xvijd. Item j codlyng xiiijd. Item dim[idium] piscis sal[i] viijd. Item misso eidem versus Stratfeld per Nicholaum famulum suum ij lag[ene] vini rubei prece xxd. Item in expensis Thome Frowyk ad hosp' Ade Silak per j noctem et j post prandium pro se et ij hominibus et ij equis et j famulo viijs. ijd. Item dat' eidem in botellis suis ij lag[ene] unini prece xxd. Item dat' garcioni suo iiijd. Item dat' Wydon' de Marchalc' ijs. Item dat' eidem at alio j lagena vini precii xd. Item miss' Almarico de Sancto Amando et Johanni Foxle militi versus domum Willelmi Catour ij lag[ene] uini rubei precii xxd. Item miss' Johanni Bacoun de Hampton j lagena vini rubei prece xd. Item pro j lagena vini apud Gildhall' in die lete xd. Item pro panne jd. Item pro ij lagenis ceruise ij d. Item in ij lagenis uini rubei missis prefatis Almarico et Johanni de Foxle et aliis versus Gildhall' prece xxd. Item miss' domino abbati ij lagene uini prece xxd. Item Priori j lagena prece xd. Item miss' camerar' j lagena prece xd. Item miss' domino abbati j lagena de Maluesyn prece xvjd. Item Johanni Taillefer nuncio vjd. Item Johanni Parys vjd. Item aliis nunciis de scaccario iiijd. Item in mayhem' vendito pro Portmanbrok videlicet xij carecte *i.e.* xxij s. vjd. Item dat' Spoulee j lagena vini rubei xd. In expensis Nicholao Bodewell' et Nicholas Aultoun de Mar' et socius suus [*sic*] in uno gentaculo ad tabernam Johannis Farham ijs. vjd. Item dat' magistro Willelmo Kene carpentario xijd. pro j lagena vini.

Summa expensarum cxvjs. viijd.

Et sic excedit summam receptarum xijs. ijd.

TRANSLATION

Account of William Ward, Mayor of Reading, from 29 September 1364 to 29 September 1365.

RECEIPTS

From John le Catour, Mayor, 7s. 10d., from the remains of his account.

[ENTRY] FINES OF BURGESSES

Thomas Butler	6s. 8d.
Robert Doke	6s. 8d.
Jacob Prachet	3s. 4d.
William Cock	10s.
Thomas Burchurst	10s.
John Baler' nothing because the ammerciament is pardoned.	
John Goswell	10s.
Thomas Fisher	6s. 8d.
John Bungeye	10s.
John Ponyng'	10s.
Nicholas atte Hethe	10s.
Nicholas Robekyn	6s. 8d.
John Malden'	6s. 8d.

Total receipts 104s. 6d.

EXPENSES

Rent of the Gildhall 6s. 8d. Item for the pay of Thomas Clerk (or the clerk) 4s. Item for the pay of Robert Butler 40d. Item in expenses at Wallingford and Winterbrook on affairs of the community 7s. 6d. Item on the same day in wine and bread 16d. Item to Richard Heckfield and Peter Fukelayn for cleaning the privy and forecourt of the Gildhall for 5 days 5s. Item to Robert Butler for his work for 5 days 8d. Item to 2 sawyers for 3 days 2s. 6d. Item to William Wymondham for cleaning the privy 4d. Item to the same William for cleaning the cornmarket 8d. Item to William Redhead and his partner as increase in their stipends 2s. Item to Grencham and clerks of Windsor Castle 3s. 4d. Item to Richard Taillor and his partner 8d. In expenses towards the breakfast of Richard son of Aleyn 4d. Item in expenses of William Ward and the constable(s) at Windsor 12d. Item to John Cosgrave for agreed expenses to Windsor 12d. Item in wine sent to Nicholas Carrew to Pourle 1 gallon of malmsey price 16d. Item 2 gallons of red wine 20d. Item 1½ gallons of red wine to the house of William Catour 20d. Item to the same and his wife at La Volte 1 gallon of red (wine) price 10d. Item sent to Master Adam clerk of Windsor 1 pike bought from William Page price 40d. Item to the same 2 gallons of red wine price 20d. Item sent to the same Adam on another occasion 1 piece of conger purchase price 18d. Item 1 codling 14d. Item half a salt fish 8d. Item sent to the same to Stratfield per Nicholas his servant 2 gallons of red wine price 20d. Item in expenses to Thomas Frowyk in entertaining Adam Silak for 1 night and 1 afternoon for himself and 2 men and 3 horses and 1 servant 8s. 2d. Item to the same in supplies 2 gallons of wine

price 20d. Item to his groom 4d. Item to Wydon' of Marchale' 2s. Item to the same and another 1 gallon of wine price 10d. Item sent to Almaric of St. Amand and John Foxle, Knight, to the house of William Catour 2 gallons of red wine price 20d. Item sent to John Bacon of Hampton 1 gallon of red wine price 10d. Item for 1 gallon of wine at the Gildhall on Leet day 10d. Item for bread 1d. Item for 2 gallons of ale 2d. Item in 2 gallons of red wine sent to the aforesaid Almaric and John Foxle and others to the Gildhall price 20d. Item sent to the lord abbot 2 gallons of wine price 20d. Item to the prior 1 gallon price 10d. Item to the chamberlain's 1 gallon price 10d. Item sent to the lord abbot 1 gallon of Malmsey price 16d. Item to John Taillefer messenger 6d. Item to John Parys 6d. Item to other messengers from the Exchequer 4d. Item in *mevhem'* sold for the Portmanbrook i.e. 13 cartloads 22s. 6d. Item to Spoulee 1 gallon of red wine 10d. In expenses Nicholas Bodewell and Nicholas Aultoun de Mar' and his partner in a breakfast at the inn of John Farham 2s. 6d. Item to Master William Kene carpenter 12d. for 1 gallon of wine.

Total of expenses 116s. 8d. It thus exceeds total receipts by 12s. 2d.

READING RECORDS (2)

MAYOR'S ACCOUNT 1373-4

BY C. F. SLADE

Compotus Willelmi Catour nuper maioris ville Radyng' a festo Sancti Michaelis archangeli anno regni regis E. tercii a conquestu xlvij^{mo} usque eundem festum sancti Michaelis proximum sequens anno xlviii^o videlicet

FINES BURGENSESIUM

De Johanne Brian de Caveresham Brasier	xs.	
De Johanne Ferby	xs.	
De Johanne Ropere	xs.	
De Johanne Killesby	vs.	
De Johanne Gregson	xs.	
De Johanne Balet	xs.	
De Willelmo Certeseye	vjs.	vijjd.
De Willelmo Yonge	xs.	
De Ricardo Taillour tannere	xs.	

Summa de finibus Burgensium iiijli. xxd.

ALLOCAT' ET EXPENS'

Primo idem Willelmus Catour petit alloc[antiam] de xiijs. viijjd. rem[anentibus] areragiis in ultimo compoto suo reddendo anno xliij^{to} ut patet in pede compoti. Item comp[oto] misso domino abbati et priori post festum Sancti Michaelis iiij lagen[c] musti precii ijs. iiijjd. lagena ad xd. Item liberat[ionibus] ballivis pro redditu Gildhalle istius anni vjs. viijjd. Item solut' Willelmo Lorekyn pro mundacione fori bladorum xvjd. Item dat' nuncio de scaccario per diuersas vices ijs. Item liberat'

clerico mercati pro feodo suo xls. Item in omnibus expensis ipsius clerici et uxoris sue et famulorum suorum existentium ad domum dicti Willelmi Catour per duos dies et unam noctem xxvijs. vjd. Item solut' Johanni Pursere pro feodo suo iijs. iiijd. Item Thome clerico pro feodo suo xjs. viijd. Item liberat' Johanri atte Hyde pro vadiis suis per xliij dies exist' apud London ad parliamentum domini Regis cum Henrico Ropere xlijs. capiend' per diem xiij. Item in ij equis conductis pro eodem Johanne in cundo uersus London' et redeundo ijs. Item in percameno empto pro compoto ijd.

Summa expens[arum] xj li. xs. viijd. Et sic excedunt expense summam receptarum xlijs. qui debentur Willelmo Catour.

TRANSLATION

Account of William Catour, lately Mayor of Reading, from 29 September 1373 to 29 September 1374.

[ENTRY] FINES OF BURGESSES

John Brian of Caversham, brazier	10s.
John Ferby	10s.
John Roper	10s.
John Killesby	5s.
John Gregson	10s.
John Balet	10s.
William Chertsey	6s. 8d.
William Young	10s.
Richard Taillor, tanner	10s.

Total £4 20d.

ALLOWANCES AND EXPENSES

First William Catour seeks allowance of 14s. 8d. arrears remaining from his last account of 1370-1 as appears at the foot of the account. Item, to the lord abbot and prior after 29 September 4 gallons of must price 3s. 4d. at 10d. per gallon. Item allowed to the baillifs for rent of the Gildhall this year 6s. 8d. Item to William Lorekyn for cleaning the cornmarket 16d. Item to a messenger from the Exchequer at various times 2s. Item to the clerk of the market as his fee 40s. Item in all expenses of the same clerk and his wife and servants staying at the house of William Catour for 2 days and a night 27s. 6d. Item to John Purser as his fee 3s. 4d. Item to Thomas Clerk (or the clerk) as his fee 6s. 8d. Item to John atte Hyde as pay for 23 days stay in London at the parliament of the Lord King with Henry Roper 23s., at 12d. per day. Item for two horses for the same John in going to London and returning 2s. Item in parchment bought for the account 2d.

Total expenses £6 10s. 8d., they thus exceed receipts by 39s., which are owed to William Catour.