

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

October 2016

- Before the conquest: a picture of Anglo Saxon Berkshire
- Origins of Berkshire as the Royal County
- English, French or Latin: Language and the Conquest
- New to the Archives

## The Berkshire Echo

### From the Editor

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Berkshire Echo. The 14th October 2016 marks the 950th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings when William, the Duke of Normandy, conquered England and King Harold II died on the battle field. '1066 and all that' is probably ingrained in most of our brains from school history lessons, but it was a point in English history that has made a lasting impression on many aspects of life from language to landscape.

In "Before the conquest: a picture of Anglo Saxon Berkshire" we discover what Berkshire was like before the Normans invaded – indeed there wasn't much peace with the Vikings constantly invading! What we think of today as 'quaint and rural England' was formed under the Saxons who created the field system that lasted through to enclosures. But it was the Normans who gathered information on the rural land as a whole for the first time.

Following the threat of Danish invasion, William needed to know how he could finance his military defence and so the Domesday Book was created in 1086. The book was a survey of all the land held by the King and his chief tenants. It therefore became a vital tool for the King in sourcing tax, rent and military service from manors and estates. Many Normans did well out

of the Conquest as William had rewarded them for their support by giving them land and positions of authority. An example is shown in "Origins of Berkshire as the Royal County" as Henry de Ferrers became the High Sheriff of Berkshire.

Such a detailed 'document' as the Domesday Book had never been done before and it provides a real snapshot of time in history of the landscape of rural England. It would have been written in Latin as that was the language used in government and the church. This is highlighted in "English, French or Latin: Language and the Conquest" where we discover how the French language became influential as a direct result of the Normans right up until the 14th century. It was not until the seventeenth century that a real decline in the use of Latin began and by 1733 only English was used in most official documents.

950 years later and we are still talking about the Normans and the effects of their conquest; it's interesting stuff! We hope that you enjoy reading our newsletter on the subject. Don't forget to look at the 'New to the Archives' and 'Dates for your diary' sections for the latest available archives and events.

Ivone Turnbull  
Senior Archivist

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

#### Behind the Scenes at the BRO

14th November 2016 & 21st January 2017 - Ever wanted to know what goes on behind the scenes at the BRO? Come along and find out. You will be shown how we store our documents and given an insight to the job of our conservator. It's FREE, but booking is essential (please see our contact details at the end of this newsletter).

#### Events page

Have you seen our events page? We list talks, tours and events at the BRO there as well as collaborative events with other institutions. We have recently introduced workshops to our events package too. Dates are not always finalised until after the Echo has been published so do not always make it into the "Dates for your diary section". So please do keep an eye on our events page in case something of interest to you appears: <http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/events/>

#### World War I blog

The blog continues to grow on a daily basis. Each post relates to that day or month 100 years earlier, as the 1914-1918 war unfolds before Berkshire eyes. Why not take a look: <http://berkshirevoiceswwi.wordpress.com/>



# BEFORE THE CONQUEST: a picture of Anglo Saxon Berkshire



1066 was the year of the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest. William, Duke of Normandy, became William I of England. While England changed forever, many aspects of Saxon life survived – something we can see in the place names and divisions of the countryside. Most of the place names in Berkshire are of Anglo-Saxon origin, including that of the county itself – ‘Barroc’ is believed to be the Saxons’ name for the Berkshire Downs. The boundaries of almost all the historic parishes in Berkshire correspond very closely to the pre-Conquest boundaries of Saxon lords’ landholdings. Any village whose name ends in –wick, -ton or –ham is likely to be a Saxon settlement. A place ending –ey (e.g. Hanney) indicates an island, either in the modern sense, or an area of dry land in the middle of marshes. Some parish names refer to the name of an early Saxon lord: for example, Woolstone was originally Wulfric’s tun (town); Didcot was Dudda’s cot; and Ardington was Aethelraed’s tun.

Berkshire was part of the Saxon kingdom of Wessex, the Thames marking the border with rival Mercia. It was divided into administrative divisions called hundreds, which survived the Conquest, although their significance lessened over time. Records of Faringdon and Shrivenham hundreds go up to the 20th century (D/EEL).

It was the Saxons who created the great open field systems in each village, which lasted until the great enclosure movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. Commons like Greenham and Bucklebury Commons are the last survivors of Saxon land usage. Other practices, like widespread slavery and serfdom, survived the Conquest by several hundred years. As late as the 1330s Reading Abbey included formulae for setting slaves and serfs free in their ‘formulary’ which

provided templates for legal documents. The practice did however die out after the Black Death in the middle of the 14th century.

Saxon Berkshire was a largely rural community. The fields were filled with cows (used mainly to pull ploughs rather than for milk) and sheep - a multi-purpose animal providing wool, meat and milk for dairy products. Pigs provided much of the meat eaten, and would have been let loose in the woods to forage for their own food. The Saxons had no rabbits, which were brought to this country by the Normans; but they also had no rats. Arable fields were used for a variety of cereals, which formed the bulk of the everyday diet; these included barley (also used for beer), oats, rye, and wheat. Vegetables were generally grown on a more domestic basis in cottage gardens.

The Saxons also made extensive use of the woodland which scattered the county. Most of the buildings, other than churches, were wooden framed.

But it was no pastoral idyll: some years (such as 976 and 1005) saw poor harvests and resulting famines, while in 1046 a terribly cold winter caused many deaths. In 1048 an earthquake shook the county. Through much of the period, there was also the all-too-frequent horror of war with rival Saxon rulers, and then the even more terrifying experience of Viking raids. Reading was captured by a band of Viking raiders in 871, and one of the major battles between Englishmen and Vikings in the 870s took place at Ashdown on the Berkshire Downs.

*Source: Dr Cecil Slade on Anglo-Saxon Berkshire (D/EX2039/5/3/19)*

*Artist's impression of the Battle of Hastings, used as a teaching aid at Ranelagh School in the 1920s or 1930s (D/EX1979/6).*





Left: The interior of the early Norman church at Avington (D/EX751/3, p. 3)  
Right: A Norman doorway in Sparsholt parish church (D/EX751/3, p.12)

## Origins of Berkshire as the Royal County

Berkshire's heritage as the 'Royal County' dates back to Saxon times. In 849 King Alfred the Great was born in Wantage, where his father, King Aethelwulf of Wessex, had a palace. Edward the Confessor, his queen Edith, and her brother, Harold II, the last Saxon king, all owned large amounts of property in the county. This all passed to William the Conqueror as a result of his victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and he owned more land here than in any other part of England. By 1086, when the Domesday Book was compiled, almost all the Saxon landowners had been dispossessed in favour of William's foreign supporters. The biggest winner in Berkshire, other than the new king,

was Henry de Ferrers, who had fought at the Battle of Hastings. Henry was rewarded with not only the title of High Sheriff of Berkshire, but all the land which had belonged to the last Saxon sheriff, Godric, who was killed in the battle.

Windsor Castle became one of the centres of the new regime, and William built another castle at Wallingford (the biggest town in the county), which stood until the Civil War 600 years later. He also established Windsor Forest, a vast area in east Berkshire where he hunted wild animals like boar and wolves.

## English, French or Latin: Language and the Conquest

The Normans were descendants of Vikings who had settled in northern France, so had originally spoken a Norse tongue. However they had adopted the French language, which they brought over to England. For over a century, they continued to speak French while their subjects spoke various Anglo-Saxon dialects. The latter gradually developed into something approaching modern English, but incorporating many French terms. For instance, beef, pork and mutton all come from French words for the animals, while cow, pig and sheep are all of Saxon origin – reflecting the fact that the Norman lords got to eat the meat, while the Saxon peasants tended the animals.

Under Norman rule, many of the clergy were also foreign-born men, who brought the English church in line with Rome. Latin became the sole language of the church, and also the language of the law. The vast majority of title deeds were written in Latin until the 16th century, with even the names of the protagonists translated from the spoken English or French versions they would actually have been known by. John and Mary would be written down in the legal record as Johannes and Maria; a Norman Geoffrey would be Galfridus; and so on.

Of all the hundreds of medieval deeds at BRO, just two are in English. These rare instances are for relatively short leases of Chamberhouse Mill in Thatcham (D/EZ77/2/4), dated 1456 and 1460. We have no idea why the rule was broken

in this case, but it may be because the term of the lease was relatively short (three and five years respectively), and the tenants (Richard South in 1456, John Walgrave in 1460) needed to know what their rights and responsibilities were.

Deeds written in Old French are, while still a tiny minority, slightly more common, reflecting the continuing use of this language by the aristocracy. One interesting example is the deed by which William of Anneford of Binfield placed all his property in trust while he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1363 (D/QR22/2/4).

A fascinating early use of written French is the submission of John Balliol, King of Scots, to the authority of Edward I in 1292. This was circulated throughout both countries, and a copy was written down in Reading Abbey's formulary of legal documents in the 1330s (D/EZ176/1).

One of the latest legal documents we find in French is an agreement in 1394 for the marriage of John, son and heir of Ralph, Lord Neville, to either Eleanor (Alienore) or Elizabeth, the daughters of Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, who was a member of the Royal Family (D/EN/F1). The future spouses were still young children – John was about seven and the girls around the same age. Obviously the marriage was a dynastic one aimed at uniting the families as it didn't matter which girl actually married John. The eventual bride was Eleanor, with Elizabeth marrying the Earl of Salisbury, who had a home at Bisham.



# New to the Archives

## Plans and property history

We have purchased the Garford enclosure award of 1826 (though unfortunately no map) (D/EZ184). The Reading Borough copies of two official 'deposited plans' for utility companies, which had also strayed from official custody, have been donated (D/EX2462). One shows the area served by Reading Electric Supply Company in 1909, and its extension to Tilehurst, Theale, Caversham and Mapledurham, all then outside the borough boundaries; the other relates to work required to a bridge in 1910 as a result of these changes.



## Berkshire at war

There have been some additions to the papers of the Spencer family of Cookham, covering the period 1901-1966 (D/EX801). Letters from 1910, 1913 and 1918 mark some of the earliest observations of the artistic genius of

Stanley Spencer. There is also some correspondence relating to attempts to get him transferred to become a war artist. An interesting recent arrival is the letter book of Faringdon Rural District Council, 1916-1917, which has many entries relating to local tribunals dealing with requests for exemption from conscription (RD/F/CZ). We have also been given the second in a series of autograph books kept by the matron of Bucklebury Place Auxiliary War Hospital, 1942-1945 (D/EX2484); we already had the first volume. Patients in this volume include Czech airmen who were fighting on the Allied side.

## Official records

We have purchased the original bank pass book for Moulsoford Asylum (later Fair Mile Hospital) Committee of Visitors, 1867-1873 (D/EZ188). Some of the payments relate to the construction of the building. The visitors' book of Reading Sewage Works at Manor Farm, Whitley, 1925-1957, sheds some light on activity there. As a state-of-the-art facility in the 1920s and 30s, it received many foreign visitors (from countries including Australia, the USA and Germany), while in the 1950s student nurses often came to study the bacteria found in human waste (D/EX2502).

## Need somewhere to hold a meeting?

Why not ask about our Wroughton Room for hire? Reasonable rates, great accommodation. Call on **0118 937 5132** for more information.



## Photographs

A small miscellaneous collection of 19th and 20th century photographs (D/EX2546) includes views of Streatley Mill and a number of Windsor scenes. Most interesting is one of the temporary wooden arches, made to look like brick and stone, erected in celebration of the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria. We have been given some photographs showing Ashbury Manor House and the White Horse and Dragon Hills, Uffington, in the 1960s or 1970s (D/EX2503). Another donation is of glass negatives showing staff or students at Holybrook House, Castle Street, Reading, in 1938 (D/EX2488). This was an 'Educational Settlement', a non-residential college for adult learners.

## New for family history

The following parish registers are now available:  
 Bear Wood (D/P73D): *baptisms, 1949-2009; marriages, 1979-2009*  
 Milton (D/P85): *marriages, 1990-2012*  
 Steventon (D/P119): *marriages, 1977-2014*

## Other parish records

Parish magazines are an informative source for life in past generations, so we were pleased to receive a small collection of magazines for Winkfield and district, for the years 1867, 1870, 1887 and 1909 (D/EX2353).

## Nonconformists

A substantial addition has been made to the records of Abingdon Congregational/United Reformed Church (D/N1), 1900-1999, including marriage registers, 1900-1968. We have also received papers from Spencers Wood United Reformed Church, 1959-2008 (D/N26 and D/N44).

## Opening Hours

Tues 9-5, Weds 9-5, Thurs 9-9, Fri 9-4.30.  
 Closed Mondays, Weekends and Bank Holidays.  
 Please call us for further details.

## Contact Information:

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## Funding Partners

- ✦ Bracknell Forest Council
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