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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo

Issue 64

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From the Editor

We had a fantastic night at the end of April as we came to the end of our short 'Enemies of the State' project. This project looked at the Irishmen who had been interned without trial in Reading after the Easter Rising, and tried to tell some of their stories.

Detention without trial is something that resonates today. For Irish patriots (or indeed, English royalists if we go further back in time) you can today read Islamist preachers. The mechanisms are modern – and we had a very interesting talk on the night about 'TPims' or control orders – but the State's problem remains the same. How do you manage the threats to your public as you perceive them?

You will be pleased to hear that the Echo is not going to attempt to answer that political or philosophical problem. Instead, we present you with the stories of two Irishmen in Berkshire, and one Berkshire man in the Tower. You can decide for yourselves whether they were victims of circumstance or the cause of their own undoing.



Mark Stevens
Senior Archivist

What these stories do show is how very local events can feed into either national or international history. There is a context to all local history, of course, but it is very easy to become short-sighted and wrapped up in our own surroundings. The challenge that an Office like ours faces is to present these local stories in that wider context. In doing so, Berkshire's history can only grow in importance.

Our small display on the Reading Gaol's 1916 intake can be seen at the Record Office until August. The internees seem determined to have made the best of it, and their writings speak of a little community in exile, talking, singing and enjoying the flowers in the prison garden. Please do come along and find out more about them.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Introductory visits

Just getting started in family or local history? Come along to one of our free introductory visits to see what's available here to help your research. The next date is Monday 7 October, at 2 p.m. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: arch@reading.gov.uk.

'Enemies of the State' on show

Until August 2013: Pop into the Record Office's Wroughton Room to see the exhibition mounted in conjunction with the University of Reading's English Literature Department on the Easter Rising of 1916 and the Irish internees held at Reading Prison.



From King's friend to Parliament's foe



The controversial figure of Reading-born William Laud looms large over the English Civil War.

Born in Friar Street in 1573, Laud lost his cloth merchant father early in life, but was lucky enough to gain a free place at Reading Grammar School. Although he later disparaged the tuition he received there, he did well enough to win a scholarship available to St John's College, Oxford, which set him on the path to a glittering career in the church.

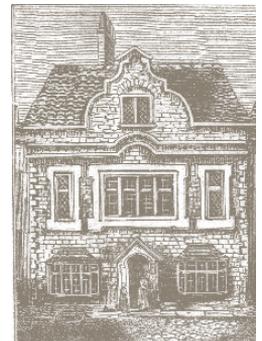
He was elevated to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1633, and was one of the closest advisors of Charles I, encouraging the latter's belief in the divine right of kings to rule absolutely without regard to parliament. A strong opponent of the extreme Puritans, he made more enemies forcing through changes in church liturgy and persecuting those he regarded as dangerous extremists. Both policies were to contribute to the breakdown of relations between king and parliament, and ultimately to the Civil War.

In a letter to the mayor and aldermen dated 28 March 1640, Laud announced his 'great longing ... to do some good for the Town of Reading'. He followed this up by establishing a charitable foundation for his home town, endowing it with property he owned in Bray, which produced rent of £200 per year – a large sum in the 17th century. This charity had a wide range of objects, including doubling the salary of the master of Reading School, which Laud hoped would attract a more gifted man than the poor teacher he had studied under. Two out of every three years apprenticeships were to be arranged

for 12 poor boys from Reading, Wokingham and Bray; every third year this money was spent on small dowries to allow six servant girls to marry.

But by the end of 1640, Laud was in custody in the Tower of London, accused by the House of Commons of treason. He had become part of a political problem. He was given freedom to correspond from his cell, and wrote a number of letters to the mayor and aldermen of Reading to make arrangements for sending money for his charity, some of which survive in the archives of Reading Municipal Charities (D/QR22/10/1-4). He occasionally asked for the prayers of his Reading friends, but his letters concentrated on good works rather than on the King's troubles. He lamented 'these broken times' to his Reading friends in a letter of 20 October 1642, as the conflict between King and Parliament took a new turn and fullscale war broke out.

Eventually, Laud became a casualty of the Civil War. After a show trial, he lost his life on 10 January 1645 on the scaffold at Tower Hill. Four years later, his beloved King was to share his fate.



Top: William Laud (1573-1645)

Right: The house where William Laud was born in Reading

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New to the Archives

Berkshire people at work...

The archive of Clifford's Dairies of Bracknell, 1901-1992 (D/EX2311) contains much of interest ranging from the problems of slugs getting into recycled glass milk bottles to the controversial introduction of plastic bottles in the 1970s. Modern business life is also represented by the papers of the Chief Executive of Reading Chamber of Commerce, 1982-1986 (D/EX2205).

Another recent arrival was a set of rules to be observed by employees at Petty & Sons, a Reading printer, c.1921 (D/EX2147). They relate to issues such as timekeeping, youngsters 'larking', keeping the factory clean, as well as specific aspects of the printing process. Employees were forbidden from entering one particular pub near the works. Slough's industrial heritage is reflected in the recent addition of brochures of engines produced by the Rheostatic Company in the 1930s (D/EX2268). We have also acquired additional material from the engineers Plenty's of Newbury, 1897-1994 (D/EX1739 and D/EX2240).

... and at play

The minutes of Reading Aero Club, based at Woodley Aerodrome, 1932-1934 (D/EX2276), show how some Berkshire men and women adopted an exciting new hobby for the 20th century – flying. Recently deposited papers relating to the Berkshire Sun & Leisure Club record the activity of local naturists, 1979-1984 (D/EX2267). The club had extensive premises in Bracknell, for the use of families wishing to 'enjoy sunbathing, swimming and sauna as nature intended - without the restriction of sweaty clothing'. Children (who the club called 'natural nudists') were welcome; while the motives of single males wishing to join were viewed with suspicion.

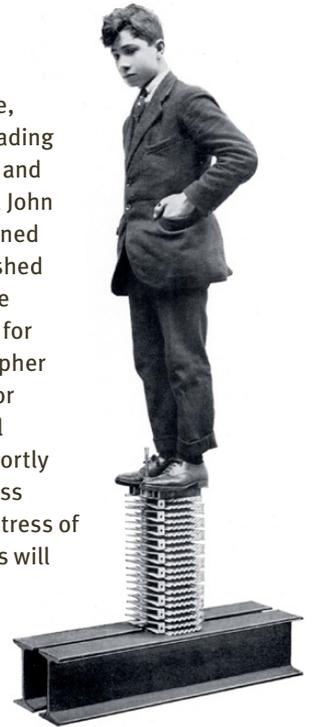
Our interest in sporting records, highlighted in last summer's Olympic edition, continues, with the addition to our holdings of the records of Harwell Football Club, 1912-1995 (D/EX2185) and Maidenhead Cycling and Athletic Club, 1914-1999 (D/EX2251). East Reading Horticultural Society has added to its archive, going back to its foundation in 1942 (D/EX1482). The ledger of the Regent Cinema, Wantage, 1948-1976, gives an insight into local people's tastes in films (D/EX2325/1). We have also received records of the Townswomens' Guilds of Easthampstead, 1958-2003 (D/EX2322) and Emmer Green 1952-2011 (D/EX2256).

Berkshire's literary links

A recent transfer from Reading Library includes documents showing the county's links with the publisher John Newbery

(for whom the Newbery Medal for children's literature was named). He was born in Waltham St Lawrence, and served his apprenticeship in Reading before marrying his master's widow and settling in London. His stepchildren, John Carnan and Anna Maria Smart, returned to Reading, where they jointly published the Reading Mercury newspaper. The papers include a famous agreement for Anna Maria's husband, poet Christopher Smart, to produce half the content for a new magazine called the Universal Visitor in 1755 (D/EX2280). Smart shortly afterwards developed a mental illness which is sometimes blamed on the stress of producing this periodical. Newbery's will contained the unusual provision that his substantial bequest to Anna Maria should not be touched by her husband, from whom she was then estranged.

Wokingham people's interest in reading is also reflected in two recent deposits. The minutes of Wokingham Library Advisory Committee, 1953-1976, show the development of a library service for Wokingham and Bracknell (J/LY1). The records of Wokingham Literary Society, founded in 1955, have also been deposited (D/EX2304).



Slough's Rheostatic Co shows how strong its 'Resistance Grid' was (D/EX2268/1)

Opening Hours

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

Contact Information:

Tel: 0118 937 5132 Fax: 0118 937 5131
Web: www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk
Email: arch@reading.gov.uk

The Berkshire Record Office,
9 Coley Avenue, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 6AF

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