

# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## The Berkshire Echo Issue 65

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### From the Editor

Family life accounts for a great deal of our time, don't you think? Having relationships that transcend circumstance is something that most human beings strive for, and try hardest to protect.

I'm minded to think that in recent years, the way these relationships are managed has changed in ways that our ancestors could never understand. We used to need our family close by if we wished to maintain a regular contact; today, family life can be reflected in a screen small enough to fit into your pocket. In theory, no one need be face-to-face to share information with their loved ones.

I find this interesting because family relationships are also likely to be the most complex we will ever encounter. Dealing with your parents, partner or children is so much more nuanced than just about any other friendship. Is it easier to deal with complexity if we make it remote, keep it at a distance and only see it via our desktop, tablet or phone?



Mark Stevens  
Senior Archivist

I guess the coming years will suggest whether we all embrace remote relationships more readily than real-time ones.

This Echo features three hard relationships from Berkshire times gone by, all of them managed without access to technology. Each one – preferential parenting, infant mortality, and betrayal – dealt with guilt and disappointment in the flesh. In their own way, these stories offer up yet more evidence of the complexities of family life.

Their interest also comes from one of the endearing features of archival material: its ability to tug at your own emotions. Sometimes the most banal-looking document can place you at the forefront of someone else's joy or sorrow. Something that is so many words on paper becomes a story once it's read, unlocking a memory that was previously lost from view.

We have hundreds of thousands of family stories in the BRO archives so it is always difficult to pick out only two or three for the Echo. It is probably a theme to which it is worth returning. As George Bernard Shaw wrote, "If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance."

### 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 dates are Monday 7 October and Monday 10 February, both at 2 p.m. To book your place, telephone: 0118 9375132 or email: [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk).

#### Downton Abbey for real?

Until December 2013: Pop into the Record Office's Wroughton Room to see our display of documents from the Vansittart Neale family archive, which illustrate the joys and sorrows of family life for three generations of a Victorian/Edwardian family. The family inherited Bisham Abbey, now a major centre for national sport, in the late 19th century.



# A Favourite Child



Top: Henry and Henrietta Vansittart Neale in the 1850s (D/EX73/4/1/39).  
Yes, Henry is the child carrying the doll.

Bottom: Phyllis and Elizabeth Vansittart Neale with their ponies (and groom),  
Bisham, c.1900" (D/EX73/3/19/3)



Many parents find it easier to favour one of their children, but would never dream of saying so. Yet when this happened to Sarah Vansittart Neale, she confided her secret to her diary (D/EX73/3/2/1).

Sarah was the wife of Edward Vansittart Neale, a lawyer and writer who later became famous as the founder of the Co-operative movement, and who inherited Bisham Abbey. She had four children.

It was her third child who caught her eye. ‘Dear little Henry is a very merry, darling child’, she wrote in June 1843, ‘[He] is a fine tempered though determined fellow. I think his passions are stronger than would have been those of that sweet little Ernest [her older boy who died in infancy] but I trust we shall not spoil him.’

All the signs in Sarah’s diary suggest that spoiling him was exactly what she had in mind. Virtually every page provides some admiration for his latest triumph, whether that be speaking by the age of 10 months or gaining his father’s approval.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sarah’s elder daughter Henrietta began to notice her mother’s favouritism. Sarah wrote that Henrietta saw little Henry on her knee and ‘heard me say he was a dear little boy. She asked if she was a dear little girl. I said of course but that I petted Henry more than her because he was so little. She said half sadly “If you pet him too much though, you will spoil him”’.

Luckily, Henry turned out to be a sterling character, who supported his mother and sisters during the hard times when his father lost his fortune by unwise investments in the Co-operative movement he founded. He had to swallow the disappointment of not going to Oxford, instead taking up a clerk’s post in the Admiralty, and could not afford to get married himself until he was over 40. He was ultimately rewarded by enjoying his own happy family life at Bisham Abbey – and he remained close to Henrietta and her children. Henrietta’s grand daughter Margaret Dickinson regularly visited her cousins at Bisham, and inherited the estate from them in 1965.



# A Death in the Family

Much has been written about high infant mortality in Victorian England. All parents expected to lose children, with death rates varying from around one in ten in the middle classes to one in four in the poorest communities.

A quite remarkable private publication preserved in the Ashbury parish records shows us one father's love for a little boy who died tragically young (D/P 9/28/4). The booklet, addressed to the children of Ashbury School, was written by the vicar of the parish, the Revd William Chambers. It recounts the short life of his son, 'our dear little Alfred', who died suddenly from croup aged four in 1832. It sold well enough that in 1840 it went into a second edition. The distinct personality of this bright little boy springs to life from its pages.

At two his father began to teach little Alfred Bible stories, using pictures in the large family bible. 'Now and then from his playfulness, I had some difficulty to catch him and to keep him quiet in the chair', William writes, but the child was soon fascinated by the dramatic tales. The story of Joseph's betrayal by his brothers caused 'his little bosom [to] heave with sobs, and

the tears trickle down his cheek'. By the age of three he could pray in his own words, asking 'Let me be a little angel in that beauty heaven'.

He was introduced to church aged three years and four months, where he repeated the Lord's Prayer so loudly most of the congregation could hear him. He was allowed to stand on the pew to see other children brought to be christened, and he particularly liked attending weddings. At home he played at preaching, choosing topics like 'Noah and the naughty people'.

'His little life was a succession of happiness', according to his father. Though his devoted parents never got over his death, compiling this memoir gave his father some consolation. William and his wife Jane were able to adopt Arthur, the young son of a friend, who helped fill the hole in their lives for a short period. A sweet-natured child, he was soon calling William 'Papa', and happily listened to stories of Alfred (and was called by the other boy's name on occasion), but sadly tragedy struck the family again and Arthur died just before his sixth birthday.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Dayschools at the Record Office

A dayschool studying quarter sessions records will be held by the Continuing Education Department of Oxford University at the Record Office on Saturday 30 November, led by Dr Peter Durrant, the County Archivist. The court of Quarter Sessions acted as the seat of county government. Not only did it deal with judicial matters but also with a wide range of administrative business including poor relief, highways, gaols, and the licensing of many activities from alehouses to nonconformist chapels. This practical day school will look at the history, nature and work of the court in general and will include workshop sessions when students can examine for themselves some of the records relating to Berkshire. Book online at [www.conted.ox.ac.uk](http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk); the cost is £53. Places are limited to 20 students.

On Saturday 22 February there will be a dayschool on sources for the 18th century village, led by Dr Durrant and Joan Dils. Book as above.

# A Broken Home

Family breakdown in the 17th century is reflected in a letter in the Reading Borough records (R/Z4/3/4). Nicholas Reynolds, a Hertfordshire farmer, wrote to the Borough in 1632 to implore them to arrest his son (also called Nicholas), who had run away to the town.

The cause of his flight was a local girl. Nicholas had been married to an innkeeper's widow in the little village

of Amptill, near Luton, when he met Elizabeth King, a Reading girl who was working nearby as a servant.

Elizabeth – described variously by Nicholas senior as a 'drab' and a 'filthy hussy' – was alleged to be the cause of Nicholas junior's leaving his wife and thereby bringing great shame onto the Reynolds family.

The father implored the Mayor of Reading to 'bridle' his son, and to take 'sharp and speedy course' with his mistress. Sadly, the Borough archive does not record the Mayor's response, though as the younger Nicholas also lay accused of killing a man, fathering a bastard and ruinous spending, it seems unlikely that his story ended well.

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# New to the Archives

## The Church of England

Family historians may also be interested in poor law material recently discovered for the parish of Englefield, together with rate books and charity apprenticeship records, 1677-1859 (D/P52). The Wargrave vestry minutes, 1822-1849, reveal much of interest, particularly relating to poor relief in the parish (CPC145). The responses to an intriguing questionnaire sent out to Berkshire clergy relating to their finances in 1705 have arrived here (D/EX2272), together with accounts of the cost of chancel repairs at White Waltham, c. 1775 (D/EX2281). The closed St Paul's Church, Reading, has been documented by a recent set of photographs (D/EX2222). We have also received the records of Hopkins and Gray's Charity, Ashampstead, 1888-2005 (D/P8), and were delighted with the arrival of some Victorian parish magazines for Christ Church, Reading (D/EZ172 and D/P170).

## Environmental records

The Eady/Hoddinott family of Lockinge had a special interest in recording the weather, and as a result we have three generations' painstaking daily records of north Berkshire rainfall, 1899-1984, with an earlier weather diary kept by the young Charles Eady in Northamptonshire (D/EX2258). The Dines family of Pangbourne also had an interest in the weather, and we hold their notes on the varying flow of the River Pang, 1938-1976 (D/EX2312).

## Family life

The diaries of Elizabeth Blandy, wife of Reading brewer and banker William, 1844-1873, contain illuminating material on middle class family life in the Victorian period (D/EX2329). Other family papers to have arrived recently include a small collection of papers of the Martin family of Reading and Kent (D/EX2188); papers of Lord and Lady George Pratt of Winkfield (D/EX2218); and copy wills of the Breedon family of Pangbourne (D/EX2271) and Charles Millson of Stanford Dingley (D/EX2288).

## Medical matters

We have acquired a poster advertising an Oxford dentist's monthly visits to a Faringdon pharmacy in 1876 – hopefully no-one got toothache in between (D/EX2326). An autograph album kept by Barbara Arnst, a nurse at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, 1901-1908, includes several photographs of the wards (D/EX2299). The trust deed and inventory of the Woodclyffe Home, a convalescent home in Wargrave, 1912-1913, is also of interest (D/EZ174). It was run as a charity for ladies of small means recovering from operations or serious illnesses, and was open only to those able to provide evidence of their elevated social standing.

*The following new registers have been deposited from Anglican churches:*

*Basildon St Stephen:* marriages, 1975-2009, and banns, 1965-1994

*Bucklebury:* marriages, 1837-1945, and banns, 1907-1950  
*East Challow:* marriages, 1966-1990

*Coleshill:* banns, 1907-1980

*Cookham Dean:* marriages, 1994-2007

*Dedworth:* baptisms, 1944-1978, 1993-2001, and marriages, 1948-1987

*Frilsham:* marriages, 1964-2012

*Grove:* marriages, 1996-2007

*Pangbourne:* baptisms, 1920-1992, marriages, 1957-2011

*Reading Holy Trinity:* banns, 1987-2010

*Reading St Luke:* banns, 1965-1991

*Sulham:* marriage, 1999-2001

*Sunninghill:* baptisms, 1955-1968

*Tidmarsh:* marriages, 1981-1999

*From other denominations:*

*Burghfield Common Methodist Church:* baptisms, 1942-1966  
*Oxford Road Wesleyan Methodist Church, Reading:* baptisms, 1880-1996

*Whitley Hall Methodist Church, Reading:* baptisms, 1970-1997  
Methodist churches formerly in Silchester Primitive Methodist Circuit, including Stratfield  
*Mortimer:* combined baptisms, 1889-1998

*Newbury United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church:* marriages, 1899-1985, and burials, 1830-1838  
*Brookside Church, Earley:* marriages, 1986-2010

The recently deposited records of Coleshill Parish Council include accounts for the village's civil cemetery, 1922-1995, with names of the persons buried (CPC40/14/1).

## 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.

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- Bracknell Forest Council
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Baby Edith Vansittart Neale, 1850s (D/EX73/3/15/1)