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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo

October 2018

- A tremendous triumph for right and justice: Berkshire rejoices
- Crosses and torpedoes: competing war memorial visions
- Signed in a railway coach
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WHAT'S ON

From the Editor

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Berkshire Echo where we take a look at Berkshire at the end of the First World War to tie in with the fact that the war ended on 11th November 1918. The magnitude of the war led it to being referred to as the 'Great War' and we continue to remember the fallen on this date every year. Indeed, memorials exist all over Berkshire and as we read in 'Crosses and torpedoes: competing war memorial visions', the Berkshire War Memorial Committee had to consider numerous proposals on the subject.

In 'Signed in a railway coach' we discover who may have been the first 'ordinary' person to hear the news in Berkshire that the war had ended, and in 'A tremendous triumph for right and justice: Berkshire rejoices' we see examples of just how people celebrated.

War is a difficult subject to digest as so many lives were lost in the First World War and it is sad to think that despite the huge loss of life, the world was at war again in 1939. 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the war, but it was not until June 1919 that the peace

Treaty of Versailles officially put an end to the war. To commemorate this we will be showcasing some World War One records that we hold in an exhibition in 2019. We will have more details about it in the next issue of the Echo.

Don't forget that we also have a World War One blog. Each post relates to that day or month 100 years ago as the 1914-1918 war unfolded before Berkshire's eyes. Why not take a look and see what you can discover? <https://berkshirevoiceswwi.wordpress.com/about-berkshire-at-war/>

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Ivone Turnbull
Senior Archivist

'A Perfect Specimen'

17th October 2018 to 18th January 2019,
during normal opening hours

"A Perfect Specimen": the Coleshill Estate and the Radical Lord Radnor' is an exhibition which looks at the way a dynamic landlord set about improving a great Berkshire estate in the mid-nineteenth century, some of which can still be seen today. Available during our opening hours (Tuesday and Wednesday 9am to 5pm, Thursday 9am to 9pm and Friday 9am to 4.30pm). FREE admission. Why not come along and take a look?

How to Read Old Handwriting

12th November 2018, time 10.15-14.45
Always wanted to know how to read old handwriting? Come along to our introduction to reading handwriting found in documents at the BRO from c.1500 to 1700. Cost is £20 per person. There are 10 places available and booking is essential. Please email arch@reading.gov.uk or call 0118 937 5132.

Behind the Scenes at the BRO

19th November 2018, time 10.30 to 11.30
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 into the job of our conservator. It's FREE and there are 12 spaces available. Booking is essential. Please email arch@reading.gov.uk or call 0118 937 5132.

Top: Percy Spencer of Cookham with his unit in France, n.d. (D/EZ177/19)



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A tremendous triumph for right and justice: Berkshire rejoices

The entire county erupted in celebration at the thought that the war was over at last. Stoke Road School in Slough was one of many to celebrate patriotically:

“During the morning I received the news that Germany had accepted the Allies’ terms and signed the Armistice. The children formed a hollow square in front of the flag-staff, to which a new rope had been attached in readiness. The flag was hoisted by the youngest boy in the school to the singing of the National Anthem. The flag was then saluted and cheers were given for the allies and the Old Boys fighting.”

Many headed to church to give thanks, while remembering those who would not be coming home. Newbury St Nicolas reported in their parish magazine:

“Monday, November 11th... will for ever be remembered in the history of our country as the day on which the greatest of all wars came to an end, and the strongest and most ferocious of military nations confessed itself beaten. It has been a tremendous triumph for right and justice, and we have endeavoured to express our thankfulness to Almighty God, who has so signally vindicated His mighty power and has so wonderfully blessed our arms and those of our Allies. May we now as a nation and Empire prove ourselves more worthy of His goodness to us, and endeavour to work together to make the world a better, and therefore happier, world.

Thanksgiving Services were held at the Parish Church: on Tuesday morning [12 November], a celebration of the



Holy Communion, when there were 88 communicants; on Wednesday afternoon [13 November], when the church was full; and the following Sunday [17 November]. There was also a United Thanksgiving Service in the Corn Exchange, under the presidency of the Mayor, on Sunday afternoon, when there must have been 2,000 people present, and when several hundred failed to gain admittance. Mr Liddle had got together a splendid orchestra for the occasion. May this spirit of thanksgiving remain with us, and may we not forget the spiritual lessons of the war.

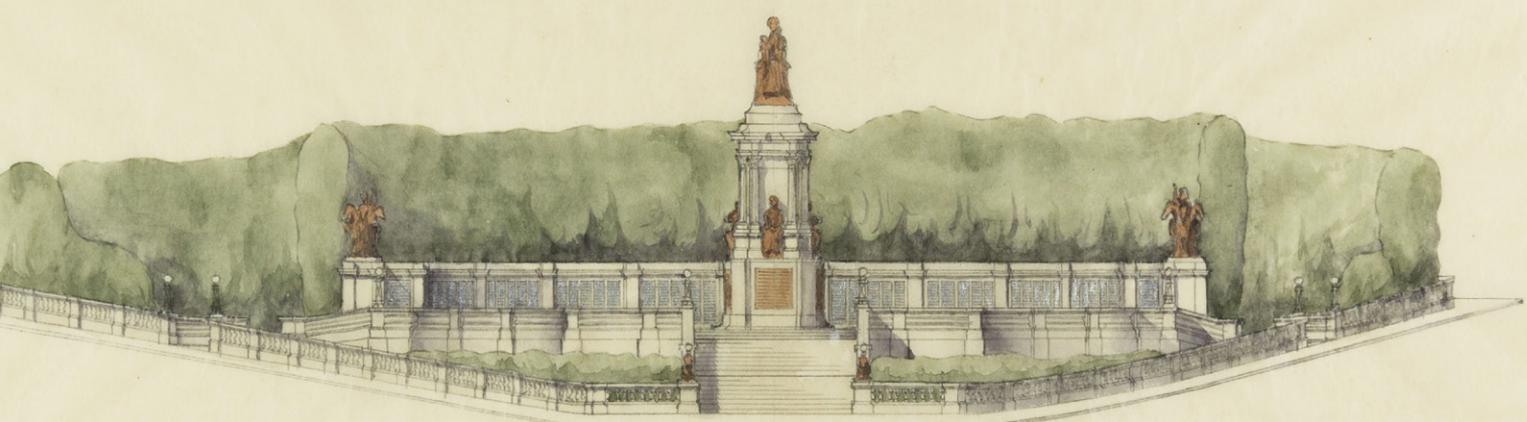
The streets presented a very gay appearance, and there were processions (authorised and unauthorised) much to the delight of the young. All the fireworks possible to be obtained were let off in the streets, and one unexploded bomb was found inside the Churchyard gates, and handed over to the police. It appeared afterwards that another member of the Police Force had put it there for safety. We were very glad to see the excellent and sober spirit of the merry-makers. It was indeed an occasion for rejoicing with great joy.”

More peace celebrations were to follow in July 1919, when the signing of the Treaty of Versailles brought formal closure to the war.

Sources: *Newbury St Nicolas parish magazine, December 1918 (D/P89/28A/13); log book of Stoke Road School (89/SCH/28/1)*

Top: Wokingham celebrates the Armistice (D/EX588/1)
Below: The Royal Berkshire Regiment is welcomed home, Reading, 1919 (D/EX588/1)





Crosses and torpedoes: competing war memorial visions

The time would come for quiet reflection and the desire to honour the dead by permanent remembrance.

One unusual proposal was from Pangbourne Parish Council, to “place a torpedo (which has been presented to them) on the parapet of the bridge over the River Pang as a War Memorial”. Permission was refused by Berkshire County Council, which considered the fact that it was “approximately 22 ft in length, 18 in wide, and about 1 ton in weight” would make it unsafe.

The Berkshire War Memorial Committee considered a number of options for a countywide memorial, including some for the direct benefit of former servicemen and their families:

“Mr F G Belcher suggested that an Institution in which disabled sailors and soldiers could be taught crafts and trades and thus become able to do useful work would be the best form of memorial. He alluded to the monotony of the lives of these poor men, and the need to do everything possible to provide them with interests in life. As an alternative he suggested the establishment of an Orphanage to benefit the children of the men who had fallen in the war.

Signed in a railway coach

The first ordinary person in Berkshire to hear that fighting was over was S T Mann, the long serving stationmaster at Windsor Railway Station, thanks to HRH Princess Alice (1883-1981). He remembered the day well, and wrote in his memoir:

“On the morning of Nov 11th 1918 I had just started the 8.47 am train and [was] going back to my office when I saw HRH Princess Alice standing at the door and wondered what she wanted so early. When I reached there she said “I have got some news for you. The Armistice was signed in a Railway Coach at 6.00 am this morning, but it is not to be made known until 11.00 am, but I was sure you would like to know, so don’t tell anyone until then.” I thanked her for taking the trouble to come down to tell me and she returned to the Castle.

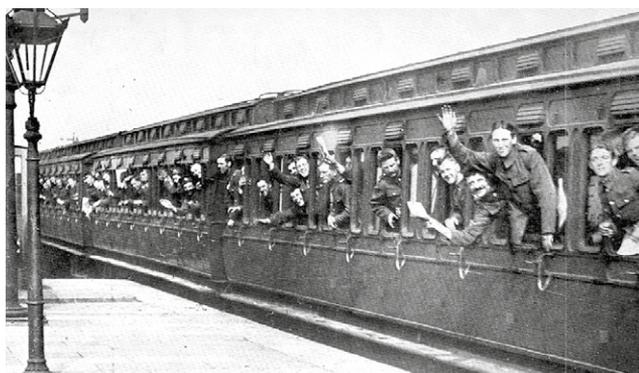
The Chairman pointed out that in any such Institution the question of endowments to provide an income for its maintenance must be met and also that the need of either kind of Institution would pass away within a limited number of years.”

War memorials were erected in every village at local expense and took many forms – from the archetypal village cross bearing a list of names of fallen servicemen associated with the parish, to village halls and recreation grounds, new church bells and organs, and even endowed hospital beds.

Sources: Berkshire War Memorial Committee minutes (R/D134/3/1); Berkshire County Council minutes (C/CL/C1/1/22)



Top: Proposed design for Berkshire War Memorial, Reading (not built), 1919 (D/EWK/B2/3/2/1/1)
Left: Statue used as model for Caversham war memorial, 1921 (D/EWK/B2/3/2/3/1/4)



At 11.00 am the news was given out by the Mayor from the Town Hall. Of course everyone was pleased and hoped there would never be another [war] like it.”

Source: Memoir of S T Mann, stationmaster at Windsor (D/EX1915/5/14)

Bottom: Soldiers leaving Reading by train, heading for the Front, 1915 (D/EX88/1)





New to the Archives



Top left: Ambulances collecting wounded soldiers at Reading Station, 1915 (D/EX588/1)
Top right: Trooper Fred Potts of the Berkshire Yeomanry is awarded the Victoria Cross (D/EX588/1)

Phoebe Cusden

We are delighted to have completed work on the very large archive of Phoebe Cusden (1887-1981) and her husband Albert (1891-1953) (D/EX1485). Phoebe was a very prominent figure in Reading's local political scene, and is best known as mayor of Reading 1946-1947, and for setting up the Reading-Düsseldorf Association. She had many other interests, all represented in her papers, including pacifism, feminism, the Labour Party, education (particularly nurseries), public health, housing and welfare, international friendship and anti-racism, and crime.

Local politics

We have now completed work on the extensive records of Windsor Labour Party, 1936-2001 (D/EX832) and the records of Hurst Conservative and Unionist Association, 1906-1955 (D/EX2606).

Women's groups

We have received additional records of the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes (D/EX2007); together with the records of now closed branches of the WI from across the county (D/EX1925). Ongoing WIs depositing records include Basildon (D/EX2447), Bradfield (D/EX2390), Theale (D/EX2550), and Winnersh (D/EX2567). Townswomen's Guilds are an urban equivalent to the WI, and we have recently acquired year books for the Berkshire Federation, 1991-2016 (D/EX 2634), plus records of the Tilehurst Guild, 1968-2017 (D/EX2632). We have also listed the records of the Sonning and Bracknell Deaneries Branch of the Mothers' Union, 1900-2000 (D/EX2682); and Arborfield Wives Group, 1949-1990 (D/EX2601).

At school and play: Berkshire's children

We are pleased to report that the very extensive archive of Reading School, 1746-2001 (SCH3) is now available for research. We have also received the records of Hemdean House School, Caversham, a small private girls' school, 1835-2014 (SCH40); and Caversham Nursery School, 1946-2011 (SCH43). A small collection of papers from a former pupil relates to Newbury County Girls' School, 1934-1944 (D/EX2644). Children's leisure is represented by the extensive archives of the Reading and District Boy Scout Association, 1909-2004 (D/EX1500) and South Berkshire District Scouts, 1953-1993 (D/EX741).

Life events in Berkshire

By coincidence, at the time of this year's royal wedding in Windsor, our project to list all the Reading Borough deposited collections came across a scrapbook relating to the Royal Family in the 1860s includes contemporary press reports of the wedding of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and Princess Alexandra of Denmark, also at St George's Chapel, Windsor, in 1861 (R/D181).

We have received a copy of the report of the official inquiry into the tragic death of Reading schoolboy Lester Chapman, 1979 (D/EX2597). We have listed all the surviving coroners' inquests for Reading Borough (COR/R) and Reading District (COR/RB) up to 1942. Records of Newbury and Community Primary Care Trust cover healthcare in the area 1884-2010 (P/HA7). They include material on the building of the new West Berkshire Community Hospital in 2004, and scrapbooks and other records relating to predecessors Newbury District and Sandford Hospitals.

Opening Hours

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

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