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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Echo

January 2019

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WHAT'S ON

Offences against the person?

11th February 2019, time 16.30 to 18.00

To learn more about the individuals accused of 'homosexual' offences in Berkshire during this time, we invite you to join the researchers George and Amy for a free teatime exhibition and discussion of their findings at the Record Office on Monday 11 February 2019 from 4:30pm-6pm (exhibition and refreshments from 4:30pm, discussion from 5).

There will be the opportunity to see some of the Victorian and Edwardian documents used for the project, and to enjoy tea and cake.

For free tickets, please e-mail arch@reading.gov.uk

World War I blog

The blog continues to grow on a daily basis, and will be continuing until the first Remembrance Day in November 1919. Each post relates to that day or month 100 years earlier, as the aftermath of the war unfolds before Berkshire eyes. Why not take a look: berkshirevoiceswwi.wordpress.com In May we hope to launch an exhibition on the end and aftermath of the war – more details in the next issue.

From the Editor

For as long as I can remember, LGBT history in Berkshire could be summed up in two words: 'Oscar' and 'Wilde'. This is not surprising, as Oscar's story is a powerful one that has inspired many on the road to equality. But having worked with the archives of Reading Prison it was clear that Oscar, though celebrated, could not really be described as representative of the gaol's captive population. So might the same be true for his place in the pantheon of Victorian sexuality?

This question was interesting enough to apply for some funding from the University of Reading who, with the support of Dr Katherine Harloe, kindly sponsored a small research project. The intention of this project was first to use prison and court records to build a list of Berkshire people prosecuted by the same law that did for Oscar. Then, once we had that list, to use census returns and other family history sources to tell a rounded story of these people's lives – a biography that went beyond one

appearance before the magistrates and into 'ordinary', everyday experience. In short, we wanted to find some new stories to broaden out that two word summation. So for six weeks over the summer we had two students - George Stokes and Amy Hitchings - working to do precisely that. It was great to benefit from their time and enthusiasm. They looked at a wide range of sources and found a lot of potential stories from across the county. George and Amy have now taken over this edition of the Echo to describe the work they did and share some of the things they found. I think what our little project proved is that there are plenty of LGBT characters from the past still to be discovered. This means we can add some new alternatives to those well-known stories, like Oscar's, and also place them into a wider narrative. Hopefully that gives researchers plenty of additional ways to celebrate diversity.



Mark Stevens
County Archivist

Top: Edward Egleton at HM Prison Reading (P/RP1)



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LGBT history in Berkshire

Last year was the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, the piece of legislation that ended the criminalisation of people for 'homosexual' offences in this country (in certain circumstances, at least). Up until this point, any male who was accused of a sexual act with another male faced being brought before the criminal justice system. In many instances, a custodial sentence was passed, and the individual would have to spend anywhere up to ten years in prison.

Today, many of these past offences have been completely legalised, and sex between males is no longer stigmatised in the same way as it was previously. However, although morals and understanding of these issues have changed, the criminal records of men accused of 'homosexual' offences remain preserved in archives up and down the country. It was felt that these records should be put into the context of the lives of the people they concern, and so the students working on the project went through each mention of these offences and researched the background of each individual.

Their first task was to compile a list of people who had fallen foul of the criminal justice system for 'homosexual' acts in Berkshire. These records are, for the most part, held by the Berkshire Record Office. Two weeks of research were spent

scouring Calendars of Prisoners for the Berkshire Assizes and Quarter Sessions, the registers of Reading Prison, and newspaper reports from the period. These types of record usually gave the prisoner's name, age, trade, and a (sometimes very) brief description of the offence. A few difficulties emerged at this stage, primarily because of the phrasing of the offence; with Berkshire being a rural county, there was often ambiguity in the type of 'unnatural offence' – the 1861 Act uses the same section for Buggery 'either with Mankind or with any Animal'.

Court papers were then located for this initial list of names. The majority of cases were heard in the Assize Courts, the surviving records of which are held by The National Archives at Kew. Unfortunately, many of the records were not kept. Witness depositions in Assize Court cases usually only survive where they relate to capital offences. However, it was possible to find the indictments that were put to the men in the study, which were used to establish trends over time. Where there were no Assize Court records available, some information could be garnered from the hearings of the Petty Sessions before the cases were sent to the Assizes (roughly the modern equivalent of a hearing in the Magistrates' Court before a case is transferred to the Crown Court).

Top: Caption: The Reading Assize Court where many of these offences were tried (D/EZ12/1/1)





The Human Story

Francis Thomas Scriven was sentenced to four years penal servitude for Buggery with John Dobson on 10th November 1905 at the Berkshire Winter Assizes, which were held in Reading. Scriven was born into a wealthy and respected family; his father was a naval officer. He lived in this area until 1891, after which he studied at St Mary's Hall, Oxford. After his graduation, he was ordained as a clergyman and held several curacies around the country. While living at Ascot, Scriven was charged with several counts of Buggery and Gross Indecency.

Scriven's case is interesting because it demonstrates the extent to which the community played in the detection of cases such as his; the write-up of the trial proceedings in the Windsor and Eton Express tells us that one witness readjusted the laths of the blinds in Scriven's room so as to be able to see through and witness the acts for himself, as well as eventually making a hole in the ceiling after his first attempt was foiled. These accounts are not uncommon in relation to 'homosexual' offences at the time; witnesses were keen to be removed from the action themselves, so there are many tales of peeping through keyholes.



Other Cases

George Butterfield spent his working life as a groom in large houses. He never married, and seems to have lived with other servants in each new position he took up. At the age of forty-three, he was charged and convicted of Gross Indecency.

Vialo Salvatore was an Italian immigrant working as an organ grinder (or street musician). At the age of thirty-seven, he was admitted to Reading Prison for 'Intent to commit Sodomy and Gross Indecency'. It is unclear from court records whether this was consensual. Salvatore blamed his 'moment of madness' on drink, and was encouraged by the judge at his trial to practise temperance in the future.

Gladstone Lowell Main was a Canadian who came to England during the First World War to work in the Royal Air Force. Main was an accomplished pilot who went on to manage the Aeronautic Camp in Milton. It was during this time that Main was accused of several counts of Gross Indecency and was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment with hard labour.



Top: Photographs of George Butterfield and Vialo Salvatore at HM Prison Reading (P/RP1)
Below: Other men accused of similar offences (P/RP1)



SHEEP'S HEAD PIE

Take a sheep's head, not singed but scalded. Boil till the meat separates easily from the bone. Take the liquor in which it was boiled, putting through it the bones and skin, etc., till it becomes a jelly. The brains should be left out. When cold cut the meat in small pieces, cover the bottom of the pie-dish with pieces of the head, and then slices of lean ham or bacon, then the jelly cut in thin slices and laid over the ham. Season with mace, cayenne pepper and white pepper. Repeat the layers until the dish is fully filled, then put a rich crust over it and bake.

New to the Archives

Berkshire families

A particularly interesting collection catalogued recently consists of the papers of the Castle family of Home Farm, Charlton, 1704-2008 (D/EX2547). This very large archive contains much on agriculture and village life, mainly for the later 19th and 20th centuries, plus records of Charlton schools, 1875-1921. The collection includes a copy of a cookery book produced by the Berkshire Federation of WIs in 1944. We also have an additional collection of deeds of the family's property, 1713-1902 (D/ECA).

We have listed papers of the Blandy, Hooper and Watlington families of Reading, 1692-1933 (R/D142). They include a very rare passport from 1822, and a charming plan of Dr John Hooper's property in Reading, dated 1819, including a building containing baths in Bath Court, presumably used medicinally. Papers of the Loveday family, 1697-1848, include deeds of Caversham Court (R/D155).

A fascinating group of records from the linked Harrison, Martin, Salter and Talbot families covers the period 1717-1943 (D/EX2188). There are two letters reporting on life in colonial America, 1717-1718, with particular reference to Baptists there. A 1795 letter (from the father of the founder of the Colgate toothpaste company) comments frankly on attitudes in Maryland to slavery, which he abhorred.

Schools

We have catalogued a significant quantity of material relating to schools in Reading (R/ES). The most important are some early material for Reading School, 1714-1866 (R/ES19), and the complete and very extensive archive of the British School (established by local nonconformists) in Southampton Street, 1809-1905 (R/ES12). There are also some records for Kendrick Girls' School, 1875-1955 (R/ES13); and minutes of the private Reading Nursery School, serving Whitley, 1937-1939 (R/ES18). The collection also includes newly listed managers' minutes Reading and Earley Board School, 1873-1887 (R/ES14), St Mary's and All Saints' CE School, 1903-1913 (R/ES15); St Mary's Episcopal Chapel Voluntary School, 1903-1906 (R/ES16); St John's and St Stephen's CE Schools, 1903-

1937 (R/ES17). Additional minutes and admission registers have been added to the records of St Laurence's CE School, 1903-1927 (R/ES1); St Giles CE School, 1903-1939 (R/ES2); Holy Trinity CE School, 1903-1930 (R/ES3); Greyfriars CE School, 1903-1932 (R/ES4); and Lower Whitley CE School, 1910-1929 (R/ES5). We have also been given the records of Coley Park School, 1965-2004 (SCH46).

Elsewhere in the county, new light is shed on life at the Royal Merchant Navy School at Bearwood in the early 1930s by the memoir of a former pupil (D/EX2693). We have also catalogued the extensive records of Basildon CE School, 1877-2010 (SCH39); the records of John Blandy Primary School, Kingston Bagpuize, 1872-1980 (SCH45); and a small amount of material relating to Roysse's Grammar School, Abingdon, 1854-1935 (SCH41).

Manorial records

The court roll for Cholsey manor, 1749-1750, has been deposited as part of a collection of deeds of property in various parishes (D/EX2617).

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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Funding Partners

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