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Contents

Wallingford's Restoration Town Hall <i>David Pedgley</i>	3
Droving across Berkshire <i>Nigel Hammond</i>	9
Early Nineteenth-century Printers in Reading <i>Diana Mackarill</i>	19
Lascelles Playing Fields, Slough <i>Tony Pilmer</i>	27
The Berkshire Bibliography, 2008 <i>David Cliffe</i>	36

Berkshire Local History Association

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Cover illustrations

Front: Wallingford town hall, photograph by David Pedgley.

Back: Election poster, 1826, printed by Robert Snare. Illustration from the Department of Typography, University of Reading.

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Wallingford's Restoration Town Hall

David E Pedgley

Wallingford's town hall, a Grade I listed building, stands on the south side of the Market Place, next to the church of St Mary. It is plastered and half-timbered and, along with the Council Chamber, forms the first floor of the building, supported on stone columns above the ground floor, which consists of a closed part (at one time accommodating the market house and fire engine) and an open part (at one time used as a covered market).

For nearly three and a half centuries the town hall has been at the centre of town life – a meeting place upstairs for the Corporation, courts, proclamations and public gatherings, and downstairs for the market. Its impressive appearance has long been recognised. Ashmole¹ (1719) described it as 'a handsome guild or town hall built about 42 years since'; Moll² (1724) mentioned 'a market house where in the mayor and justices keep their Quarter Sessions'; Simpson³ (1746) stated that the street where the market is kept 'is adorn'd with a convenient and handsome town hall ... where the assizes have been sometimes held, and always a quarter sessions for the borough'; and Russell⁴ (1769) referred to 'an elegant and well-built market-house over which is the town-hall where the sessions are held'. Ashmole said 'guild or town hall', but 'guild hall' was the name used up to about 1620, and then for some unknown reason this was changed to 'town hall' almost always thereafter.

When was it built? The 'Statute Book' (Corporation minutes 1648-1766) records that on 16 March 1669/70, 'It is ordered that the guild hall and market house ... shalbe removed ... and erected ... on some parte of the ground late purchased of James Leaver on the south side of ... St Mary's church, and for the doing thereof the Chamberlyn is ordered to laye moneys out not exceeedinge foure pounds' (worth about £330 in 2008).⁵ This plan was not implemented; instead a new town hall was built in its place, although there is no formal record of the decision to change the plan. The old guild hall being replaced was in the middle of the Market Place, according to a detailed survey of the town made in 1606, a position confirmed by a title deed of 1614 for a property on the eastern side of the Market Place.⁶ The small sum ear-marked for its removal in 1670 suggests that the building was small and perhaps in a poor state. It seems to have been built around 1550-60, for an annotation of about 1560 written on

another detailed survey of the town in 1548 describes 'the newe yelde hall' as being in the Market Place, whereas the survey itself records the guild hall as being on the south side of St Mary's church – the same place where it was intended much later to move the 1670 hall.⁷

The precise timing of construction is not recorded but can be reasonably inferred from the accounts of the borough Chamberlain (treasurer). For the years 1670-71 these are entered in the 'Statute Book'. Payments (many, but almost all for less than £1) become much more numerous from mid-April 1670 onwards, suggesting that work began soon after the decision was taken to build. However, none is attributed specifically to the new town hall. They mention timber, stone, tiles, bricks, flints, gravel, pebbles, lime, sand, nails, tile pins, carts and teams (presumably horses for heavy work) – all implying a big project. There is one reference to Headington quarry. Some named individuals were paid repeatedly – for example Michael Adeane and John Whichelow (carpenters) and Edward Tompson (bricklayer) – and are therefore likely to have been key construction workers. William Maxey (cooper) was employed to cleave laths. By 24 February 1670/1, the windows had been painted, implying that the building was almost complete; and by 26 April 1671 the hall had been cleared, implying it was about ready for use. Thereafter payments declined quickly, so it seems that the work was done between April 1670 and April 1671.

Election of a new mayor, on 1 September 1670, was in the church, 'not the guild hall as usual'; but on the same day it was ordered that 'the Chamberlain, bailiffs, aldermen and assistants should accompany the mayor from his house to the guild hall on Wednesday every week for the public meetings'.⁸ Perhaps the old guild hall had been kept in use for the time being. Later, in 1671, it was admitted that debts had been contracted by the Corporation in building 'the new town hall', butchers' shambles, pitchings, Market Place and other necessities, to carpenters, masons, plumber, glazier, pavier, painter, smith, ironmonger and other craftsmen. It was ordered that these should be paid and that the mayor should be indemnified (presumably meaning that he would be repaid if in the meantime he personally settled the bills).⁹ He had already for two years given his annual allowance of £15 as mayor to the Corporation. One of only two lawyers in the town, he could probably well afford to help the Corporation.

Wallingford's town hall is the earliest of four Restoration public buildings to have survived in Berkshire, the others being the market houses at Abingdon (1678-82), Windsor (1687-9) and Faringdon (late-seventeenth century).¹⁰ All four have a similar plan: an open ground floor used for a market, and an upper floor supported on stone columns. The buildings at Abingdon and Windsor are larger and grander than that at Wallingford,

perhaps reflecting both the greater wealth and status, being county town and royal borough, respectively. Faringdon's market house, by contrast, is smaller and simpler, and may in fact have preceded Wallingford's because a new building was needed with greater urgency, following the Civil War fire of 1646 that destroyed much of the town. Other towns did not remove their old town halls – for example, Newbury and Wantage not until the nineteenth century. In Abingdon, the market house pulled down in 1677 in fact resembled the new one built in Wallingford – first floor timber-framed and plastered (but used by courts, not town council), and supported on pillars above an open ground floor used as a market.¹¹ It had been built in 1566.

Why should Wallingford want to build a new town hall? The town was beginning to prosper, despite its involvement in the Civil War: the castle had been a royalist stronghold, and was besieged for 16 weeks by Cromwell's troops. During the period 1660-80, the variety of services available suggests it was more like a county town than a small market town, a feeling perhaps more obvious when it hosted the assizes. From a range of records (particularly wills and deeds) it can be shown that there were not only the usual craftsmen working with metal (blacksmith, farrier, brazier), wood (carpenter, joiner), construction (mason, bricklayer, pavier, glazier, painter), clothing (weaver, shearman, tailor, cordwainer) and container manufacture (cooper, basketmaker, hemp-dresser – for sacks and rope), but also small-scale employers (brewer, maltster, barge-master, tanner) and a range of shopkeepers (baker, butcher, draper, grocer, hosier, haberdasher, ironmonger, tallow-chandler). There were also inn-keepers and a carrier, as well as professionals (doctor, apothecary, barber-chirurgeon, attorney, schoolmaster, even a 'musicioner'); and not forgetting the gentlemen. Some were of independent means, and others who had been traders or employers who had prospered in later life liked to call themselves gentlemen.

Wallingford's growing prosperity stemmed primarily from trade in malt, as has long been recognised. For example, Miede (1691) stated that 'Wallingford ... makes shift to support itself by its trade of maulting, and its commodiousness for transporting corn and other commodities to London'.¹² Gibson (1695), in his translation of Camden (1586), when describing the town, said 'the mault-trade and the convenience of sending corn and other commodities by water to London do still support it so that of late years 'tis very much increased both in buildings and number of inhabitants'.¹³ At the time the town hall was built, around 1670, there were at least eight maltsters in the town,¹⁴ yet there was no 'common brewer' and only two bargemen, suggesting that it was the maltsters themselves who undertook the ferrying of malt to London, although there is no indication of

that in their wills.

Building a new town hall was one thing, paying for it was another. Despite the increasing prosperity of at least some of its inhabitants, the Corporation often had insufficient funds. Among the Chamberlain's receipts are a number of gifts, starting in April 1670 with 5 guineas from the Recorder (the Corporation's legal adviser) and amounting to some £60 by the following October (not including many other sums that were probably gifts, although not described as such). In addition there was £100 of 'Cooks money' – probably a gift of William Cook, a maltster, former mayor and benefactor of the town at his death six years later. Moreover, it seems there was also an appeal for subscriptions, for about £40 was raised in September and October 1670 by small sums from many townsmen. But in 1671, no doubt to pay outstanding bills, the Corporation accepted the offer by 15 men to lend £3 each (worth about £250 in 2008) interest-free for two years – £45 in all.¹⁵ Six of these men had been or would become mayor,¹⁶ one was a gentleman, and the others were principal shop-keepers. It is clear that town prosperity allowed for some surplus private funds to be available for lending. However, it took time for the Corporation to repay. As late as 1674, John Freeman esq., of Wallingford Castle, was paid £15 (worth now about £1,250) from the £50 (about £4,000) that had been the gift of Sir John Bennett, who had become MP for the borough in 1663, towards erecting the town hall.¹⁷ Three others were paid lesser amounts.

When the assizes came to the town hall it was an expensive time for the borough. Not only had a temporary court room to be set up and cleaned out afterwards, but the judge and accompanying clerks had to be found board and lodging – as well as their horses looked after – all out of town funds. The Chamberlain's bills and vouchers show, for example, that in 1685 Silvanus Wiggins (inn-keeper at the Lamb) was paid £7 0s 6d for hay and oats for the judge's horses, and a further £3 0s 6d 'for the judge's present'; at the next assizes, in 1697, 9s was paid 'for cleansing the hall after the workmen at the [as]sises'.¹⁸ Not until the next year was it agreed to pay bills arising, amounting to £18 3s 7d (over and above the £9 11s 10d already collected by the inn-keepers). Wine was not only provided for the judge: the Corporation had its celebrations, such as in 1685, when Mr [William] Polhampton was paid for wine drunk at the town hall on the king's birthday. Polhampton was Chamberlain at the time, and was presumably being repaid expenses he had himself covered.

Also included in the town hall building was the bailiffs' ward, or debtors prison, in the cellar beneath the market house. 'The Expence Book for the Bylies' 1649-1835 shows that cleaning out and providing fresh straw cost about 1s a year.¹⁹ Fitting a new door lock in 1688 by John Wilder

(ironmonger) cost 1s 4d, and the same amount in 1726 when Charles Wiggins (ironmonger) did the same, but by 1742 the cost had gone up to 2s 2d. Sometimes more serious work was needed. The bill of William Adeane (carpenter) dated 4 October 1735 for 12ft oaken timber for planks for the bailiffs' ward (14s), and for 2½ days work (4s 2d), was paid two years later; as was the bill of Thomas Butler (blacksmith) dated 2 November 1735 for a new gate for the bailiffs' ward – 5 score and 18 pounds of iron at 6d the pound, totalling £2 19s.²⁰ Late payment reflects the continuing problem the Corporation had with funding.

Above the town hall was an upper floor that came to be used by the Grammar School. This school, founded in 1659 by Walter Bigg, never had its own building until 1877. Instead it was held at first in the private houses of the masters, apparently because the endowment of £10 a year was insufficient to pay for both a building and a master's salary. But in 1687 the Corporation decided to lease the upper floor, already in use for the school, at a peppercorn rent.²¹ This arrangement may have proved inconvenient because, in 1717, for whatever reason, the school was moved to one of the Corporation's houses.²²

With a new town hall, it had become clear that something had to be done with the old chest that contained the borough muniments. So, on 18 January 1672/3, an order was made for the town chest to be repaired.²³ In addition, of course, the new building began to deteriorate slowly. The first known repairs were in 1685 when one Cox was paid 3s for tarring the timber and board of the market house, which presumably indicates it was largely a wooden structure like the town hall and chamber above. On 30 August 1689, Thomas Best (mason) presented his bill for 1½ days labour under the market house at 2s 6d a day; on 24 October 1689, John Adeane (carpenter) signed his receipt for six days mending the butchers' shambles at 1s 6d a day; and on 19 April 1692 Thomas Best presented another bill, for three days mending the tiling of the market house and shambles at 1s 8d a day, with John Best (?his son) for 3 days at 1s 4d a day.²⁴

In conclusion, it seems that increasing prosperity after the Civil War, particularly through the malt trade by river to London, prompted the building of a new town hall, perhaps as a first step in the progressive improvement of the town. We can imagine that a civic building was chosen, prominent in the market place, because it would represent a growing civic pride that was later to be reflected in many new-built or modified private houses of the prominent inhabitants. Similar events were taking place in other Berkshire towns, but did Wallingford Corporation over-reach itself originally? Certainly it had to draw upon gifts and loans to supplement its traditional income (primarily from rents and fines), but there is no

indication of any long-term debt arising from the construction work, which was well done – as reflected in a building standing much as it did when first built.

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Droving across Berkshire

Nigel Hammond

The long-distance seasonal droving trade from Wales to London passed across Berkshire and reached a peak of economic importance during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It declined in volume, value and significance after the enclosure of open fields offered local farmers winter keep for a greater number of animals, and railways subsequently provided alternative forms of transport.

Before the railways, movement of animals on the hoof provided the only straightforward way to take meat to market. During the months from April to October, and over considerable distances, drovers supplied an increasing demand in towns and in rapidly expanding London. Sheep and cattle from Wales moved regularly across Berkshire and neighbouring counties. Drovers used ancient tracks, crossed commons and open fields; later, and reluctantly, they were obliged to use turnpike and parish enclosure roads to reach Smithfield market.

Pigs and donkeys from Ireland, and geese and turkeys raised closer to London, all travelled on foot. Ducks, hens and rabbits had the luxury of being carted to Poultry or Leadenhall markets in London, using specially constructed horse-drawn vehicles.

Drovers and their Drovers

The Welsh drover was organizer, entrepreneur and businessman.¹ Rather than buy them, he took animals on trust from the farmers. He travelled on horseback ahead of the livestock and if he could find no free pasture, arranged overnight rest (a 'stance') at a farm or drovers' inn, enabling the drove to be fed, watered and sheltered. Guides, who led the animals, and drivers who followed, also needed sustenance and lodging. Most would sleep in a convenient barn or beneath the stars atop a hayrick or in a hedgerow, cooking themselves a supper from a dead lamb, the drover himself taking more salubrious accommodation at an inn or farm.²

Collectively, all involved were known as 'drovers', although technically graded as drovers, drivers and guides. Invariably they were Welshmen, required by convention to be over thirty years of age and married. This security for their sure return to a wife and family in the valleys meant that few absconded in London, stealing the sovereigns with which they had been

paid for the cattle, or made off with cash on their return journey.

Payment of drovers between 1800 and 1850 was in the region of 10s a week, all expenses paid, or alternatively 3s a day with an arrival bonus. Journey times for droves from Gloucester or Hereford to London varied but were usually about eight days; Exeter to Smithfield took a fortnight. Cattle droves travelled at two miles an hour, consequently covering sixteen miles or more a day. Droves were allowed a rest twice a day, with a complete rest every three days. Sunday travel was often avoided, not for sabbatical reasons, but because tollgates charged double.

The London Welsh Society was associated with the droving trade and was established to provide hospitality and help to drovers and accompanying Welshmen in London. Drovers carried messages and commissions en route, and took care of youngsters accompanying the drove, some of them travelling to enter service or seek employment in London.

Droves took favoured routes, occupying regular overnight stances on farms known to them. With several well-grown Scots pines planted at their entrance, farmers conventionally advertised overnight stance availability. There remain various examples, such as a fine group of pines north of Shrivenham memorial hall, beside the Lechlade to Ashbury drove road.³ Others lie along the Faringdon to Abingdon route, at Hinton Waldrist, Kingston Bagpuize, Fyfield, Fyfield Wick, and Shippon.

From Wales, sheep droves were 1,500 to 2,000 strong, accompanied by several drivers. They travelled about twelve miles a day. Cattle droves, with a guide in front to warn of their approach and alert drivers to coaches, were usually 300 to 400 strong and divided into two equal groups.

Three cattle breeds predominated in the trade through Berkshire. Black Castlemartin cattle were from south-west Wales and generally thought to be a runt of an animal. The Glamorgan Red or Speckled, and the Montgomery or Merioneth ox came from south and mid-Wales. Indicative of the Smithfield value of Welsh animals, in 1792 a fat English ox fetched £13, but a Merioneth ox, skinnier after its long walk, would sell at only £6.

Some droves left the Ridgeway through the Goring gap on their way to Reading or Wokingham markets, and some were taken to the rich pastures in Surrey, Sussex and Kent, where animals were fattened. But most droves went straight to London or regional markets, or to major fairs and slaughter. During the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the size and importance of the London market is indicated by average annual Smithfield sales of 100,000 cattle and 750,000 sheep.

Pig droving contrasted with the cattle and sheep. Difficult and slow to move, pigs required ingenuity, cunning, know-how and enormous patience. Droves of swine from Ireland and Cardigan were driven along hog ways and

dry routes across Wales to Bristol, Calne or London at about six to ten miles a day. They fostered the Wiltshire bacon industry at Calne and Chippenham and bacon curing at Faringdon. The 14,500 pigs passing through Beckhampton tollgate west of Marlborough in 1830 gives an indication of the size of the trade.⁴

Drove Roads from Wales across Berkshire

Three major droving routes from south and mid-Wales crossed Berkshire, while others passed through Oxfordshire (see map).

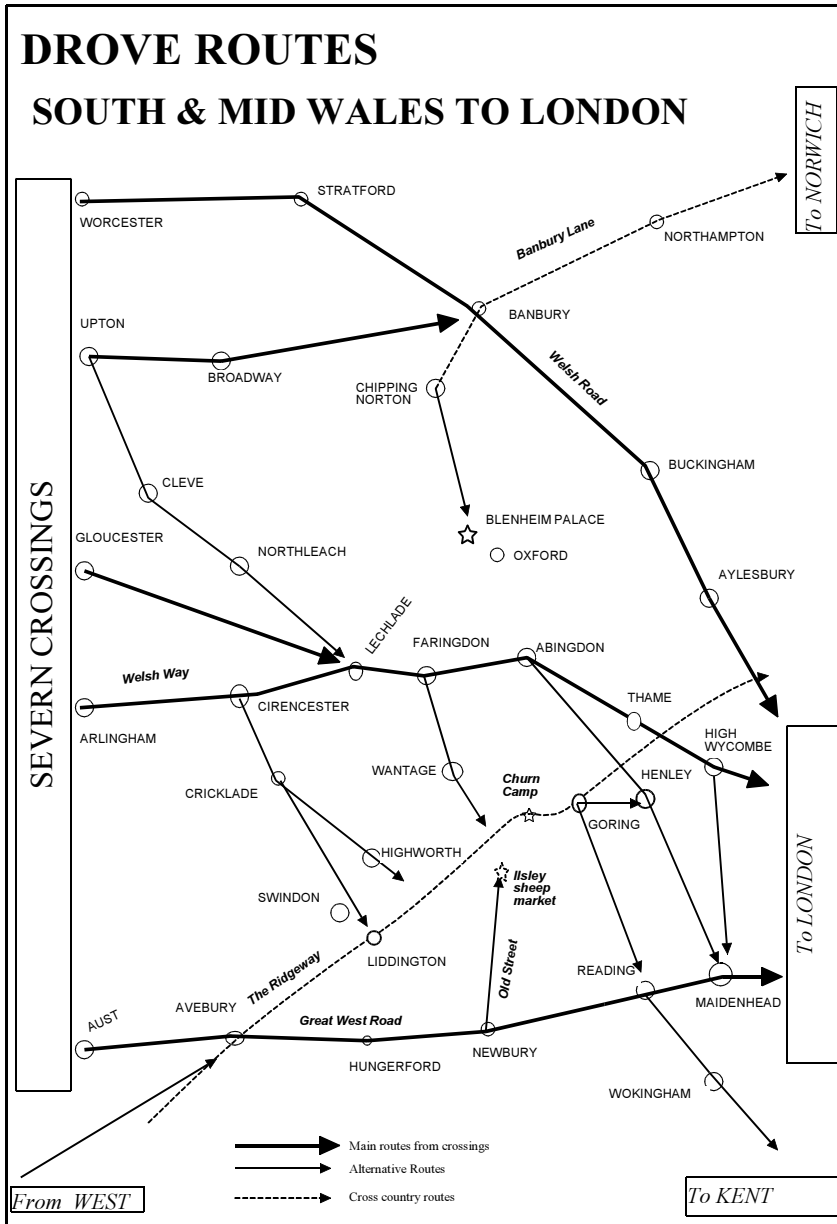
First, to the south, animals crossed the Severn by slow ferry at Old or New Passage linking Beachley to Aust and Portskewett to Redwick. Offering close and direct access to Bristol markets this route continued across Wiltshire to Avebury, either joining the Ridgeway at any of a number of points, or passing on to Newbury along the line of the Great West Road. Sheep droves then used Old Street to reach the important summer series of markets and fairs at East Ilsley. Celebrated as being the greatest sheep market outside Smithfield, William Hewett reported that 80,000 sheep were penned at East Ilsley on one day during the 1844 markets, with an annual average sale of 400,000 animals.⁵

Second, from Brecon and west Wales animals were ferried over the Severn from Newnham to Arlingham in Gloucestershire: at low tide the cattle might swim perilously to the eastern bank. Crossing the Cotswolds, droves moved along Welsh Way to Fairford or Lechlade and Cricklade, then through Old Swindon, Shrivenham, Highworth or Faringdon to join the Ridgeway at Liddington Castle or Red House Hill above Wantage.⁶ From Faringdon drove routes ran down the Vale of the White Horse through Buckland, Hinton Waldrist, Longworth and Fyfield, or by way of Stanford in the Vale, Charney Bassett, Lyford and Marcham to Abingdon. Droves then crossed the Chilterns taking routes close to Thame, High Wycombe, Henley and Maidenhead to London.

On the third route, droves from Builth Wells followed the upper Wye to Willersley or Hereford and crossed the Severn at Gloucester before moving over the Cotswolds and along Welsh Way to Lechlade. These droves then joined the Ridgeway after passing Highworth, Shrivenham or Faringdon, using the same routes followed by droves from Arlingham.

The drovers' routes across mid and north Oxfordshire emanated from mid-Wales, crossing the upper Wye, Severn and Avon at Erwood, Upton and Worcester respectively.

The first of these routes ran over Bredon Hill to Broadway and Banbury. The second passed through Stratford-upon-Avon and Banbury. Both of these routes joining the southern end of the Welsh Road at Buckingham,



Main droving routes that passed through Berkshire.

from where droves could take the road to enter London at Islington or could travel down to High Wycombe and thence reach London from the west through the Chilterns. A third route from Worcester ran southwest to Broadway, Cleve Hill and Northleach, joining the eastern extremity of Welsh Way at Lechlade.

As a measure of importance of the Erwood crossing, in 1836 some 200 droves, or over 30,000 bullocks a year were winched over the Wye two by two on log rafts.⁷

Movement of sheep and cattle across country through Berkshire and Oxfordshire to centres other than London, to regional fairs and to major markets was common. Some droves ended at East Ilsley, others travelled to Chipping Norton, Banbury, Buckingham, Northampton, Norwich, Reading, Farnham or Guildford.

Road, Field, Farm and Place-names

Familiar names and features offer clues and confirmation of drove roads, such as Banbury Lane leading from Chipping Norton through Banbury towards Northampton and East Anglia. Others include the Ridgeway, Icknield Way and Old Street, the latter with associated green lanes, running north from Newbury to East Ilsley and the Hendreds. Lesser-known drovers' tracks include the watershed route, Ditchedge Lane in north Oxfordshire, Wool Way and Dornford Lane north of Woodstock and Port Way between Lyford and Garford, some still retaining wide verges from droving days.⁸

Drove roads with Welsh connotations include Welsh Way (Cotswolds through Bagendon, Barnsley, Ready Token, Fairford to Lechlade), Welsh Road (Brownhills to Buckingham), several Welshman's Ponds and Welsh Ride (Farnborough). There are also ox-roads, ox-droves, hog-ways and a Drove Road (Swindon), Ha'penny field (Painscastle), Drove Barn (Ogbourne St Andrew), Copse Drove and Woolmer Drove (Ogbourne St George) and Sheepdrove Farm (Lambourn close to the Ridgeway).

Further names associated with droving include Brasenose Driftway (East Oxford), the Driftway (Harwell to East Hagbourne), Snowswick Lane (Lechlade and Coleshill to Shrivenham) and Droveway Hill (Ardington). Sworford and Latchford Lanes (Great Milton and Little Haseley) are on the drove route through Chipping Norton, Bletchingdon and Islip leading into the Chilterns. White Shoot (Blewbury), White Road (East Hendred), White Hill (Bishopstone) conjure a scene of droves slowly progressing up the bare, dry, chalk tracks with a plume of white dust rising behind them.

Two Droves from Wiltshire

R. H. Wilson, a Bishopstone farmer, reminisced about droving at the turn of the nineteenth century. One drove was taken to Blenheim Palace. 'On one occasion', he wrote, 'my father sold a big drove of cattle to the Duke of Marlborough, and they had to be delivered to Blenheim. All the regular drovers were on other journeys, and it was decided that the foreman of our farm at Shrivenham should take them. He had a large family and his wage was twelve shillings a week; he was given thirteen shillings and seven pence for one night's lodgings, as his journey would take two days, and for his railway fare home from Woodstock. He slept rough, in a yard with his cattle, thus saving his lodgings, reached Blenheim about 4 o'clock the next day, looked at the 13s 7d, and said to himself, "My youngsters can do with this", and he and his dog walked the thirty odd miles home during the night, arriving in time to start work at 6 o'clock. This same foreman had an opportunity of earning many times 13s 7d, by way of perks later on.'⁹

From the 1880s to the First World War, Colonel Robert Loyd-Lindsay, VC, Lord Wantage of Lockinge, provided part of his Berkshire Downland estate above Blewbury as Churn military camp. Lord Wantage, a pioneer of the volunteer movement, encouraged the Berkshire Yeomanry and Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars to use Churn in summer months: cattle droves went directly to supply meat for the troops.



Churn army camp c1908

R. H. Wilson wrote, 'My father had been given the contract to supply beef cattle to the troops engaged on vast army manoeuvres and based on Churn Downs, near Ilsley. All these cattle had to be prime quality and I think had to be delivered daily during the fortnight that the exercise lasted. My father arranged for a butcher friend to do the slaughtering at the camp, and on the first day the Quartermaster told our foreman to bring a horse and cart with him on future deliveries and that he could have all the bullock's heads. He found a ready market for these luxuries at a shilling a time in the villages en route. I do not know how many cattle were involved, but I do know that the fortnight's contract netted a profit of £2,000.'¹⁰

Trade in Donkeys

A return drove of donkeys and mules was sometimes taken to Ireland for use in turf carting, carrying creels and transporting milk, by the drovers who had delivered Irish or Welsh black cattle to London. The donkeys, driven in strings of up to forty, were shipped in bullock boats across the Irish Sea. Other mokes, some from Ireland, but the best from Wales, were sold in London Donkey market at Islington on Friday afternoons. In the mid-nineteenth century some 3,000 donkeys and mules were sold annually at Islington, each animal commonly making up to £30 each. Used primarily to haul costers' carts and coal merchants' wagons, some provided holiday rides on beaches in Essex, Kent and Sussex.

Problems for Drovers

Cattle plague and murrain could cause havoc to droves. The risk of cattle raiding and theft was ever-present.¹¹ Eighteenth-century roads were bad. Between 1750 and 1775 100,000 cattle and 750,000 sheep entered Smithfield each year. Daniel Defoe commented that 'drifts of cattle coming constantly to London continually trod the roads.'¹² Roads to London were consequently in a constant state of mud, especially in wet seasons, not solely from droves, but from pack animals, galloping relays of post-horses, stagecoaches, stagewagons and fish carriers.

Turnpikes improved road surfaces, particularly for stagecoaches and wheeled vehicles, but for drovers the downside was considerable. Animals drove faster, consequently fat cattle and sheep lost more weight and market value. Payment at tollhouses, on average once every seven miles, of generally 1s 6d a score for cattle and 1s a score for sheep increased costs. Tollgates were time consuming, the drove having to exit slowly, passing largely innumerate, unhelpful, unpopular tollhouse keepers. Where possible, therefore, drovers sought ways to avoid the turnpikes, taking parallel toll-free routes.

Metalled surfaces on turnpikes were injurious. Cattle were shod with iron, at ten pence a head, before leaving Wales, increasing costs further. That was good for blacksmiths, bad for droving finances. Drovers took evasive action or alternative green routes to avoid tollhouses and turnpikes, on which droves were obliged to give way to mail coaches and other traffic. The unscrupulous coachman, whipping a way through a drove, would frequently panic and scatter the animals, causing much ill feeling and mutual road rage.¹³

Enclosure was equally unpopular for similar reasons. Enclosure roads, narrowed and hedged, formed a hindrance to droves. Road surfaces were hard. Wayside grazing was less possible and free overnight stances became more difficult to find, adding the risk that droves straying on private land could be impounded. Release only followed payment for damages.

Return to Wales: development of banking

Enclosed roads made drovers more vulnerable to footpads, highwaymen and rustlers. Welsh drovers frequently received animals on trust, paying farmers on their return from markets. Responsible for carrying large amounts of cash, drovers were consequently open to attack but entirely liable for any consequential loss. Travelling back to Wales on horseback, with an ever-present risk from highwaymen and footpads, or robbery at inns, cash was carried in panniers divided between drovers.

The usual return route (1836) was over Hounslow Heath to the Rose & Crown at Maidenhead or Raven at Henley. The next stage was through Nettlebed, Shillingford and Dorchester, with an overnight stay at Abingdon or Faringdon, thence to Gloucester, Newent and Clyro.¹⁴

With the development of rudimentary banking, appointed agents in London took cash and issued notes redeemable in Wales, initially at the King's Head at Llandovery. This Black Ox Bank, established by David Jones in 1799, was eventually taken over by Lloyds Bank in 1909. There was an Old Furnace Bank at Carmarthen and Bank of the Black Sheep in Aberystwyth, the latter issuing notes bearing sheep heads, each head representing one pound in value. Banking developed as a necessary part of droving which by 1800 was big business. A drove of two hundred cattle could sell for over £4,000, causing obvious security problems.¹⁵



On the road to Ilsley fair. A flock of Kerry Hill sheep in the 1930s.

The End of Droving

Droving declined in the second half of the nineteenth century with expansion of the railways. It had ended by the second quarter of the twentieth century, although short distance droving, from villages to local markets and rail stations, remained. My father began farming as a lad with his father about 1909 at Charney Bassett.¹⁶ He recounted having driven animals to Challow station and from Reading into market. On one occasion he took cattle from Challow round a fog-bound London, to Chelmsford market: but that was the very tail end of droving.

Notes and references

- 1 P. G. Hughes, *Wales and the Drovers* (1943).
- 2 For Scottish droving methods, see A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drove Roads of Scotland* (1952).
- 3 H. R. Rankin, 'Cattle Droving from Wales to England', *Agriculture*, v. 62, no. 5 (1955) pp. 218-21.
- 4 K. J. Bonser, *The Drovers* (1970) pp. 56-7; P. G. Hughes, *Wales and the Drovers* (1943) p. 13.
- 5 William Hewett, *The History and Antiquities of the Hundred of Compton, Berks* (1844, John Snare, Reading).
- 6 K. G. Watts, *Droving in Wiltshire* (privately published).
- 7 Roy Saunders, *The Drovers' Highway* (1959).
- 8 See *A map of the Hamlet of Lyford as divided and Inclosed by an Act of Parliament* (1801), drawn by W. Church, Wantage, Berks.

- 9 R. H. Wilson, *The Sparrow Hunters* (1975, privately published).
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 W. Thompson, 'Cattle Droving between Scotland and England', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* (1932) pp.172, 183.
- 12 Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through the whole island of England and Wales* (1948, Everyman edition) vol. 2, p.127.
- 13 The novels of Thomas Hardy make reference to this feature.
- 14 Roy Saunders, *The Drover's Highway* (1959).
- 15 Bonser, *The Drovers*.
- 16 Edward Alfred Hammond (1872-1944) and Wilfred Hammond (1899-1984).

The map on p. 12 was drawn by John Chapman. The photograph on p. 17 is from the Museum of English Rural Life.

Early Nineteenth-century Printers in Reading

Diana Mackarill

The late eighteenth century and first quarter of the nineteenth saw a rapid expansion of the provincial printing trade, certainly true in Reading. This was due to a number of factors – relaxation of government control, developments in printing processes, and growth in local trade and transport. Two major newspapers, the *Reading Mercury*, founded 1723, and the *Berkshire Chronicle*, 1825, had increasing circulations as the town population rose from 9,421 in 1801, to 19,827 in 1811, and up to nearly 16,000 by 1831. The general elections, with their debates on representation, a growing concern for public education, and calls for Catholic Emancipation, generated local interest in political issues, providing need and opportunity for printed material.

In 1790 an advertisement appeared in the *Reading Mercury* for Robert Snare who was opening a business as 'Bookseller, Stationer and Bookbinder' at 16 Minster Street in the town centre. His brother John set up as a hardwareman in the same street. There is no evidence of the family in Reading before that date; it is probable that they came from Brandon, Suffolk, where the name is common. Robert was printing by 1795 – possibly earlier – as Snare & Co. On 4 May 1807 a Press notice appeared in the *Reading Mercury*, referring to 'the late firm of Snare & Co.', and stating that he 'has taken into Partnership Mr. William Man, at the Printing Office, Seven Bridges', an adjoining street. This partnership was dissolved in 1816. Robert continued on his own until 1834. In that year this changed to R. Snare & Nephew, to R. & J. Snare in 1835, with a few additional notices for R. Snare alone in June 1838, the year of his death. Robert had married Jane Beck in 1799, but there were no surviving children; he took into business his brother's son, John, born in 1808. The firm closed in 1849, with no further family involvement in this trade.

Robert's advertisement in the *Reading Mercury* declares his expertise in bookbinding including 'Account Books bound and rules to am pattern, the paper of which shall be procured from the best makers.'¹ Presumably the first years were spent in establishing himself and the stationery business, which included perfumery and 'genuine Patent Medecines'. His earliest printing so far found is 1795.² In 1796 he published a set of verses, 'Tommy

Type's Trip', and another 10 pages of verses, no author given, and in 1798 appeared *Poems of W. Lane*.

The next dated works seen are those of Snare & Man, which include a number of religious pamphlets such as George Glead's *Sermon preached to the young gentlemen of Reading School* (1807). In 1811 came *Seven Sermons* by Robert Russell, a new edition, which is an older-style book, on rough-edged paper with board covers, and a title-page 'printed for R. Snare and sold in London, by J. Richardson', with colophon (printer/publisher's mark) 'Snare & Man, Printers, Reading'. Furthermore, an end-paper advertises 'Books Printed and Sold by R. Snare, Reading' (not Snare & Man), listing five religious pamphlets and *A Compendium containing Instructions for Writing...*, Price 6d. The variations in printing acknowledgement may just be accidental, or possibly the partners retained some work individually.

Another mixed publication occurs with a new edition of *Views of Reading Abbey*, an impressive folio volume of engravings by Charles Tomkin. The title-page is dated 1805, 'printed by J. Whiting, Gerrard Street, Soho'. This new edition appeared in 1810, with colophon 'Snare and Man, Printers, Seven Bridges, Reading', and a binder's ticket of Knill and Sons, Account Book Manufacturers, Reading. Robert Snare had his dwelling in Minster Street, and continued to use that as his printing office; possibly Man set up at Seven Bridges before going into the partnership. They must have been carrying out the usual business of a jobbing printer, with its local miscellaneous productions – tickets, invitations, billheads, bookplates, advertisements, etc, but almost nothing of this seems to have survived.

Of continuing significance in Reading is the partnership's interest in local history; in 1810 they had published *A Supplement to the history and antiquities of Reading*, 'with corrections and additions,' by Charles Coates (originally 1802), and in the same year came the notorious *The Stranger in Reading*, 'a series of letters from a Traveller, to his Friend in London'.³ Although this appeared anonymously, it was generally assumed (and now confirmed) that the author was John Man. Confusion has arisen with the involvement of two members of the same family. John Man, author, had come from Whitechapel in London to Reading in the 1770s, married there, and it was his son William who became a printer. This publication, with its critical and satirical view of the town, aroused much controversy; an anonymous reply by 'Detector' (Henry Gauntlett) appeared, published in London. One can assume that Robert Snare shared some of the views of the town, in this joint publication with the author's son.

Whatever his criticisms of the current state of the town, John Man also wrote his major work on *The History and antiquities, ancient and modern, of the Borough of Reading, in the County of Berks* (printed by Snare & Man)

He would have been preparing this at the time he was making his satirical comments. Its publication date is 1816, and it was in this year that the business partnership between his son William and Robert Snare was dissolved. No explanation has been found.

Meanwhile, Robert was developing what was obviously a major interest – his library. In 1808 the Reading Literary Institute had opened, which suggests an educated public in the town, ready for a wider supply of literature to be available locally, in view of what the *Reading Mercury* referred to on 29 June 1807 as 'the increased and happily increasing prosperity of this Borough and Neighbourhood'.

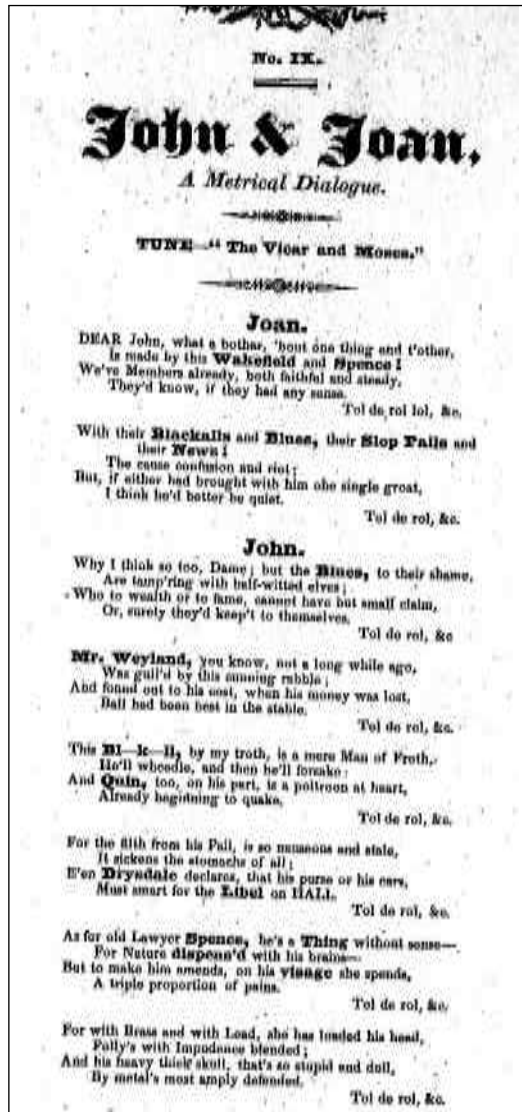
Robert Snare's Catalogue of 1810 shows the direction of his interests, and the expansion of his business beyond Reading.⁴ The inner page, advertising several foreign language hooks, is headed 'Books printed and sold by R. Snare'. He also announces a new edition of *Ashmole's History and antiquities of Berkshire* with large-scale views, 'already engraved and for inspection ...' at Minster Street. The catalogue, printed by Snare & Man, was on sale in London at J. Richardson's, Royal Exchange, and at Messrs. Whittaker, Treacher & Arnot, Ave Maria Lane. Further annual catalogues followed, showing the accumulation of a large and comprehensive library. The 1829 issue was specifically on English Literature.

The image shows two separate election addresses side-by-side. The left address is titled "Electors of Reading" and "100 Guineas Reward. LOST, Barrister's Conscience!". It contains a long, humorous letter from "Daniel the Scribe" to the electors, mentioning a "Hand-bill" and a "Quiz". The right address is titled "Independent Electors BOROUGH OF READING" and is signed "EDWARD WAKEFIELD". It is a formal letter of regret and explanation regarding a "Hand-bill" and a "Quiz".

Two of the election addresses printed by Snare, March 1826

There are no surviving accounts to show how Snare acquired this increasing collection, but useful evidence comes from another printer-bookseller in the town, who produced catalogues from 1805 to 1836. J. Rusher published a Reading Guide or Gentleman's Trade Directory in 1801, in which he promises a catalogue in the future. This Guide is 'Printed for and Sold by J. Rusher, in King-street'; and it seems that he did little printing on his own account. In 1810, his collection included 'the Libraries of the late Rev. Thos. Pentycross, A.M., Wallingford, Berks., Rev. John Caswall, A.M. Swalcliffe, Oxon., and several other collections recently purchased.' By 1820 his Catalogue of Books contained 'about Twenty Thousand Volumes in general literature and theology, New and Second-hand.' It seems safe to assume that Snare built up his stock in a similar way. Both booksellers were obviously successful in business, and they were not the only ones in the town to enjoy the 'happily increasing prosperity'.

A further indication of this success is the specialist catalogue of 1834 from Snare & Nephew, Bibliotheca Theologica, 'A catalogue of English and Foreign Theology and Ecclesiastical

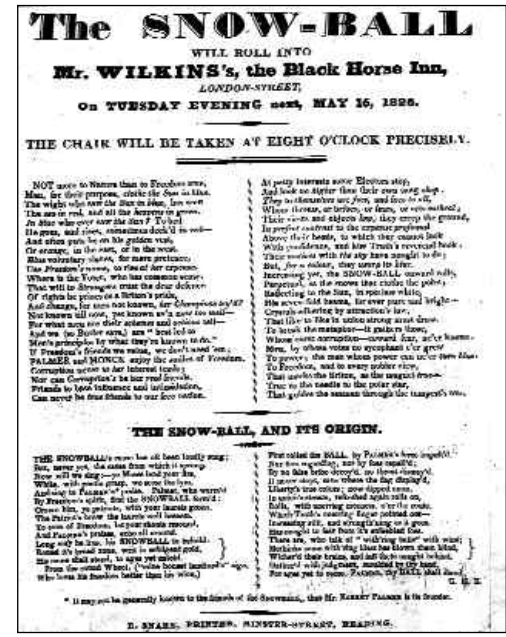


An extract from 'John and Joan', one of the election ballads distributed in 1826

History, together with an extensive Collection of Sermons, now selling by...'. The outlet for this catalogue additionally includes Oxford, and Mr Washbourne, of Fleet-street. The second page refers to another catalogue, in two parts, 'containing upwards of 13,000 articles [that is, items] In various Languages, And every Branch of Literature'. Altogether, these offered a very large collection of books on sale. A circulating library had also been established. Additionally, 16 Minster Street held 'every article in the Bookselling, Stationary, Toy, and Perfumery business ... genuine Patent medicines ... together with the printing and book-binding business, as it had from 1810.

The catalogues are well laid out for easy reference, the title-pages of elegant presentation, using a variety of types, and examples of the advertised copper-plate printing obviously for the discerning public. The 1834 catalogue also provides details of the printing works: 'Letter-Press Printing In every Department of the Art ... The Presses are constructed upon the latest improved principles. The extensive Stock of Types has been selected from Foundries of established reputation, and is replete with the various improvements that have been of late introduced.'⁵ Furthermore, 'bookbinding is executed on the premises ... by experienced workmen.' Unfortunately no records survive as to which foundries were used, nor of the new presses installed.

Examples of the liveliness of Robert's printing also appear in the election posters, a large collection of which has survived, held by the University of Reading.⁶ Whether Snare was responsible for the content of the posters is not known, but he was certainly much involved in the Reform movement during the 1825-26 elections in Reading. He issued posters and leaflets, supporting Palmer and Monck, the Whig candidates, with notices of meetings, arguments, charges and counter-charges, with strong satirical



Handbill for a political meeting, May 1826



Robert Snare's later house in Castle Street

language, and publicising the falsification of the poll results that had occurred. Snare was one of eleven Electors in the Borough who signed the petition to the House of Commons in 1826, following the manipulation of votes which had favoured George Spence, the Tory candidate, over the legal votes for Charles Fysshe Palmer – later reinstated. Ribald songs about ‘Reading Blues in the Slop Pail’, ‘Neddy’s Flight or the Old/New Married Man’s Vagaries ... Liberty Ever! Slavery Never!’, a long poem on ‘John and Joan’, with various scarcely disguised characters, pro Palmer and Monck, together with threats on the likelihood of rises in the price of beer (‘To the Mechanics ad Labourers ... from Sir John Barleycorn’) rolled out in rapid succession. A spoof advertisement

with bold heading WANTED, typical of the usual ‘lost’ notices, asked for ‘100 Dozen Clouts and Napkins, fifty Nurses and 150 Pap Dishes and Spoon’ for a fete where ‘3 Caldrons of Soup will be provided for the “Lower Orders”’. A REWARD notice gave publicity to ‘LOST, a Banker’s Conscience’, referring to the Tory candidate ‘Daniel’ Wakefield, Another, on 15 March 1826, headed SKY BLUE, adopted current dairy language, where ‘Flet Milk’ having been skimmed three times at Shinfield was ‘thrown into the hog tub’. Of course the Blues had their own printers, notably Cowslade, and Drysdale at the Chronicle Office, whose surviving posters are much more restrained.

An important piece of evidence relating to Snare’s history comes to light here. The election address by Edward Wakefield, 22 September 1825, the Blue candidate opposed by the Radicals, was printed by W. Man from Butcher Row. Man had also printed anti-Popery posters, as part of the campaign in the Catholic Emancipation debates which were being held at this time. Although views on this measure did not entirely divide along Tory/Radical lines, Snare’s politics were clearly pro-reform. Such political differences then may have been the reason for the break-up of their business partnership.

Other confirmation of Snare’s Radical beliefs is shown earlier in relation to the trial in 1818 of Mr Hone, the parodist, who was committed for writing religious and political satire, and later imprisoned for debt. The Reading Mercury of 13 January records the trial, adding ‘Subscriptions received by

Mr. Snare, bookseller ... where may be had the report of the trial.’

Little is known of Snare’s other interests, or activities in the town; in 1802 he subscribed to Coates’s History, in 1808 he subscribed to a fund for the improvement of Gun St/ St.Mary’s churchyard, and in 1809 he signed a demand for a local meeting about the celebration of George III’s jubilee. His name does not appear among the promoters of the Literary Institute.

He was obviously a well-known and respected figure in the town, a Parliamentary Elector (one of only about 1200 in the Borough) and a man of property. He had moved his home from the main business in Minster Street to an impressive house in the new development in Castle Street, no. 27. In Reading Street Directories of the period he is classified as ‘Gentleman’, and his widow is listed under ‘Gentry’. In his will, made early in 1838, he is able to leave ‘shares and property in the Reading Gas Light and Reading Insurance Co., a freehold messuage or dwelling house in the Butter Market, my house in Minster-street, and 8 Freehold messuages or tenements in Coley Terrace’. He assures the house and contents in Castle Street ‘to his wife for her lifetime’; apart from a few small bequests, the rest is left to his nephew John. As the business is not mentioned, it can be assumed that it had already been made over to John by that date.

His brother John, the hardwareman, in a will made earlier that year, also leaves various leasehold estates in Reading and in Basildon, and his ‘freehold messuage’ in St Giles, Reading, to his family, which then consisted of two married daughters, John II (the printer) and William Henry, already in his hardware business. It seems that the Snare family had done very well in their business ventures in their adopted town; what is not known is whether they had substantial assets when they first arrived in Reading.

Robert’s obituary notice, in the Reading Mercury, 18 July 1838, is brief but exemplary: ‘Died on Tuesday the 24th inst. in Castle-street, aged 80 Mr. Robert Snare, late of Minster-street, where he carried on the business of bookseller and printer for nearly fifty years. He was greatly and deservedly esteemed for his consistency, disinterestedness, and probity, in every transaction through life.’

Unfortunately, his nephew’s career did not end so well; John Snare continued in Minster Street with the same lively style of printing, but his real interest lay in art. He collected pictures, both prints and originals, sculptures, and other cultural artefacts, displaying them for sale on his premises and acquiring a reputation as a local connoisseur. At a local sale he bought, very cheaply, a portrait of Prince Charles, thought to be by Vandyck. Snare, however, believed he had found the ‘missing Velasquez’, of which he had read in many articles, and was determined to promote his discovery. This became an obsession, in pursuit of which he neglected the business,

and, worse, got involved in numerous lawsuits concerning the picture, and also with his family over their inheritance from his uncle Robert. This led to the collapse of the business and its sale in 1849. Snare departed to America to exhibit his picture and never returned. His extraordinary story is developed in *The Snares of Minster Street: the Printer and the Picture*, recently published by this author.

References and acknowledgements

Note: addresses in that period hyphenate '-street'. I have retained the convention when quoting (Minster-street).

1 *Reading Mercury*, 15 March 1790 p. 3

2 Elizabeth Beynon, *Reflections on the Necessity of Paying a Strict Attention to our conduct through life* (1795)

3 *The Stranger in Reading in a series of letters from a traveller to his Friend in London*, Reading, printed by Snare and Man, 1810. A new edition edited by Adam Sowan, has been published by Two Rivers Press, Reading.

4 Catalogues produced by Snare, and Rusher, Local Studies Library, Reading Borough Library, R –JO.

5 Directories of Reading and of Berkshire, various dates, Local Studies Library, R-CY. No complete run.

6 Election posters, in Printing Collection, Berkshire Election Ephemera, 324,4229 BER Special Collections, University of Reading.

Thanks are due to the staff of the Local Studies section of Reading Borough Library for their help and patience in answering innumerable questions, finding material and allowing me to quote from it, to Berkshire Record Office, and to the members of the Department of Typography and Graphic Design, University of Reading, for advice and encouragement. Sydney Gold, retrieved many 'Snare' references for me, and Adam Sowan provided material on the Man family.

Copies of *The Snares of Minster Street: the Printer and the Picture* can be obtained from Diana Mackarill, 26 College Road, Reading RG6 1QB, price £5 plus 50p postage.

Lascelles Playing Fields, Slough

Tony Pilmer

In late 2005 I was asked to provide some background information to support the redevelopment of Lascelles Playing Fields Pavilion. I expected to discover some dreary facts and figures about buying a plot of land, laying out sports fields and building a rather grand pavilion. However, I soon discovered that the park was created in a time of great change for Slough and that the attitudes of those who influenced the park's development can tell us a lot about Slough's past.

Early History

Lascelles Playing Fields sit in the east of Upton village. To the north of the field are the nineteenth-century houses of Sussex Place. To the west is Upton Towers, otherwise known as Blacklead Castle, the home of industrial baron W. G. Nixey. To the south west is the twelfth-century St Laurence's Church, the fourteenth-century Upton Court and the fashionable 1830s houses around Upton Park.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought industry, with the establishment of Ellimans, Horlicks and the fledgling Slough Trading Estate. The new jobs created by these companies drew people from across the country and, as a consequence, the town's population increased rapidly. In 1921 there were 16,392 people living in the Urban District of Slough, and by the outbreak of World War II there were an estimated 50,620 people living in the enlarged Borough of Slough. This in turn put pressure on local services run by local government. Roads, schools, parks and the water supply were all designed for a small town and they needed to be expanded. With a view of making such improvements to Slough's open spaces, a plot of land which ran along Lascelles Road and up to the Bath Road, and formally known as Pound Gate Field, was bought by Slough Urban District Council (Slough UDC) in 1928 at a cost of about £7000. Slough UDC earmarked their new fields as a site for a new Grammar School, later to become Slough Grammar, and for public playing fields. The area intended for the fields covered 'twenty-six acres of ground and afford[ed] every facility for games'.

There were two men who were instrumental in the purchase and development of the playing fields. The first was Alan Bromly A.M.I.C.E.,

Slough UDC's Surveyor & Engineer & Manager of Water Works from 1920 to 1938. As the town's surveyor he was the council officer responsible for planning, running and developing the council's infrastructure. He did this throughout the inter-war years when the population exploded from 16,392 to 66,250 and he was planning for an eventual population of over 100,000 residents. In this capacity Bromly was in charge of the design and building of Slough Waterworks, Slough Cemetery and 242 council houses along Stoke Poges Lane.

Bromly was also passionate about parks and open spaces. During his time of employment he oversaw the expansion of Slough's allotments, the building of Salt Hill Pleasure Grounds and an open air swimming pool on Montem Lane, as well as the purchasing and development of Lascelles and Upton Court Playing Fields. His passion can most clearly be seen in his notebooks. In his notes for the 3 July 1931 meeting of the Playing Fields Committee he argues for greater land for open spaces considering the exploding population, and laments his failed attempts to persuade the council to buy the parkland once belonging to Baylis House. The parkland containing lakes and landscaped gardens was then developed for housing.

Bromly's influence over the council's parkland went further than persuading the council that it needed more open spaces. As surveyor he was in day-to-day control of the playing fields, as well as their development and design. As shown below, he also had the key role in building the Lascelles Playing Fields Pavilion.

The second key individual in the purchasing of the park was a man called Richard Jewry Harbert. Jewry Harbert was an insurance agent, former florist to Queen Victoria and Edward VII, magistrate, and at the time of the park's purchase, Chairman of Slough Urban District Council. According to 'Sweep' in the *Slough Observer*, a mysterious private individual was also interested in buying and developing the site for housing. Luckily for the town, Jewry Harbert privately obtained an option to buy the land. This gave Slough UDC time to complete the purchase before the developers were able to put in a bid.

Naming the Park

On 31 January 1930 the power to shape the new playing fields was given to Slough UDC's Salt Hill and Playing Fields Committee. One of the first jobs of this body of councillors was to suggest a name for Slough's newest playing field. In March 1930, Slough UDC's Playing Fields Committee suggested to a meeting of the full council that the new playing fields should be named after the Lascelles Family. The full council discussed alternatives to the plan.

Councillor Shrapnell suggested that the park should be called Upton Playing Fields, as they had already honoured the Lascelles family by naming the adjacent road after them. However, the councillors were worried that the site would be confused with Upton (later Herschel) Park. Councillor Bayley suggested naming it 'Daw Playing Fields in tribute to Councillor Daw who had been chairman of the Playing Fields Committee'. However, as the Playing Fields Committee had already approached Henry George Charles Lascelles, Earl of Harewood, on whether he would prefer the park to be called either Harewood or Lascelles Playing Fields, the meeting decided that they should agree to the Playing Fields Committee's suggested name.

However, should the fields be called Lascelles or Harewood? As Lord Harewood 'had replied that he did not mind which', the Playing Fields Committee 'considered that as Lascelles Road ran along the side of the fields that would be the more appropriate name'.

As Councillor Daw stated in the March 1930 full committee meeting, the Lascelles family had a long connection with the parish of Upton-cum-Chalvey. 'In 1711 Benjamin Lane conveyed to Edward Lascelles and his heirs "all that capital messuage or mansion house called Upton Court"'. Though the Lascelles were to become the Lords of the Manor, very few lived in Upton Court and the house was mainly occupied by tenants. There were, however, members of the family who were buried at the parish church of St Laurence.

King George V and Queen Mary visited Upton Court on 4 June 1922 in order to decide whether it was a suitable country home for their daughter, Princess Mary, when she married Viscount Lascelles, later 6th Earl of Harewood. However, Upton Court did not get the royal seal of approval and the Lascelles family sold the house in 1929.

The early development of the playing fields

By 1930 Lascelles Playing Fields contained areas for 'the playing of organized games ... but is not laid out at present with any walks or ornamentation'. The 'natural' appearance of the field was part of the finance committee's plans to keep the rates as low as possible.

The playing fields and courts were also made available for clubs to hire on an annual basis. Slough Rugby Club and Slough Ladies Hockey Club started a trial season of playing at the club in September 1931. These teams were joined by children from local public schools, such as Halidan House, St Joseph's and Tower House Schools.

The conversion process did not run smoothly. During 1930 and 1931, the Playing Fields Committee wanted to stop all organized sport taking place on Sundays. However, after appeals from sports clubs and members of the

public, this decision was reversed by the full council. The groundsman, Charles Price, was also appointed a special constable to 'make him better qualified to deal with anything which cropped up'.

The playing fields continued to develop throughout the 1930s. The December 1931 meeting of the Playing Fields Committee of Slough UDC agreed to spend £52 on children's playground equipment. A bowling green was also converted into a tennis court.

The lack of ornamentation had been rectified by the end of the decade as the 1938 Slough Official guide describes the field as 'being laid out with paths and flower beds, hard and grass tennis courts, football, hockey and cricket pitches, and a children's playground equipped with slides, etc'. The guide goes on to describe the playing field's crowning glory as 'an attractive Pavilion where refreshments are obtainable'.

Planning the pavilion

The process of building the pavilion started in mid-1931. The Playing Fields Committee reported to full council on 20 July 1931 that they had received complaints that there were no public lavatories on the playing field. It was agreed that the Surveyor should prepare a scheme for a permanent facility. Councillors also thought this scheme should be extended to provide seating for the elderly and a house for the groundsman. At least for the time being the committee reported that they had not been given money for such a scheme but 'at a future date an improvement will be made'.

Not only were there no public lavatories, but the changing facilities were also less than ideal. As an interim measure, Slough UDC rented a former pigsty from the adjacent Upton Towers.

The regular users of Lascelles Playing Fields did not have to wait long for their promised improvements as in September 1931 the full council was informed that the Playing Fields Committee had asked the Surveyor to add a caretaker's lodge to their original plans for 'proper lavatories for both sexes'.

Bromly delivered plans far beyond his brief. The Christmas council committee meeting heard that not only was there to be a caretaker's lodge and lavatories, but a pavilion 'including dressing rooms, refreshment rooms and caretaker's quarters, all under one roof'. This would cost the council the sum of £1500. However, as with many schemes before and since, the council was told that the revenue from the refreshments, rent from the caretaker's rooms and entrance fees for the lavatories would mean that the 'erection should involve little (if any) charge upon the rates'. Not surprisingly, the council 'instructed your surveyor to prepare the necessary plans, sections and estates with a view to the matter being proceeded with'.

Building and opening the pavilion

Work on the pavilion was started on 16 June 1932 and was estimated to have lasted for three months. When the pavilion was nearing completion, the council looked to appoint someone to run the cafe. The groundsman, Charles Price, together with his wife, was appointed and allowed to live in the caretaker's quarters. The Prices took possession of the building on Wednesday 12 October 1932; however, as the chairs for the café had not arrived, their contract started on 9 November 1932. The Prices had to pay £1 a week rent for the cafe as well as for the lighting and heating.

In 1938, S. Logan in his 'Round and About' column for the *Windsor Express*, described the pavilion as follows:

Here there are a main refreshment room and kitchen, above which is accommodation for the park keeper, while a long, dipping roof of mottled slates and the tall chimney stacks make it a picturesque as well as a practical addition to its surroundings.

The pavilion gained praise from councillors and even the often hard to please 'Around and About' columnist in the *Slough Observer*:



Extract from Ordnance Survey Map SU9879 SW & SE 1955. Not to scale. Courtesy of the Local Studies Collection, Slough Library.

When I passed that way the other day the building was only partially finished, but it was even then possible to see that the design was uncommonly graceful. I can imagine that the lodge will be well-suited to its surroundings, and will be something to be proud of.

However, universal praise could not last for long. Perhaps regretting such an enthusiastic endorsement, the 'Around and About' column later stated that to 'my mind [the pavilion] is spoilt by the colouring ... why, for instance, had the council to choose sickly green and grey slates ... I confess that last week when I saw the place again I was very disappointed in it.'

History has been a little more kind than 'Around and About's second piece. In 2006 Martin Andrew, Slough's Conservation Officer commented that the pavilion was 'a distinguished essay in Arts and Crafts style ... and any replacement would be hard put to provide a building of such architectural distinction and careful and well-balanced and detailed design.

The Greatest hour? – Slough's Charter Day

Soon Lascelles Playing Fields were playing host to some of Slough's most important events. Not only was it to be a venue for a controversial circus in 1932, but it held Slough's celebrations of King George V's Silver Jubilee in 1935 and the coronation celebrations of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1937.

However, perhaps the greatest event held on Lascelles Playing Fields was held on Wednesday 14 September 1938 when the Royal Charter which converted Slough from an urban district to a borough was presented to the town. This not only gave the town greater prestige, but also a new coat of arms, and the chairman of the council became a mayor with all the pomp and circumstance which that entails.

The charter day did not start at the playing fields but at the newly built Town Hall. Here the dignitaries met, and after signing the guest books they formed a procession to Lascelles Playing Fields. They were met by up to fifteen thousand people and the field was covered with a sea of tents.

What is certain is that the playing fields hosted one of the key events of Slough's civic history. The Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Lord Cottesloe, presented the Slough's Charter of Incorporation that day signed by King George VI – the Borough of Slough had come into existence. Colonel J. N. Horlick, the President of the Slough Civic Society, then presented the mayor with the civic mace as a gift from the Society.

After the presentation there were celebrations throughout the rest of the day. A civic lunch for over 400 people was held. The festivities spread over to Upton Court Park where there was a 'military band, fun fair, vaudeville



The pavilion at Lascelles Playing Fields, c.1980, a photograph by the council's Parks Department. Local Studies Collection, Slough Library.

and pipes', with some of the events being broadcast on BBC Radio. The children were not left out as they had races and a tea party.

The decline of Lascelles Playing Fields

The playing field has declined since its peak in the 1930s. As the population of Slough has increased, Lascelles Playing Fields seem to have become too small to hold Slough's big civic occasions. Instead the nearby Upton Court Park held a 'Grand Country Fair', celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the creation of India and Pakistan in 1997, and the 2003 Youth Festival, whilst the Slough Bonfire and the Asian festival called the Slough Mela have become annual events. Many of the sports clubs that rented out pitches at Lascelles, such as Slough Rugby Club and Slough Ladies Hockey Club, have also moved to Upton Court Park, though other clubs have taken their place.

The size of Lascelles Playing Fields must have been recognised as a problem because, at some time between 1948 and 1953, it had grown from 28 to 31 acres. By comparing maps published in 1932 and 1955 it seems that the Borough of Slough had purchased the grounds of Upton Towers and incorporated them into the park.

The fortunes of the pavilion have also declined. A newspaper report from 1978 suggests that the café was closed and boarded in 1965, while the Slough Official Guide still has reference to 'a café where refreshments can be obtained' in 1972/73.

The café remained derelict until three women applied for and gained a three year licence to run the pavilion as a tea room. Mother and daughter Else and Diana Mitchell of Langley, together with Diana's sister, Pat Stanhope from Dulwich, gained the licence, and with help from their husbands and children redecorated and repaired the pavilion. Slough Borough Council also promised to repair the outside of the building. The café was re-launched in the summer of 1978 as a commercial concern and was open daily between 9 am and 5 pm. The idea to reopen the pavilion came to Diana Mitchell when she saw cricketers walking to Slough High Street for their tea during May 1978. It is currently unknown how long the café stayed open; however there is no mention of a café in the 1982 Slough Official Guide.

The decline continued when at about 8pm on Thursday 22 January 2004 the changing rooms were burnt to the ground. It took four fire crews six hours to put out the fire after a jet of flames came from a leaking gas pipe. A week after the event the cause of the fire was still unknown. With an estimated rebuild cost of more than £200,000, a Slough Borough Council spokesman said that there were 'no immediate plans' to rebuild the changing rooms. Fortunately, Bromly's 1930s pavilion was unaffected.

Since the closure of the café, many ideas have been put forward to bring the park and the pavilion back to its former glory. Though reopening the café was unsuccessful, there have been plans to put the pavilion to other uses; however none have yet come to fruition.

Slough Borough Council's Parks and Planning Departments value the history and architectural style of the building. The council's conservation officer put the essence of the park and buildings very well when he said:

It is sad to see it with its windows shuttered, the walls graffitied and broken tile hangings and slates. The slates look like Westmoreland types. In my view it is well worth seeking ways to conserve the building as a significant part of the history of Slough and the old Urban District Council's far sighted policies which led to the formation of numerous public parks for the citizens to enjoy.

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