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Cover illustrations
Front. Reading Abbey, an early-nineteenth-century print. Museum of English Rural Life.

Back. The old corn exchange entrance, Market Place, Reading, 2013. James Smart.

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Cluniac Reading and Paisley

Harriet Mahood[1]

The purpose of this paper is to explore the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the abbeys of Reading and Paisley in 1121 and 1163 respectively and to establish the effect these circumstances had until the fourteenth century. These two monasteries are anomalies within the Cluniac order (an order consisting primarily of priories, discussed below), as both Reading and Paisley became abbeys with the latter becoming an officially 'affiliated' Cluniac abbey c.1220.[2] They were ostensibly similar, with powerful founders, populated by the same order of monks, and founded within 45 years of each other. A number of factors will be examined to determine their effect upon the monasteries' development. The factors chosen are: the influence of the original founder and subsequent patrons; the role of endowments and the locations of the abbeys; and finally, the agency of the monks themselves. First, a brief history of the Cluniac order and the abbeys will be given.

The Cluniac order was a reforming monastic order that sought to return to a 'purer' form of monasticism and adhere more rigidly to the Benedictine rule than other monasteries at the time were perceived to. Founded at Cluny, in northern Burgundy, in 909 by William of Aquitaine, the abbey of Cluny and its monks were content throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries to impose Cluniac rule at a monastery when invited to reform it, supervising only temporarily, before returning control to the monastery. Later, however, it became standard practice to remove the monastery's autonomy and previously independent monasteries were now absorbed into the order. Some power was often left with local authorities however, particularly in areas distant from Cluny, and founders often inserted clauses into their foundation charters which permitted their monasteries greater freedom from the abbey of Cluny. By the eleventh century, the structure of the Cluniac order was based upon a 'hierarchy of relationships' where all daughter houses had the status of priories or cells and were subject to the mother house and dependent upon the abbot of Cluny Abbey. Cluniac houses were popular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: David Knowles estimates that there were between 18 and 36 in England during the period under discussion. In comparison, there were between 35 and 50 Benedictine houses and around 50 Cistercian houses in England in the twelfth century. Abbeys entering the order surrendered their status and became priories, and it is the abbatial status of Paisley and Reading which makes them intriguing and was the initial point of interest for this comparison.

Monks first arrived in Reading in the year 1121, and Henry I signed the

monastery's foundation charter which recognized the head of the monastery as an abbot c.1125. Its first abbot, Hugh of Amiens, had been appointed in 1123 and, until its dissolution in 1539, the house maintained its abbatial status and followed the Cluniac way of life, although it was later referred to as Benedictine (discussed again later). Its proximity to the settlement of Reading and its endowment ensured its survival and success and in 1164 the church was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. Reading attracted many endowments, becoming large and wealthy, and hosted numerous important events including Edward IV's wedding in 1464, as well as several parliaments between 1191 and 1467.

Paisley Abbey was founded in 1163 by Walter Fitzalan, hereditary steward of Scotland, and settled by Cluniac monks who, until this point, had not established themselves in Scotland. The new monastery was a priory and adopted the local saint, St Mirin, and flourished under the patronage of the Fitzalan family until 1220, when it received the right to have an abbot. Paisley Abbey became an important pilgrimage site for Scotland and possible pilgrim badges from Paisley have been found at Whithorn. The Fitzalans went on to become the Stewart dynasty and eventual kings of Scotland with the ascension of Robert I in 1306.

When Henry I granted Reading its charter c.1125, he granted to the monks the royally appropriated houses of Leominster, Cholsey and Reading, leading some to assume that Henry's foundation was a re-foundation. A great deal was granted in the foundation charter, including 'appurtenances, woods, fields, pastures, meadows and rivers ... mills and fisheries ... churches ... chapels, cemeteries', as well as any attached tithes, the village of Thatcham, and the church at Wargrave, all of which helped establish Reading's wealth. The abbot of the monastery was already recognized in this early charter. Walter's charter of foundation for Paisley is sparse in comparison but does record that the monks came from the Cluniac priory of Much Wenlock in Shropshire and were to be independent from that house. He also refers to the head of his new house as 'the prior'. The only endowments detailed within the foundation charter are perpetual alms, a measure of land in Renfrew, a salmon net, six herring nets and a boat given to Paisley's mother-house of Much Wenlock priory.

Greater comparisons with Reading's endowment however can be drawn with Paisley if Walter's second charter dated between 1163 and 1173 is examined. This second charter goes into greater detail concerning the land grants, which included the churches and appurtenances of Prestwick, Paisley, 'Ennyrwic', Ledgerwood, Cathcart and 'Strathgryfe'; 'Carucates' of land at 'Hastendene' and also between the River Cart and the River Gryffe as well as an 'island' near Renfrew and the fishing rights between that island and Partick; a salmon net, a toft and mill in Renfrew, a merk of silver from

the rents of Renfrew and the use of Paisley mill as well as four shillings from the latter. A tenth of Walter's hunting and skins, as well as deer skins from his forest at Ferenese, and a tenth of his waste land and Paisley forest were also included and the abbey was granted the same rights of pasture as Walter and his men in the forest of Paisley.

Reading's foundation charter also protected the abbey from extraction of dues by custom and violence and also freed the monks and their servants from tolls and other customs of the land and water throughout England. Similar rights were not granted to Paisley and it was Henry's status as king that allowed him to grant these privileges. When the Fitzalans gained the Scottish throne as the Stewart dynasty, however, the monks of Paisley were granted these royal privileges and protected against 'vexing, molesting, hindering, and troubling' by 'justiciars, chamberlains, sheriffs, provosts and their bailies, coroners and other royal officers all and singular'. Walter was however able to grant Paisley the standard rights of 'sac and soc, tol and them and infangtheof' which related to local jurisdiction. Reading was granted these rights as well, but with the addition of 'utfangenthef, and hamsocna', which allowed them greater judicial powers over those from outside of their jurisdiction, as well as the right to hear criminal cases such as burglary. The power to grant these privileges at Paisley came from David I's grant of these privileges to Walter which was subsequently confirmed by Malcolm IV. Paisley would not have received these rights had Walter not been granted them, and it was Walter's status as a valued member of the Scottish entourage, and as Royal Steward of Scotland, which facilitated their granting. These grants clearly demonstrate the distinction between what the king could grant, and what a nobleman was able to. Who the founder was directly affected what exactly could be granted.

The motives of the foundations should now be considered. In November 1120, Henry I's only legitimate son and heir drowned off the Norman coast in the 'White ship disaster'. Traditionally, this has been seen as the motive for Henry I's act of piety in establishing the abbey. A more tenable explanation is that he intended Reading Abbey to be a Royal Mausoleum, and indeed, in 1135 he was buried in front of the high altar. In 1121, Henry requested that seven monks should come to Reading from Cluny to be joined by monks from Lewes priory before settling at the newly established monastery. The exact number of monks from Lewes is not recorded, but Brian Kemp speculates that it was at least five, bringing the whole contingent of Cluniac monks to twelve plus the prior. This was the traditional number for an Anglo-Norman foundation and although many were founded with fewer, this was the 'ideal' number and, when coupled with the strength of the foundation grants, suggests the importance Henry attached to the monastery's success. The continued importance of Reading

to the monarchy is demonstrated by the abbot's attendance in parliament, beginning under Henry III, which at Paisley did not occur until the mid-fifteenth century.

When Walter Fitzalan founded Paisley Abbey, thirteen monks came from the priory of Much Wenlock. Great trouble was taken by Walter during the foundation of the monastery to ensure its independence from Much Wenlock. Humbald, Much Wenlock's prior, was required to gain official acknowledgement of Paisley's foundation from the abbot of Cluny as well as the priory of La Charité-sur-loire, to which Much Wenlock was daughter, during the settlement. Confusion over the amount of independence Paisley actually had will be discussed later, but 'Holy Humbald' has often been accused by contemporaries and historians alike of withholding important information pertinent to a Cluniac house believing itself to be independent.

As discussed already, it is the abbatial status of Paisley and Reading which makes them intriguing and the choice of Cluniac monks for both monasteries is also significant as the order was in decline during the twelfth century, having previously enjoyed great popularity. Despite this popularity, Cluny expressed little ambition to expand overseas. Much Wenlock (Paisley's mother house) experienced difficulties during its foundation and was eventually settled with monks from the priory of La Charité-sur-loire, which explains why Humbald was required to seek La Charité-sur-loire's permission during Paisley's foundation. In comparison, the 'ease' with which Lewes (the first Cluny priory established in England c.1077) agreed to populate Reading may be due to Henry's position as king, but also as a valued patron of Cluny. Henry had previously endowed other religious houses during his reign including the abbey of Cluny during its rebuilding c.1109-31. These contributions may have facilitated Henry's establishment of Cluniac monks in his monastery at Reading and may also go some way to explaining why Cluny never demanded the direct subjugation of Reading. Equally, Cluny's reluctance to expand suggests that the choice of Cluniac monks lay solely with Henry and Walter, although, as previously mentioned, there were eventually a number of Cluniac houses in England (only two in Scotland).

Walter's connections to Cluny stem from his father Alan who was granted lands in Shropshire by Henry I after serving with him in Normandy. Walter left Shropshire and settled in Renfrew following his role in support of the attempt by David I's niece Matilda (also known as Maud) to take the English throne, for which he was awarded the title of hereditary Steward of Scotland in 1158. Through his connection to Shropshire, and thus Much Wenlock, it was perhaps an easy decision to found his monastery with monks from that priory, instead of the more established Cistercians, despite Cluny's (already

stated) reluctance to expand.

Later patrons were also important for the monasteries. At Paisley, donations continued well after Walter's foundation. Initially this was through his wife Eschina and their son Alan. Alan's son Walter, grandson of the founder, also endowed the monastery with various parcels of land and the Fitzalan family would continue over the years to endow the 'family' monastery. These possessions, and more, are listed in the Transumpt of Clement IV which, although not exhaustive, does demonstrate that over the course of a century the monks came into the possession of a great deal more land and wealth than were first granted, as well as greater fishing and timber rights. Later gifts followed and while the Fitzalan/Stewart kings Robert II and III did not donate as much as their predecessors, both aided the abbey and Robert III granted two charters to the abbey. The first, in 1396, declared that all the lands in Renfrew, Ayr, Roxburgh and Peebles were now a free barony while the second secured the abbey's possessions and took the abbot and monks under crown protection. This charter is reminiscent of Henry I's foundation charter and reinforces the point argued earlier that the 'who' determined the 'what' when it came to these privileges.

At Reading, the significance of the founder's initial grants has been discussed by Brian Kemp, who states that the abbey 'depended to a remarkable extent on its endowment by Henry I and other members of his family': from 1291, up to 90 per cent of the abbey's assessed income came from these grants. Acquisitions slowed in the thirteenth century and the majority of the abbey's income came from the property granted at foundation. Despite this 'tailing off' the monarchy maintained its connection to the abbey, not least because of its location and hospitality. The rights to hold various fairs in Reading were granted at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth centuries; conversely, this privilege was not granted until the end of the fifteenth century at Paisley and was actually strongly contested with the neighbouring town of Renfrew. The dispute suggests that the right to hold a weekly market and yearly fairs strongly affected the 'balance' within the region. In comparison it is worth noting how early on in its history Reading was granted market rights which increased trade to the town and abbey and, as a result, ultimately aided the establishment of the settlement as an economic centre. These grants ensured the prosperity and survival of the monastery. While no in-depth analysis to the same extent as Kemp's PhD thesis has been carried out at Paisley, the continual expansion of Paisley's wealth and lands, seen in the acquisitions over the first 100 years of its history, implies that Paisley owed its wealth and survival to cumulative endowments rather than the strength of the initial foundation.

The location of the monasteries also played an important role in shaping the fortunes of the monasteries. Reading, for example, is situated on the crossings of the north/south and east/west land routes and straddles the River Kennet near its junction with the river Thames. The site of Reading may have been one of several possible choices for the king, but Cecil Slade argues that Reading was decided upon due to its convenient distance from London and Windsor, and its proximity to the Thames allowed the town and abbey easy access to Oxford, Wallingford and London. William of Malmesbury, a twelfth-century chronicler, even describes Reading abbey as being 'well suited to provide a lodging for almost all travelers to the more populous cities of England'. Indeed the monarch and his court routinely claimed hospitality at the abbey and Henry III is said to have stayed at the abbey up to four times each year. Paisley, in contrast, never appears to have achieved this same reputation for hospitality as Reading, possibly because the Fitzalan estates provided ample hospitality for visiting nobles and the abbey was not as conveniently situated to the royal centre as Reading was. Paisley's location did have a great impact upon the monastery's development, however, eventually leading to its abbatial status.

Paisley struggled as a priory for almost 60 years, as without abbatial government, the monks were unable to make regular profession to a Cluniac abbot or receive canonical benediction and become full monks. Repeated complaints were made, as well as allegations that prior Humbald of Much Wenlock had hidden the flaws in the monastery's arrangement, and it was upon this basis that the house sought abbatial status from the Pope. The crux of the problem lay in the Cluniac order's structure in which all monks were expected to make regular profession at the abbey in Cluny. The founder, Walter, may have assumed his monks would be able to take their monastic vows and hoped his monastery would rise to the same prestige as its Scottish contemporaries. However, Paisley's priory status, Philip McWilliams argues, meant it was regarded as a minor Scottish religious house despite its considerable wealth. Many of the most prestigious religious houses in England, such as Lewes, were priories, making this issue of perceived 'rank', McWilliams suggests, a problem individual to Scotland. The Cluniac order itself also presented its own problems through its reluctance to share its abbatial rank with daughter houses.

On 15 July 1219 Pope Honorious III addressed a bull to the bishop of Glasgow and the abbots of Melrose and Kelso in response to a petition from the king, the bishop of Glasgow, and the monks of Paisley for an abbot. The bishop of Glasgow and the abbot of Kelso subsequently met at Jedburgh to discuss the matter. Following this meeting, the connection between Paisley and Much Wenlock was essentially terminated and from 1220 onwards the

Paisley register records an abbot at the monastery. The abbot of Cluny however refused to approve the promotion of Paisley and Honorius was only able to grant it conditionally. Another 28 years would pass before Paisley abbey received full recognition from the abbot of Cluny.

Following the abbatial elevation discussed above, Paisley set about re-establishing its relationship with Cluny and it is here that the agency of the monks is most apparent. The motives behind this will now be considered, as houses with Cluniac origins, such as Reading, were often content to assume Benedictine status and relinquish their Cluniac affiliations. Indeed, Reading by the time of its dissolution was widely considered to be Benedictine. The evidence that the Paisley monks clung to their Cluniac identity is demonstrated in the purported challenge of Paisley by the Cistercian order in the thirteenth century. To briefly summarise the event, Walter, grandson of the founder, was apparently under pressure from the Cistercians to persuade Paisley to enter the Cistercian order. Indeed Paisley's abbot, William, in a letter to Cluny states how he agreed to this in the presence of the King and a Cistercian abbot. Durkan even speculates that the pressure upon Walter at this point to concede may be related to the issues of Paisley's status (discussed above), as freedom from Cluny would enable the Paisley monks to elect an abbot. The Cluniac monks of Paisley were eventually allowed to remain and elect an abbot provided he was Benedictine and took his oath of obedience at Cluny within two years of appointment. 'Two marks' were also to be paid to the 'procurator of Cluny in England', who in return would protect Paisley's status. It appears that dependence upon Cluny was seen more as a safeguard against interference than a hindrance, and this episode, with the monks acting against their patron's wishes, demonstrates not only the agency of the monks but their attachment to Cluny. Paisley maintained its Cluniac status from this point and was tenth in precedence at the general chapters introduced at the end of the twelfth century. Their failure to attend a general chapter for seven years was in fact investigated and is used by McWilliams as proof that Paisley was still an active member of the order and being described as 'Cluny' as late as 1546.

For Reading, the issue of monastic identity never reached the dramatic climax it did at Paisley and the monastery was never directly subject to the abbey of Cluny. The argument here is that the founder of Reading directly influenced the degree of Cluniac identity and connection at Reading, whereas at Paisley it was the monks who decreed the level of association. Alan Coates argues that Henry wanted 'the best of two worlds' when he founded the monastery, and the delay of two years between its foundation and appointment of an abbot is used by Coates to suggest that the situation was either the result of the King's developing ideas concerning his

foundation, or stubbornness on the part of Cluny. However, the abbatial appointment in 1123 allowed Reading independence and rendered it an anomaly in England as it had been ‘colonised by Cluniac monks’, and followed Cluniac rule, yet was not ‘officially’ linked with Cluny. Equally, Reading remained associated with Cluny as evidenced by charters from Abbot Peter of Cluny to Abbot Hugh (1123-30) and Abbot Anscher (1130-5) of Reading which conferred ‘confraternity’ upon the abbey. The condition of the conferral was that the names of each other’s dead were written with the names of their own dead at both houses to ensure their remembrance in prayers. Further evidence survives in a charter granted by Malcolm IV of Scotland to the ‘monks of May who belong to Reading’, and William I, his successor, described the priory of May as ‘serving God and upholding the Cluniac Order there’. Papal bulls also support Reading’s Cluniac identity. Kemp states that all papal bulls from the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries refer to Reading as a Cluniac house, despite the fact this status was no longer really applicable by the mid-thirteenth century.

Comparative studies such as this enable us to gain a better perception of medieval patronage in the development of monastic houses, and of how these related to the initial foundations, endowments given, and the agency of those living within. This study has shown that the status and choices of a monastery’s founder influenced its future greatly, with later benefactors equally affecting a monastery’s fortunes. Locality also had a profound impact upon both monasteries (more so than was originally thought at the outset of this study) and it has been shown that the agency of the monks cannot be underestimated. The combination of these factors affected the overall development of Reading and Paisley significantly, and through understanding the influence of these factors, developments in a monastery’s history can be better understood. Indeed, the act of comparison itself reveals aspects of the monasteries, such as the relative strength and importance of endowments and the agency of the monks themselves. Medieval monasteries occupied a unique role in the medieval world and society, and through comparative studies such as this the factors which affected and influenced them can not only be better understood, but also improve our understanding of these institutions as a whole.

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Windsor and the oldest profession, 1300-1850

David Lewis

'[Windsor suffers from] the gross indecencies of … prostitutes and disorderly persons … [it was] swarming with prostitutes and beggars'. Such a description of the mid-nineteenth century royal town, one might think, was an exaggeration or mistake.[1] Knowing Windsor today it would seem barely credible that such a genteel and well-to-do place could ever have been described accurately in these terms. But no, the arrival in Windsor in c.1795 of two garrisons of soldiers, numbering over 1,500 men and the disorderly band of female friends who accompanied them, known as 'camp followers', again brought to attention a profession which had been a notable feature of the town since the late thirteenth century, and possibly before. This oldest of professions was indeed Windsor's oldest profession, since no other trade is so consistently evident in the town's historic records. Indeed, illicit sexual conduct was so organised before the fifteenth century that an entire Windsor street was specifically named and dedicated to the trade, when the town in total had no more than ten named streets. Even to modern minds some aspects of this medieval profession were truly shocking, including the direct involvement of the church. In this light, the problems of prostitution in the mid-nineteenth century might, by comparison, seem very tame.

It is an often forgotten fact that early nineteenth century Windsor was a very down-at-heel place. It was a small town with insanitary living conditions which had hardly changed since the early sixteenth century. The improvements brought by the 'enlightenment', 'industrial revolution', and the movement for agricultural advancement which had led to a huge growth in the national population had passed it by: there was no mains drainage, the small number of houses which had a piped water supply were fed with heavily polluted river water, and as with medieval towns, outbreaks of deadly disease regularly swept numerous inhabitants into an early grave. The many influential visitors coming to Windsor in the eighteenth century regularly commented on the castle's 'romantic' location, but also noted the deplorable living conditions in the town. Despite the vast sums spent on the castle's renovation from 1824, under the Prince Regent (later George IV), improvements to the town were very slow in coming. Windsor's medieval constitution effectively entrenched vested interests and it was only the arrival of the railways in 1849 and the money of their shareholders which prompted any real change. Windsor was reordered at this time to become the town we know today. Houses and shops on one side of the High Street were removed in 1851, again revealing the castle's lower ward walls, to open this once dark and narrow highway and allow access to the town's two railway stations – one for each of the London and South Western Railway and Great Western Railway. At the time, the positioning of these stations was a matter of a considerable debate, lasting almost twenty years, but finally the Great Western Railway's station, it was decided, should be sited on (difficult to reach) George Street, entailing the construction of a huge (and expensive) viaduct to cross from the main line at Slough. This was a street, however, which had a notorious reputation and which the town authorities were particularly anxious to see removed. Not only was it the site of the town gaol from 1804, but with its cluster of cheap hostels, inns and beer shops it was a place well known for immorality.[2] An iron gate next to the gaol at the far end of the street provided easy access to Goswell Hill, a dark passageway behind the shops on Peascod Street which was regularly used by 'fallen women'. Cases recorded in the town's Hall Books (a type of Corporation minute book) note the disturbance and inconvenience associated with this alleyway and its use for immoral purposes.[3] The other end of George Street, however, opened against the castle's lower ward walls making it a potentially valuable commercial site, central to the town. The construction of a railway station on this site thus provided an opportunity to implement two improvements at once: the up-grading of the town centre by removing George Street's knot of disreputable inns, and the improvement of the castle, locating a railway station adjacent to its main gates. Significantly for a town seriously short of ready money, all this was to be funded by the Great Western Railway.

If a consideration behind this 'railway' scheme was the final banishing of prostitution from the town centre, then it was ill-conceived. By the mid-nineteenth century the trade had become a significant part of the local economy, a regular part-time occupation for some poor women, and an intermittent source of income for others, as household finances demanded. Many of the women engaged in the trade, according to the census, noted their formal occupation broadly as textile workers, although their additional profession comes to light from court cases and other records. Estimating the number of women who worked in this way is necessarily imprecise, but certainly 143 can be identified in the 1840s and the total number may have been three times this figure.[4] The comments in the *Windsor and Eton Express* noted above clearly had some truth behind them. Evidently the trade was not as 'invisible' as the formal records of the town would have you suppose. Of course, with the construction of the central railway station the

illicit activities of George Street did not fade away, but rather they were relocated to other parts of the town, principally the slum dwellings on the Goswells and Clewer Lane, where they remained well into the twentieth century.

Although it might be reasonable to suppose that the George Street clientèle were mostly soldiers from the town's barracks, these were not the only people seeking immoral contacts in Windsor, nor was this the only place where prostitutes plied their trade.[5] Both male prostitutes (soldiers from the barracks) and female prostitutes operated on the Long Walk. The activities of these people became such a problem that by the mid-nineteenth century a police officer had to be posted at the entrance to the Long Walk on Brook Street to deter 'undesirables'.[6] Before 1824 this grand avenue was not connected to the castle as it is today, but was rather a ceremonial entrance to the Great Park planted with huge elm trees which provided ample dark and secluded retreats for those seeking privacy. It was the Long Walk's relative seclusion which first led to its use for immorality, and this continued well after its improvement and connection to the castle. The offering of sexual services by soldiers from the nearby barracks was a risky business as (technically) homosexuality was a capital offence until 1861. But for both the authorities and those involved this extreme punishment provided good reason to avoid use of the legislation, as the army feared adverse publicity and the soldiers the punishment. For this reason, the offence of male prostitution was usually concealed within an indictment for a lesser crime. Court cases normally coded as 'theft of property' or some similar matter, followed by the soldier's immediate dismissal reveal that some routinely supplemented their meagre wages with immoral earnings.[7] The Long Walk was not the only setting for immorality in greater Windsor. Eton Street (now High Street, Eton) had since the mid-fifteenth century been the location of several brothels. The manorial rolls note the regular prosecution of inn-keepers for this offence, although the fines imposed were more akin to licensing fees rather than any serious attempt to stamp out the trade.[8] The customers at these places were at first construction workers employed at the college, but over time they also proved convenient for the clergy, teaching staff engaged at the College and the older scholars alike.

In the Middle Ages people did not refer to specific immoral acts such as prostitution; this is a modern way of thinking. Rather social stigma was set against the more general category of 'women of evil life', or as they termed it, bawds (intermediaries) and whores: people who may have been, at one end of the scale, a disliked neighbour, or at the other, a common prostitute.[9] Immorality was considered in more general terms, and covered all classes and professions. Cases involving these offences appear frequently in

manorial court rolls but unfortunately these have not survived in Windsor. While the offering of immoral services was prohibited by legislation in some towns, it is highly questionable whether window-dressing ordinances of this type had any real effect other than to provide the town with a veneer of respectability. More usually, the authorities preferred to confine illicit activities to known areas, recognising that they could be better controlled in this way. Most people grudgingly accepted that the trade was part of everyday life. It is notable that successive London ordinances proscribed whores within the City, yet accepted the existence of immoral stews and bathing houses in Southwark, conveniently located outside the city gates.

Windsor was in many respects a poor town in the early nineteenth century, but, as it received many anonymous visitors, it is hardly surprising that prostitution flourished. The services offered on George Street, which from the early eighteenth century was also a coaching stop, must have been well known to all those arriving in the town.[10] This street had been created from the site of a medieval inn, 'The George' (hence the street's name) to create additional commercial premises in the town centre. From the late fifteenth century, however, this inn had formed part of an aligned row of seven or eight inns facing the castle either side of Peascod Street, including The Garter Inn referred to by Shakespeare in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*. This rather unusual and monotonous townscape served not only those attending the monarch in the castle, but also from c.1483 a vast influx of pilgrims visiting St George's chapel, with its collection of saintly tombs and holy relics, centring on the shrine of Henry VI. For approximately seventy years Windsor became a national centre of pilgrimage, drawing people from every part of the country and the near continent. Visitors and tourists formed customers for the town's inns, and also for its well established and nearby 'red light' district. This centred on a street, since built over, but which once formed the connection between the parish church cemetery and castle hill, known by the graphic name of Gropecount Lane (more usually, Gropecuntelane). The same street name, associated with immorality, is known from many other (but much larger) English towns, such as Norwich, London, Oxford and Reading. In Windsor the street seems to have come into existence in the late thirteenth century, or possibly before, as it is specifically mentioned in the town property deeds from 1315.[11] Medieval tourists and pilgrims visiting the town must have recognized the name and have been aware of the services it offered. Given that Windsor was a small town the existence of such a place demonstrates the contemporary demand for illicit services and, it must be assumed, the part immoral services played in establishing Windsor's tourist credentials. Sex tourism is evidently not as new as might be supposed. Groupecount Lane disappears from the historic

records in the early fifteenth century but the name remained in the vernacular vocabulary of Windsor, as an alternative to the street's later name, Priest Street (now St Alban's Street), well into the eighteenth century. The site is now occupied by the Royal Mews, which were built from c.1845.

The connection of priests to Groupecount Lane is no mere coincidence. The lane – probably no more than an alley way at the time – was the location of at least two houses occupied by priests serving within the castle. A dwelling on this street called 'Burnhams' had been granted to St George's College in 1361 by Robert Burnham, one of the first canons of Windsor, specifically to provide accommodation for priests, since no provision existed at this time within the castle walls.[12] Many of the priests working in the castle chapels were obliged to live in the town, with the streets behind the parish church becoming their preferred location. Close by, the local parish priest lived in a house adjoining Groupecount Lane and in the same vicinity – although the extant records do not specifically note where – further dwellings existed for at least two parish chantry priests serving in the guild chapel, and a parish curate. Given the number of (supposedly) celibate men in holy orders working in both the town and castle and the location of their houses, it must be reasonable to suppose that some were involved either with the activities on Groupecount Lane or were themselves clients. The teaching of the church at this time particularly vilified lust as one of the worst sins, exemplified by Eve, yet at the same time the existence of Groupecount Lane was evidently accepted, or even, possibly, promoted.

The medieval connection between the clergy and prostitution, although outrageous to modern minds, is graphically described in an unusual case noted in the 1395 City of London plea and memoranda rolls, concerning a transgender prostitute called John Rykener.[13] Rykener wore women's clothing, liked to be called Eleanor and worked in the Thames Valley between Oxford and London. From the transcription of his questioning in court, he seems to have had clients living in the Windsor area, and particularly favoured men in holy orders – specifically naming priests, curates and friars from London and Oxford – because 'they wished to give him more [money]'.[14] His arrest in London was not solely for vice, nor for dressing as a woman, but because he had taken a gown from one of his clients (Philip, rector of Theydon Garton [Essex]) and was intending to use it to bring a false prosecution. Rykener was evidently intending to exploit the rector's embarrassment to retain or sell-on stolen goods – echoing similar nineteenth-century cases of homosexual prostitution disguised as 'theft' – how little had changed! As Rykener's client priests were known to him by name, it would seem they were 'regulars' and this sheds light on what must have been a concealed but not infrequent connection between the 'celibate'

priesthood and prostitutes, albeit in this case a transgender prostitute. This same connection is evident in the spatial layout of medieval Windsor, with its conjunction of a dark alleyway (Gropecount Lane), priests' houses and the ready supply of anonymous clients; pilgrims, tourists and locals. The trade must have been particularly viable in Windsor, not least for those priests wishing to retain their anonymity, relying on the confidences of other priests living nearby. Unfortunately, documentary evidence concerning these matters, such as the court cases which are available for London, are lacking in Windsor, since the town's medieval records were almost entirely destroyed in the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, it is perhaps significant that in 1527 James Denton, at his own expense, built accommodation for college priests within the castle walls, to extract them from the town. The motivation for this gift, built adjacent to the chapel and known as 'Denton's Commons', is not explicitly stated but was evidently intended to shield the clergy from too much worldly involvement, and possibly their participation in activities which were increasingly considered immoral.[15] Groupecount Lane seems to have been renamed Priest Street in the mid-fifteenth century, underlining its continuing use by the clergy, but as it formed a 'T' junction with Priest Street proper, this arrangement seems confusing. Significantly, Gropecount Lane is illustrated on the first map of Windsor drawn by Norden in 1607, as if to indicate its notoriety, whereas other features of the town which we might consider important, such as its Guildhall and market cross, were omitted. Groupecount Lane, aka Priest Street, was built over in the late seventeenth century with mansion houses but, as it was a subsidiary road, its disappearance went unrecorded.

The history of prostitution in Windsor is a long one, although unsurprisingly one which is universally omitted from the town history books. Reflecting, however, on the town's long established tourist and visitor trade and its two nineteenth-century army barracks, it must be supposed that a substantial 'immoral sector' existed within its economy. Moreover, the evidence would suggest that this had been the case for a considerable time. Unfortunately, the available records allow little detail to be added to the bare information coming from the medieval period, but by the nineteenth century this sector becomes more visible, with names, addresses and the occupations of those involved. What is most surprising is that many parts of the town were from time to time actively involved in the trade; it was not confined to just one street. On the surface Windsor was a town respectfully dedicated to the castle; its economy, however, held a long-standing darker truth, and one that dare not speak its name.

References

1 *Windsor and Eton Express*, 25 April 1842; 13 February 1836.
2 Inns on this street had names such as 'The Spread Eagle', 'Rose and Crown', 'Blue Anchor' and 'Prince George'.
3 See, for example, R. South, ed., *5th Hall Book of Windsor*, pp. 51, 76, 82.
4 B. Mitchell, 'Problems of a Garrison Town, Windsor 1815-55', unpublished PhD thesis, Reading University, 2001, p. 103.
5 Ibid, p. 110.
6 Ibid, p. 104.
7 Ibid, p. 117.
8 R. Karras, 'The Regulation of Brothels in Later Medieval England', *Signs*, Winter 1989, p. 403.
9 R. Karras, *Common Women* (1996), p. 15.
10 London Metropolitan Archives, MSS MI 11936/34.
11 Saint George's College Archive, XV.44.52.
12 A. Roberts, *St George's Chapel Windsor Castle 1348-1416* (1947) pp. 30-2.
13 D. Boyd and R. Karras, 'Ut cum muliere: a male transvestite prostitute in fourteenth century London', in L. Fradenburg and C. Freccero, eds, *Premodern Sexualities* (1996) pp. 99-116.
14 The 'Windsor' clients mentioned in this case include Sir Thomas Foxley – possibly from the Foxley family of Bray, and John Matthew, a landowner in Windsor. The price quoted by Rykener was between 1s. and 2s., approximately the equivalent of five days' wages for working man.
15 D. Lewis, 'St George's Chapel and the Medieval Town of Windsor', in N. Saul and T. Tatton Brown, eds. *St George's Chapel Windsor, History and Heritage* (2010) pp. 60-1.

Corn for Sale! The markets and corn exchanges in Reading and Wokingham

Pat Smart

During the mid-nineteenth century the output of cereals increased, and with it the trade of the corn markets. Markets competing for trade upgraded their facilities, most often with the building of corn exchanges. Two neighbours, Reading and Wokingham, differing in size, had different experiences in establishing markets for corn.

Reading corn market

Reading's was one of the principal corn markets in Berkshire.[1] Mavor reported that the wheat sold at the Saturday market 'is peculiarly excellent and the flour is much esteemed ... The business done was considerable.' The average quantity of wheat sold weekly was not less than 100 loads 'and other grain in proportion'. Mavor wrote that 'the market begins at nine o'clock and is finished in about an hour and a half, when the farmers return [homeward] with their money and sacks'.[2]

The market was a pitched market, that is the full sacks of corn were carried into the Market Place for inspection by prospective buyers. Corn porters were employed to move the sacks of corn in and out of the market. Reading Corporation, owner of the market rights, kept the pitching of the Market Place in repair and charged a toll of one pint out of each sack of corn sold.[3] In the Reading Corporation Markets Act 1853 the toll was described as one quart upon every quarter of corn bought or brought for sale. The toll was unpopular: it had led to 'difficulty and disputes, and tends to prejudice and injure the trade' of the borough of Reading.[4]

The corn trade of the mid-nineteenth century was conducted by measure not weight. The standard measure for recording trade was the quarter of eight bushels. The trade at Reading for 1831 was 34,017 quarters 2 bushels of wheat and 46 bushels of barley. In 1851 it had increased to 41,281 quarters 6 bushels of wheat and 14,257 quarters of barley.[5] Tolls were charged by the sack of 4 bushels. The load, to which Mavor referred, was 5 quarters. When weighed a quarter of wheat was different from a quarter of barley. Weights could vary from season to season, depending, for example, on the amount of moisture in the grain. Such variation caused William

Mavor to remark in a footnote that 'measure is fallacious and weight is the most certain criterion of value'. However, it was not until the late nineteenth century that trade was conducted by weight.

Growth of trade and competition between towns led to the construction of corn exchanges from the 1830s onwards. They offered covered accommodation, and they usually resulted in pitched markets being replaced by sample markets, at which the farmer showed the dealers a pocket bag with a small sample of his crop.

Besides being more practical and comfortable, a corn exchange was prestigious for a town. At Reading it was seen as more in keeping with promoting the place as a successful country town with a flourishing trade. The Reading Corn Exchange opened for public use on Saturday 23 June 1855.

Whereas in many other towns a corn exchange was funded privately, in Reading it was promoted by Reading Corporation.[6] It was an expensive project requiring a Parliamentary Act to empower the Corporation to carry out this scheme. Also an architectural competition was set in motion for the design of the building. According to a letter published in the local newspaper, this was before a site had been finally selected, two slightly different sites being under consideration.[7] It was reported in *The Builder* that at the Parliamentary Committee stage a financial limit was placed on the cost of implementing the architect's design, and as the two winning designs were too expensive, it was proposed that the architects should amalgamate to fulfil the brief.[8] Was the extra expense involved in the winning designs not only for the proposed construction but also to do with the cost of buying certain properties?

In 1852 'symptoms of rupture and discontent again appeared' and the corporation thought that the time had arrived to take a decisive step towards a corn exchange building. A sub-committee, after consulting with others with experience, had decided on a scale of charges which, while to a certain extent compensating for the initial heavy outlay, would meet with the views of 'all frequenters to this market. The buyers have already redeemed their pledge of support, and they could look forward with confidence to the same support from the sellers.' If any modification were to be needed, it would be considered, but he again alluded to the advantage that 'sacks will from this time be exempt from the toll dipper'. 'The building will protect the trade and the corn from the pitiless storms and business will no longer be put a stop to by it.'[9]

By late September 1854, the erection of the corn exchange by the contractors was 'progressing rapidly' and the foundation stone, which included the names of the two architects, was laid with some ceremony. The

'men employed in the works were regaled with beer'.[10] The building was situated between the Market Place and the Corporation's covered market.[11] The Parliamentary Act authorised the purchase of various plots of land and gives details of their owners and lessees. There is a narrow archway entrance in a free Renaissance style from the Market Place which includes the words CORN EXCHANGE and MARKET WAY.[12] One might have expected a grander entrance from the Market Place.

The interior of Reading corn exchange in use for the town's annual hop fair. From the Illustrated London News*, 1859.*

Reading Corn Exchange opening day

A local newspaper remarked that there had been 'many harsh and perhaps just remarks made as to the delay', but now that it was opening day for the new building, with its 'crystal roof', all would be forgiven and forgotten.[13] Upwards of two hundred sat down to a cold dinner. The iron columns were festooned with laurels with coloured pennants on their tops. The band of the Royal Berks Militia played popular airs and the only drawback was that, owing to the 'great reverberation in the building', it was very difficult to hear the speakers.

A clergyman in his speech assumed that the corn exchange and its arrangements would put an end 'to all disputings and bickerings and everything that might be painful and unpleasant between the different orders'.

The chairman in his thanks emphasized the need for a firmer union between the town and the country. There were very heavy expenses involved in the erection of the exchange and that had meant that its use could not be free, much as they would have liked it to be. If the coffers of the Corporation had allowed them to make no charge they would have been delighted to have done so. However, they had got rid of some of the 'ancient usages of transacting business out of doors; and also the demand of paying a toll in kind, which he considered had been much resented, was now abolished', the Corporation having yielded their right to the toll. The fact that the exchange was a public enterprise and not a private one was to be praised.

Mr White, on behalf of 'the buyers of corn', pointed out that even as long ago as 1847, he with his friend Mr G. Shackel had presented a memorial from two hundred frequenters of the market to the then Corporation of the borough. He regretted that he had heard some complaints as to the regulations now imposed, but, with some trifling alterations, they would be satisfactory. Mr W. Hicks suggested that the market should be closed at one o'clock instead of two o'clock, which seemed to meet with general approval.

Mr G. Shackel, representing the farmers, said that it was a great pleasure that the tolls had been abolished. They had not only been a nuisance, but had frequently caused unpleasant feelings to arise between buyers and sellers.

On being called upon to speak, Alderman Brown said that although he had commenced the project, Mr W. Exall had completed it.[14] Mr Brown said that he himself had not only gained no profit, but had actually made personal sacrifices. As to the history of the market, the system of tolls from time to time had been the cause of much bad feeling, which about thirty years ago had caused an expensive law suit that ended without a decisive judgement being given, leaving the answer to the question in an uncertain state. Both parties had had enough of the expense, delay and ill-feeling caused by the litigation. From that point the Corporation felt that its rights rested 'on ticklish grounds'. The services of a toll collector were called upon to act between the parties in a disinterested manner, and with 'his judgement, tact, and courtesy' he conducted the matter in a manner that few could have done. Sadly, Mr Samuel Slaughter had died 'within the last few hours', on the very day that his task of using a scoop measure was abolished. (The description of the manner of his death is similar to that from a severe stroke.) He must have been of some age and standing, as he was referred to as the oldest registered elector on the borough's parliament roll and was thought to have voted at the 1802 election, a 'constant supporter of what is now called the liberal side of politics'. Although 'extremely plain and unpretending in his manner and address', he had a wide knowledge and was very intelligent. He and his family had lived in the Market Place for 'a great number of years'.[15]

The last few of the many toasts were to the Architects (Messrs Hawkes and Clacy), the Ladies, and The Press. The function finished shortly after seven o'clock.

Wokingham's reaction

On Tuesday 26 June 1855 (the Reading Corn Exchange having been opened on the previous Saturday), a public meeting was held at Wokingham to consider establishing in the town a weekly corn market, at the request of 'upwards of eighty inhabitants' of that town and adjacent parishes. There was a large attendance and the more important attendees were listed by name in the newspaper's lengthy report.[16] The details given of the discussion that took place are of general interest because they include opinions as to what was necessary for the establishment of a successful market for corn. Also it reveals that there had previously been an attempt 'in former years' which had not been 'altogether successful'.

As early as 1809 Mavor had been of the opinion that 'the fairs belonging to this town are most unaccountably neglected or at least not attended as they ought to be … possessing as it does a fine, spacious market-place'. 'Oakingham' used the same legal Winchester bushel. Oakingham was the earlier name for Wokingham. (It was chiefly in the more isolated Vale of the White Horse that nine gallons were allowed to the bushel, which he deplored.) Wokingham was a sample market, at that time best known for its 'fatted fowls'.[17]

However, Mr Gibson of Sandhurst Lodge pointed out that 'they were living under different circumstances to what they were formerly'. It was evident that he took an optimistic view of the arrival of railway services to the town. 'They had now got railways, either completed or in progress, leading in all directions, which must be of great service to the town especially in relation to a market.'[18]

The requirements for success were that it was supported by 'the land owners, millers and farmers' (presumably the order of social precedence for these persons). It was thought that farmers could be expected to send their corn there, rather than to other more distant markets, which would involve them in more time and expense.

The first resolution was 'That this meeting considers it highly important for the convenience of growers of corn in the neighbourhood of Wokingham that a corn market be established in the town.' This was greeted with applause.

The second resolution was 'That the present and prospective means of

railway communication between Wokingham and the Metropolis, justify the hope that in the event of a corn market being established corn merchants would attend.' This was seen as more of a matter for the farmers. If there was a good supply of corn there would be sure to be a demand. It was unanimously carried.

The third resolution was 'That this meeting pledges itself therefore to make the most strenuous efforts to establish a Corn Market upon principles that shall consider it worthy of public support.' Mr Hayward of Wokingham, who had been asked to be its proposer, stated that 'if the farmers would do as they said, and bring in a good supply of corn he had no doubt that they should set up a tolerably good market. What little barley he required he should be happy to buy at Wokingham market, if it was fit for malting.' A seconder from Waterloo Farm 'believed it was well known that the land in the neighbourhood was more adapted to the growing of corn than the breeding of stock, and at present they had a long distance to go to reach any market.'

The next resolution was that the corn market should be on a Tuesday, which was already a market day, but starting at two o'clock. It was suggested that as 'Maidenhead, Basingstoke, Newbury and other places of not much more importance than Wokingham, had their markets so why should not Wokingham?' If the farmers carried out their promises the present project should succeed. It was not expected to rival Reading.

Next came the more contentious matter of moving a resolution as to ways and means: 'effort' and 'sacrifice' might be required. At times there would probably be a few flat markets, as Reading and other places had experienced in the past. It was moved that a subscription be immediately set on foot to defray the expense of fitting up the Market Place for the purpose. This was seconded but then an amendment was proposed. A speaker said that at Reading he was charged four pence to go into the exchange and there was a further charge if he were to sell his corn, which he did not do because of the charges.[19] His attitude was, 'don't beautify until we have got the trade ... otherwise charges would drive business away in a similar fashion'.

However, no great improvement seemed to be planned or any considerable cost, only some stools and 'rather better shelter from the weather'. Mr F. R. Parsons of Winnersh asked whether the Corporation would be good enough to allow the farmers and millers the use of the Town Hall till the market was thoroughly established. The Chairman of the meeting, Alderman Heelas, gave a flat refusal. However, another member of the meeting pointed out that the Shire Hall at Abingdon was open to the public and there was a market underneath.[20] He thought that perhaps Wokingham could have the sale of corn in the hall and reserve the market

below for poultry, butter, etc.[21]

After a little confusion, a large number voted against the amendment and the crucial resolution was carried, and then a committee was appointed.

The question of using the Town Hall was raised again, particularly in winter time, when otherwise they would be exposed to all weathers. Another wanted an assurance that the millers would support the market as buyers, as the farmers would have a good deal of risk in taking corn there. Mr Glasspool of Riseley Mill said that if the farmers brought a good supply, he was sure that there would be plenty of buyers. Someone else proposed a cattle market with the corn market, but that was felt to be attempting too much at one time and the motion was withdrawn.

Mr Weeks, auctioneer, was requested to act as an honorary secretary and a subscription was immediately commenced for a fund to make arrangements for the market.

A corn market in Wokingham was held on Tuesday 10 July 1855, in the area of the Town Hall, commencing at one o'clock (instead of two o'clock as agreed at the public meeting), and it was intended to continue as a pitched market on every successive Tuesday at the same time until further notice. The sale of corn was to be toll-free. The committee respectfully solicited the attendance and co-operation of gentlemen connected with the growth and sale of corn; and assured them that no effort should be wanting to promote their interest and convenience. A public dinner was held in the Town Hall on the day of the opening of the market at three o'clock. Tickets were 2s 6d each, obtainable from Mr Wigg of the Roebuck Inn.[22]

At Reading in the late nineteenth century

In January 1889 a scheme for a new Corn Exchange and General Market was submitted to the Council by the Improvement Committee without the usual endorsement or recommendation. The argument seemed to centre on cost. Opinions varied uncompromisingly upon whether a larger general market was needed.

In February 1889 a letter to the editor of the *Berkshire Chronicle* suggested that the wall separating the corn market and the covered general market should be taken down in order to enlarge the Corn Exchange and abolish the general market. This does not seem to have been acted upon, nor was the later suggestion of making an archway in the wall to facilitate turning the whole into a general market.

By this time agricultural depression had reduced the volume of trade. In 1895 the corn return amounted to 13,425 quarters 5 bushels of wheat and 13,813 quarters 7 bushels of barley.[23]

Reading's new corn exchange

The New Corn Exchange at Reading was erected in the 1930s on land next to the Cattle Market and near to the Great Western Railway. This is an exceptionally late date to build a new corn exchange, for the motor lorry and telephone were by this time enabling more deals to be struck outside the market. In 1937 the sale of corn, cattle and flour was carried on upon an extensive scale.

The new exchange was designed by Reading architects Charles Smith & Son. Their final drawings for the proposed building show contrasting styles. Parts were in the Art Deco style, while the main frontage (also shown in a photograph in the *Reading Review*), was more classical and sedate. It was described in the article as 'an imposing open portico of Clipsham natural stone columns with stone entablature and pediment over'. A detailed description of the building explains that windows could not be put in the external walls because of adjoining properties. The concrete cantilever beams with an overhang of eight feet supported by concrete columns was the architects' solution to this problem, resulting in a large lofty hall in keeping with a modern design. Consulting engineers for the special concrete work were called in from London to assist the Reading architects.

The 'unusual design of the roof, among other advantages, allows for the

Classical entrance to the new Reading corn exchange.

provision of a large amount of lighting from vertical windows, a necessary condition for a hall to be used by persons making examinations of grain'. The article states that the architect had to produce a building in as economical a manner as possible, and use 'such architectural embellishments and decoration as an important municipal building should have'. One might speculate that this may have led to a compromise between the architects' ambitions and the clients' wishes. Perhaps an Art Deco frontage to the Caversham Road would have been too daring for the councillors to approve.[24] A photograph shows a number of trading desks set ready in the hall: probably part of the expenses of 'fitting up' mentioned in the Reading Town Council business in March 1936. The necessary furniture and kitchen apparatus cost £1,250.[25]

In July 1936 Alderman Smart suggested making an archway in the wall of the old corn exchange and the covered market to make more room for a general market.[26] That wall never seems to have been altered.

An exchange was an expensive building only partly funded by the fees paid by its users, and since it was open as the corn market on one day a week, Saturday, it could be let on other days. When the 1850s Exchange was opened there was an application to have its use on all the other weekdays, but the committee was not happy to agree to that. Instead a notice was published inviting applications for renting the advertising space on its internal walls, the passages, and the east wall of the general market.[27]

For a period in the 1870s the Corn Exchange was hired for short periods as a skating rink. This was presumably for roller skating, a pastime brought over from America, which became very fashionable in England. The Estates Committee discovered that this could lead to some broken tiles.

When the New Corn Exchange was opened, Mr R. Bamford of Hitchin was granted its use for twelve weeks (Mondays to Fridays inclusive) during winter months for the purpose of roller skating for £25 per week.[28]

In July 1936 the Finance Committee was considering a plan for the next ten years. The war clouds were already gathering, but who would have expected a five-year Second World War with all its upheaval and commandeering of buildings to happen a few years later?[29]

Post-war changes

The old corn exchange suffered bomb damage in the 1943 air raid, affecting the roof mainly. In 1946 an application to use it as a weekly repertory theatre was not granted.

After being requisitioned by the War Department, the new corn exchange was released and reparation made for civilian use. There was difficulty in obtaining suitable furniture because of the timber shortage. By

September 1946 Mr Bamford, the previous tenant, was offered the exclusive use of the building, with exception of the weekly corn market. The annual rent was £1000, plus the costs of heating and lighting, and wages of the attendant.[30]

Both corn exchange buildings had mixed fortunes in later years. Only the Market Way entrance to the old exchange survives. Although described unkindly by Pevsner in 1966, it still adds character to the Market Place.[31]

Acknowledgements

Jonathan Brown and David Cliffe suggested my researching this topic following on from the article discussing the Covered Market and they also gave helpful advice. Sidney Gold's *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Reading* (1999) was, as usual, a reliable starting point. Thanks are due to Reading University Library and the Berkshire Record Office. Particular appreciation is appropriate for the resources of the Reading Local Studies Collection and its ever helpful Reading Libraries staff. As always, James Smart's encouragement and support was invaluable.

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1 W. M. Childs, *The Town of Reading during the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century* (1910) p. 24.
2 William Mavor, *General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire* (first published 1809) pp. 464-5. Saturday was the day originally appointed for the weekly market by the Charter of Elizabeth I. There was a market on Wednesday chiefly for butcher's meat and fruit in summer. Most of the work for the report was done in 1808.
3 Mavor, p. 464.
4 The Reading Corporation Markets Act 1853, 16 & 17 Victoria c. xxxix, in C. F. Pritchard, *Reading Charters, Acts and Orders, 1253-1911* (1913). 'The toll traverse of one quart upon every quarter of corn sold or brought for sale within the borough shall cease.' The *Chambers Dictionary* states that a quart may be as much as will fill a two-pint measure, a quarter may equal 25 lb or 8 bushels.
5 *Reading Mercury*, weekly market reports 1831, 1851.
6 Berkshire Record Office (BRO), R/AC1/2/3 Reading Borough Minutes December 1850-August 1857.
7 A published letter to the Editor of the *Berkshire Chronicle* by George Rayment, Victoria Ward, dated 31 January 1889.
8 Mr Hawkes and Mr J. B. Clacy. Sidney M. Gold, *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Reading* (1999).
9 An effect of the opening of the GWR was that goods were left unloaded on the railway and sold by sample, which was to become more convenient and probably more practical within an exchange building.
10 *The Builder*, 30 September 1854.
11 It would appear from the 1:500 scale Ordnance Survey of 1875, that the Corn

Exchange building measured about 104 feet, north-south, and 45 feet east-west. OS Map 1:500 XXXVII.3.8 (published in 1879). Reading Local Studies Library Map Cabinet.
12 The archway entrance is itself about 6½ feet in width, then the width of the passageway from the entrance varies along its length.
13 *Berkshire Chronicle*, 23 June 1855 p. 6.
14 Mr W. Exall was the Mayor and chairman at the opening ceremony.
15 *Berkshire Chronicle*, 23 June 1855 p. 5 column 1. The 1851 census estimates his age as 70; he is a widower living with his daughter and a servant, his occupation is given as corn dealer, and he was born in Arborfield.
16 *Reading Mercury*, 30 June 1855.
17 Mavor, *General View*.
18 However in the future Wokingham would not have the same advantages for rail freight transport as Reading.
19 The Reading Corporation Act permitted charging admission to the Corn Exchange to be paid by every person not renting an office or box therein. The price of a yearly ticket was not to exceed 30 shillings and a day ticket must not exceed sixpence.
20 N. Pevsner, *Berkshire. The Buildings of England* (1966) p. 56.
21 The older Town Hall, before its rebuilding, was in the traditional style. In 1855 the Corporation opened a subscription list towards the building of a New Town Hall.
22 *Berkshire Chronicle*, 7 July 1855 p. 1, column 2.
23 *London Gazette* 1895, agricultural statistics.
24 The entrance to the Cattle Market was designed in the modern style.
25 Architectural drawings by Charles Smith and Son are displayed in Reading Libraries Local Studies at the central library at Reading. The *Reading Review* is also shelved there.
26 *Reading Standard*, 10 July 1936.
27 *Berkshire Chronicle*, 9 June 1855. This would have been in the covered market arcade on the east wall, which at that period did not have shops against it.
28 *Reading Review*, January 1937, information from an advertisement under 'What's On To-day' (the entertainments page). In this advertisement 'daily' means Monday to Friday!
29 *Reading Standard*, 10 July 1936. 'Planning for the Future', editorial and an article.
30 BRO R/AC1/3/92. County Borough of Reading Mayoralty Year 1945-6. Council Summonses and Minutes of Proceedings of Council and Committees, vol. 1.
31 N. Pevsner, *Berkshire. The Buildings of England* (1966) p. 204.

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A Sense of Place in Bucklebury: mapping the collections of the Museum of English Rural Life

Felicity McWilliams

The Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) was founded in 1951 by the University of Reading. Collecting started in earnest, with calls for donations published in relevant magazines and newsletters. Staff attended agricultural shows and fairs with a large banner that can still be seen on display in the Museum, raising awareness and making acquisitions. By the time the Museum was first opened to the public in 1955, well over seven thousand objects had been acquired for the collections. Active collecting is still underway; recent projects, such as 'Collecting 20th century rural cultures', have focused on acquiring objects relating to a particular theme. The collections now comprise somewhere in the region of twenty-six thousand objects, not counting the extensive archive and library collections.

As one would expect for a museum of English rural life, the collections contain objects from all over the country (with a small number of outliers from Wales, Scotland and mainland Europe). Some regions are better represented than others though, and, as the Museum is in Reading, there are a significant number of objects from Berkshire and the South East. This is probably largely due to the practicalities of transporting objects long distances, a greater local awareness of the Museum and a desire in donors to give objects to a nearby museum. Many objects are given as 'one-offs', but others arrive at the Museum as part of a larger set, and are often catalogued and defined in the documentation as part of a smaller 'collection' within the main Museum collection. The west Berkshire village of Bucklebury, for a relatively small place, is extraordinarily well represented, with over four hundred objects. One of the main reasons for this is that it was the source location for three collections: the George Lailey Collection, the Harry Wells Collection, and the Hedges Foundry Collection.

The Museum has good information about where objects were made, used, and acquired, and this information is often very interesting and relevant to both general visitors and people with more specific enquiries. Much of the information sits in the paper accession files in office filing cabinets, and has not been very accessible or easily searchable, either to the public or to museum staff. In July 2011 the Museum was given funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund for A Sense of Place, a project to address some of these issues. The project aimed to enhance the quality of data provided on the online database in order to provide a platform for deeper engagement with the collections and for the development of interpretative tools using new technologies. One major output of the project is the use of the online mapping resource Historypin, which allows users to 'pin' images and information to particular locations on an interactive map. Using Historypin has enabled us to make information about the collections accessible in a new and more intuitive way; rather than entering search terms into a sometimes clunky online database, users can now search for objects by zooming in on a particular location of interest on a map. One of the best features of this type of resource is its ability to highlight collections such as those from Bucklebury, and we chose the village as the location for a more in-depth trial of this approach. This enabled us to make information and images about the Bucklebury collections more visible and accessible than was previously possible, and gave us the opportunity to work in partnership with the Bucklebury History Group to explore ways in which the Museum can collaborate with local organisations.

This article will highlight some of the Bucklebury collections and the stories behind the objects, and explore the development of A Sense of Place and the resources created as part of the project.

Bowl-turning at Bucklebury

Bucklebury Common has a long history of woodland crafts, and the most famous of its craftsmen is George Lailey, the last in the long line of Lailey bowl-turners. George Lailey (1869–1958), the eldest of eleven children, started working when he was nine years old with his father, William Lailey. They made wooden bowls using a traditional pole-lathe at the hut that George's grandfather had built circa 1826 in the hamlet of Turner's Green, on Bucklebury Common. The hut was constructed in a dug pit which was probably the cause of the special fine of 3s 6d levied in 1826 by the Lord of the Manor; the Laileys had Common rights, but they technically had no right to erect buildings, let alone one so obviously intended to be permanent. When Lailey moved to a new house in Miles Green in the early twentieth century he lost his Common rights altogether. Dixon pointed out, this 'technically made him a trespasser at Turner's Green', but 'with the break-up of the estate in 1921, no one seems to have bothered very much'.[1] The hut itself was not acquired by the Museum, but the entire contents were, including the lathe, tools and single hurricane lamp Lailey used for lighting, and much of this is currently on display to visitors at MERL.

George Lailey usually worked with elm, a tough wood which does not

crack easily and was readily available on Bucklebury Common. The qualities of elm also enabled him to make 'nested bowls' – multiple bowls out of a single block of wood. Each new bowl was cut from the otherwise wasted 'core' of the previous bowl. Turners could make a wide variety of objects, but Lailey produced objects which were decorative as well as functional. He is most famous for his bowls, but also made other objects such as platters and candlesticks. A number of his creations are in the collections of the Museum, including bowls with Lailey's own handwritten pencil notes on the base, often recording the date they were made and his signature.

It is easy to imagine that, situated in a wooden hut on an isolated patch of a rural west Berkshire Common, the Lailey business might have struggled, but trade seems to have been plentiful right up until the business ended with George Lailey's death in 1958. Many bowls seem to have been sold to passing trade; in the bucolic *In Search of England*, written in 1929, the author visits the workshop on the advice of another passer-by he encountered on his return from purchasing a bowl.[2] Large orders also came from prestigious department stores such as Harrods, particularly as the Arts and Crafts design movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century began

George Lailey at work. From a postcard published in the 1930s, MERL D63/21/4.

to place a high value on the hand-made and on traditional rural crafts.

George Lailey was able to produce bowls to order and turn down those orders which he was unable to fulfil. His father had employed agricultural labourers to prepare the raw material into hemispheres ready to be turned, but after his father's death in 1912, George carried on largely alone, with only

the occasional help of his mother and an elderly local man. Another factor which dramatically changed the business was the outbreak of the First World War. Dixon suggests three probable effects: the disappearance of casual labour, the shortage of metal available for domestic use causing a renewed market for wooden bowls, and the large orders Lailey received for wooden ladles for use in munitions factories: 'Almost overnight, 100 years of change in the bowl maker's market, from an entirely practical product to a largely recherché craft article was reversed. ... Until well after the end of the war in 1918, Lailey was in arrears with his deliveries.'[3]

For a craftsman working largely alone, Lailey was able to produce a large number of bowls; it has been estimated that in his usual working week of six days, he could make twenty sets of four bowls, irrespective of the fact that the conditions in his hut must have been far from ideal. It had no power or method of heating, even in winter, and only daylight and one hurricane lamp for lighting. The image this conjures goes some way to explaining the somewhat arcadian ways in which the Laileys have been described. The following passages from Morton's 1929 *In Search of England* are good examples, and are worth quoting at length:

'I came to a tumble-down hut on a green knoll. Enormous elm logs stood piled outside the door; inside, a man was sharpening a long knife on a whetstone. He glanced up and admitted that his name was William Lailey [sic]. He looked to me like a shy, middle-aged faun. His cheeks were red, and his healthy country face was shaded by a floppy green hat. He asked me in, and went on sharpening his knife, his back towards me, an attitude which delighted me because it was, from him, so sincere; his knife meant more to him than I did, and he was – I looked at his hands – a craftsman.'[4]

And later:

'I only wished to hear for a second time the voice of the craftsman, the lover of his job, the proud creator of beautiful, common things; a voice that is now smothered by the scream of machines. I went on down the green hill feeling that my search of England had started well.'[5]

Lailey's lathe and tools were donated to the Museum by his niece in 1959, along with a small number of the products he made. Since then, other bowls, platters and candlesticks have been donated by individuals from all over the country. One donor remembers being taken as a child to see George Lailey at work, and bought a small bowl as a souvenir. Another was given a bowl as a wedding present in the 1940s. Such stories start to bring out the idea of the 'biography' of a museum object, and the multiple places with which it may be associated. Bucklebury therefore was an obvious choice as a community with whom to trial the work of A Sense of Place.

Other Bucklebury collections

As well as the large collection of material from George Lailey, there are two other significant sets of objects from Bucklebury parish: the Harry Wells Collection and the Hedges Foundry Collection. Harry Wells was a handle-maker at the Bucklebury hamlet of Byles Green for forty years until his retirement circa 1950. He first started working for John Brown, later Collins and Witts, in Thatcham, but soon set up his own business which, by the mid-1930s, was prosperous enough for him to be able to employ two men and a boy. A collection of over one hundred of his tools and products was donated to the Museum in 1960 by a local schoolteacher who then lived at 'Heatherdene', the location of his workshop in Byles Green.

Wells made handles for a wide variety of tools and implements, including scythes, rakes, mops, forks and mattocks. His list of clients shows that his business was not catering solely for local demand around the Bucklebury area; he completed orders for large brush-making firms in London and Newbury, made fork handles for racing stables, and supplied the Admiralty with handles for tar mops. The collection contains the tools one would expect to find in a handle-maker's workshop, including drawknives, rake tine gauges, saws, mallets and chisels, and other items used by Wells, such as aprons, breast bibs, willow bands used to secure bunches of completed handles, and the small iron ferrules used to connect tools to handles.

Typeset letters and numbers used as patterns at Hedges Foundry, Bucklebury. MERL 2006/47/11.

The Hedges Foundry Collection was acquired by the Museum much more recently, in 2006. It consists largely of twenty-six wooden patterns which were used at the foundry to make a variety of metal objects, from water pump parts to grave markers and typesets of numbers and letters. If you visit the cemetery and the churchyard of St. Mary's Church in Bucklebury you will still be able to see the distinctive metal grave markers made using such patterns. The foundry, which was closed in 1969, was situated next to the River Pang in the centre of Bucklebury village.

In addition to the larger collections there are a few objects that were donated individually, including a thick paint slab taken from the wall of the foundry, built up in layers from years of workers cleaning paintbrushes on the same patch of wall. The largest object collected from Bucklebury also came from the foundry: a wagon built by the wheelwright Fred Read who worked there from 1921 to 1946. Information given to the Museum in 1976 by a later employer of Mr Read gives a glimpse of this Bucklebury craftsman: 'The years passed, and Mr. Read, having reached the age of sixty-five, decided to retire, but soon a leisurely life became irksome and he returned to work; not as a wheelwright, as the work was too heavy for him, but as a painter and decorator. When he finally retired at seventy years of age a new van or lorry had only to arrive at Mr. Millson's yard for Mr. Read to be seen walking down the lane with his signwriting case in his hand. The "village grapevine" had conveyed the news to him that his skill was needed before any formal message could be sent.'[6]

A Sense of Place in Bucklebury

The rich collections from Bucklebury, and the level of contextual information we have about them, made this west Berkshire village an ideal place to trial the work of the A Sense of Place project. As we soon discovered, it is also an interesting place in terms of the complexity of its geography.

The parish boundary of Bucklebury, some 26 miles long, extends until, but does not include, Stanford Dingley in the east, Cold Ash in the west, and Frilsham in the north. The southern boundary incorporates the village of Upper Bucklebury. The Common is about three or four miles long, the Upper Common in the west and the Lower Common in the east being separated in the centre by Upper Bucklebury. Upper Bucklebury is a distinct settlement from Bucklebury Village, where the parish church and Hedges' Foundry are located. The village of Chapel Row sits inside the eastern edge of the Common, and is the location of The Bladebone Inn and other shops and businesses. In addition to these main settlements, there are numerous small hamlets throughout the parish, including The Slade, Hopgoods Green, Miles' Green, Byles Green, Workhouse Green and Turner's Green.

The first main task of the project was to enhance the database records for all of the objects that were made, used, or acquired in Bucklebury. We also catalogued objects which were associated with Bucklebury. The associated place category is more subjective, and is used for places related to the object, but not as directly connected as places where it was made, used or acquired. An example of this is the linking of MERL object 2006/68, a model of a stave cupola furnace, to Hedges' Foundry, Bucklebury, where the furnace it is modelled on was used. The donor of the model had played a key part in moving the original furnace to the Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron in the 1970s. To each object record on the database was added a short description, notes relating to deeper contextual history, and any relevant places. For most of the other objects in the collection, places where they were made used and acquired were recorded to a general level of detail – usually a town, village or, occasionally, a farm. For Bucklebury objects it was possible to specify more precise locations because of the detail in the information recorded with the collections.

The purpose of cataloguing by place was to enable object records to be 'pinned' to a specific location on the website Historypin. In this way, it is hoped that information abut the Museum's collections will be far more accessible to the public; rather than entering specific search terms into an online database, users will be able to locate objects by the places they are associated with, using an interactive online map. Given that we intended to upload over four hundred objects relating to Bucklebury to the website, simply pinning them all to 'Bucklebury' would result in a long list of records that is no more searchable than it would have been on the online database. In addition, this would have required choosing where in the parish of Bucklebury to pin the objects to; if the latitude and longitude of the geographical centre of the parish was chosen, this would not accurately represent the contextual history of the objects. We know that Lailey's bowls were made in Turner's Green and that the wooden patterns were used at the Foundry in Bucklebury Village, not in a field close to the banks of the River Pang.

In order for Bucklebury objects to remain searchable on the online database, however, the places had to be situated within a hierarchy – if a user is interested in objects from Bucklebury, they need to be able to search for everything linked to smaller places within Bucklebury. In a similar way, a user interested in objects from across west Berkshire will want the results of their search to include an object linked, for example, to Chapel Row. The level of detail we have been able to add for objects from Bucklebury is unfortunately not practicable for the rest of the collection; understanding 'place' in Bucklebury took a significant amount of time and a research visit.

Trialling the approach with this subset of objects, however, gives an indication of its potential for other similar collections where it is possible to invest extra time and resources.

By visiting the Historypin website, it is now possible to see MERL's Bucklebury collections pinned to relevant places. Some objects, such as Lailey's lathe and tools, are pinned multiple times to reflect the fact that they were made and used in the same location. The Museum also has a dedicated 'channel' on the website, enabling users to filter out other content and only view objects and photographs uploaded by MERL. Resources such as this also have potential for use by local history organisations that have collections from, and specialist knowledge of, a particular locality. MERL has been collaborating with the Bucklebury History Group, which now has its own channel to which the group can upload their own photographic collections.

Such resources also have great potential for people who have photographs or objects that are of interest to and complement museum collections, but which they don't want to 'part with' by making a donation. Historypin is a free, open-access resource, so anybody can upload their own content or add 'stories' to other users' content. This may lead to a 'feedback loop', whereby the Museum uploads objects or photographs and other users add contextual information they have about them, potentially enriching the Museum's own object database. The ability to compile 'pins' into online 'tours' and 'collections' also gives users the ability to tell a story about a particular place using both their own 'pins' and those added by other people. This makes museum collections not only more accessible but a more interactive and engaging resource for the public.

Bucklebury history online

Visit the parish of Bucklebury today and there are many signs of its history of craftsmanship and production, from the iron grave markers in the churchyard and cemetery to the plaque marking the spot on Turner's Green where George Lailey's hut once stood. Even the name, Turner's Green, shows the importance of the objects in the Museum's collection to the story of Bucklebury. The lathe and tools of George Lailey have been a feature of the Museum's permanent displays since they were acquired in 1959 and despite the close proximity of the Museum to Bucklebury, the A Sense of Place project aimed to use new digital and web-based technologies to bring the objects even closer to the places they were made and used. This will hopefully give people more access to information about collections from their communities and provide greater opportunity to interact with those collections and shape the knowledge that the Museum stores about them.

The Lailey, Wells and Hedges Foundry Collections, as well as the other objects acquired individually, show that Bucklebury has a rich history of local craft and industry, but also that this was not an isolated rural community with purely local businesses. Lailey and Wells both completed orders for large firms and even the government and military, and Lailey's products turned up a long way from Bucklebury: one donor recalled that she had seen some of his bowls in South Africa.[7] The history of woodland industry in Bucklebury is not just the story of Lailey and Wells, however. As the information accompanying the Lailey Collection notes, 'George Lailey was the last of a long line of Bucklebury turners, but at one time the unenclosed common with its dells and dips, was a great centre of woodland crafts'.[8] The objects in MERL's collections have a strong connection to place, and the collections from Bucklebury highlight this. The resources that have been created through the A Sense of Place project have also experimented with the ways in which such collections can be made more accessible and interactive for the communities from which the objects originated, and have shown how such tools have the potential to be useful for other interested organisations.

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5 Ibid.
6 MERL 62/29 accession record.
7 MERL 78/5 accession record.
8 MERL Lailey Collection Bowl Turning General Card 1.

For more information, see:
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> *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford: archaeological and historical perspectives* by Stuart Brookes.

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