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THE VICTORIAN COUNTRY HOUSES OF BERKSHIRE 1830 –1880 [1]

Geoffrey Tyack

Berkshire is not one of the counties which immediately springs to mind in discussions of the English country house. Its greatest house, Windsor Castle, is not a country house at all but a royal palace, and even today only a handful of its 'stately homes' - notably Basildon Park and Buscot Park - are regularly open to the public. The rest, when they survive, have either remained private or have been turned over to institutional uses. But, at least until the First World War, country houses and their estates were crucial to the social and economic life of what was still a largely rural county. Moreover, the architectural importance of country houses and the ambitions of their owners were never greater than in the Victorian heyday of the landed classes.

The 'New Domesday' survey of 1873 (see Appendix) showed that Berkshire had a pattern of land ownership common to most of south-east England, with less than the national average taken up by 'great estates' of more than 10,000 acres and a correspondingly larger amount by moderately sized or small estates.[2] Few of the great aristocratic families had their territorial base in Berkshire. The Nevilles, latterly Lords Braybrooke, had owned the Billingbear estate since the sixteenth century, and the Earl of Craven, the second largest landowner in the county in 1873, was descended from a seventeenth century soldier and courtier.[3] But neither family had its main seat in the county,[4] and in 1873 there were only two noblemen, the Earl of Abingdon, of Wytham Abbey near Oxford, and Lord Barrington of Beckett Park, Shrivenham, who lived there regularly.

Berkshire landed society was dominated by the gentry rather than the nobility, and from the eighteenth century onwards *nouveaux riches* stepped little by little into the shoes of the old-established families.[5] A striking Victorian example of this process is the Lockinge estate - the largest in the county - which comprised over 20,000 acres of land on the Downs and in the Vale of the White Horse, and which owed its existence to the banker Lewis Loyd and his son Samuel, Lord Overstone, who settled it on his son-in-law Lt. Col. Loyd-Lindsay on his marriage in 1858. Lord Wantage, as Loyd-Lindsay eventually became, was well known in late-Victorian Berkshire as an enlightened and improving landlord. But for any of the nineteenth century Berkshire gentry a country house and estate was, first and foremost, a passport to social acceptability. Such men included John Walter, the owner of *The Times*, whose gargantuan house at Bear Wood near Wokingham (1864-8) is one of the phenomena of its age, and the haberdasher Charles Morrison, 'the Napoleon of

shopkeepers', whose riches derived from funeral crape and silk, and whose landed possessions included 67,000 acres in Argyllshire and an estate in Wiltshire as well as his 6987 acres centred on the eighteenth century Basildon Park.[6] Such men were living proofs of the permeability of English society to new wealth.

Berkshire not only had a larger than average number of estates of between 1000 and 10,000 acres; it also had many smaller estates of between about 200 and 1000 acres, and many with even less land than this.[7] In some parts of England such holdings would normally belong to yeoman farmers, but in Berkshire many belonged to wealthier people - courtiers, military officers, merchants, bankers, lawyers, politicians - for whom land was an amenity rather than an economic necessity. Their houses should usually be classed as villas rather than fully-fledged country seats, though they were classified as 'seats' by Lysons.[8] Villas were especially common in certain parts of the county: the former wastes of Windsor Forest in the east, where the Crown held 59,000 acres of unenclosed land until 1813; the Thames Valley; and the land on either side of the Bath Road.[9] These areas were popular both because of their accessibility from London and for their visual charm. Artists and poets taught the nineteenth century to appreciate the picturesque virtues of woods, heaths and riverside scenery in preference to the more homely qualities of the workaday agricultural landscape, and here Berkshire scored over other superficially more favoured counties.

By 1830 Berkshire's country houses and villas had undergone a widespread and comprehensive process of rebuilding lasting some eighty or so years. Several of the older houses, like Welford Park, Coleshill, Wytham Abbey, Bisham Abbey and Shaw House, and most of the larger eighteenth century houses, like Pusey House and Hall Place, remained substantially unaltered after 1830, usually because they did not change hands and their owners lacked the resources to 'improve' them.

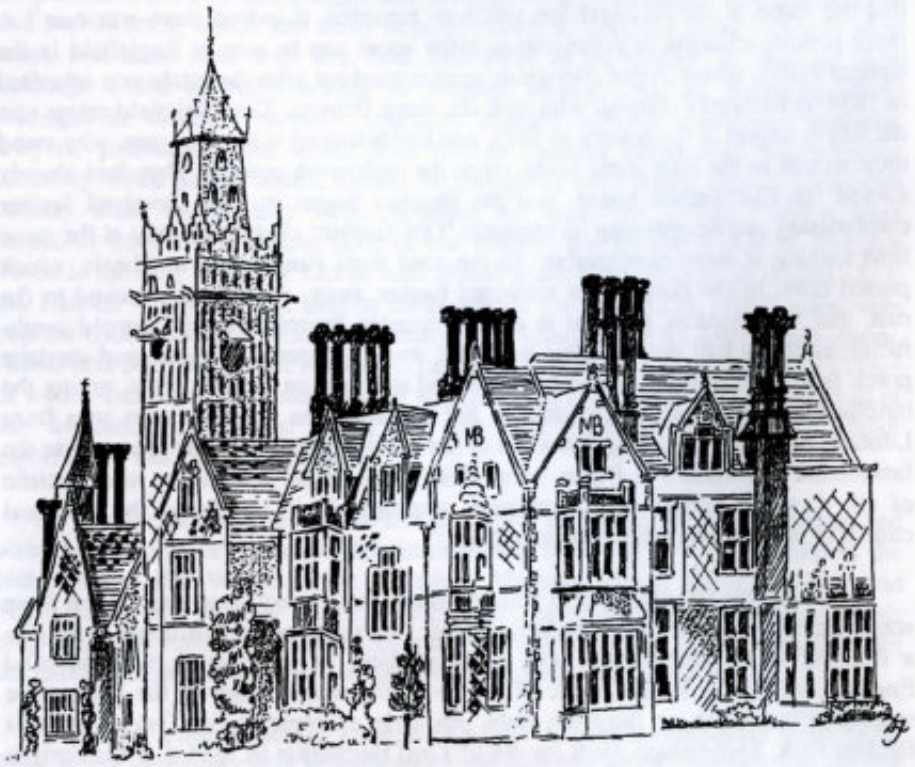
Even when a house changed ownership it often remained structurally unchanged. Thus James Morrison chose to leave intact the structure of the compact and elegant Basildon Park (1776), though he employed John Buonarotti Papworth to decorate the unfinished drawing room in a lavish style in 1839-44 and to line the walls with the pick of his superb art collection, which contained works by Rembrandt, Rubens and Poussin (he called the house 'a casket to enclose pictorial gems').[10]

It was more common to enlarge and otherwise modify an old house than to demolish it and rebuild *de novo*.[11] This happened at Lockinge, which in its late nineteenth century heyday displayed the full panoply of Victorian landownership, with extensive grounds, farms, villages, churches and schools clustering in a quasi-

feudal manner around the house.[12] Lord Wantage's architectural ambitions were concentrated more on his farms and estate villages than on Lockinge House, a plain brick building (since demolished) of 1730. The house was extended in 1860 in order to provide more space for guests and for Lord Wantage's superb art collection, but the work was done in a subdued and unpretentious style: so unpretentious indeed that the name of the architect has not been recorded, if indeed there was one.[13] A more striking example of enlarging an older house can be seen at Englefield in the Kennet valley, where major alterations were carried out after the estate was inherited in 1854 by Richard Fellowes, who took the name Benyon. The Englefield estate was the fourth largest in the county in 1873, and had belonged to the Benyons, who owed their wealth to the East India trade, since the eighteenth century. They had already altered the Elizabethan house, and the changes begun in 1856 involved further emphasising and heightening its romantic 'Old English' character, while at the same time making it more comfortable. So the road from Pangbourne to Theale, which passed close to the house, was realigned further away, the entrance moved to the east, and new gardens laid out in the fashionable formal manner. The old south-facing entrance hall now became a library, and an impressive tower and carriage porch was constructed over the new hall and staircase on the east front, giving the building a bold and romantic skyline; the architect was a little-known man from London, Richard Armstrong, but some of the interior decoration was entrusted to the fashionable decorator J G Crace. Meanwhile Gilbert Scott, one of the most prolific of all Victorian ecclesiastical architects, was brought in to rebuild the medieval church close to the house and estate village.[14]

The complete rebuilding of a country house usually occurred only when there was a change of ownership, a sudden increase in wealth, or a catastrophic event like a fire. As at Englefield, the most favoured form of architecture was the 'Old English': either the Tudor-Gothic of the early sixteenth century or the later, more eclectic, Elizabethan or Jacobean style. An early example of the Tudor-Gothic is Beckett Park, Shrivenham, built for the 6th Lord Barrington in 1831-4 to the designs of his brother-in-law the Hon. Thomas Liddell out of a bequest from Shute Barrington, Bishop of Durham (d.1826).[15] Tudor-Gothic was also employed at about the same time at Titness Park, Sunninghill, in the fashionable district near Ascot racecourses, and somewhat later at Aldermaston Court. Here the seventeenth century house built by the Forster family was severely damaged by fire in 1843 and soon afterwards the property was sold to pay off the debts of the last owner, William Congreve. The new owner, Daniel Higford Burr, M P for Hereford, eschewed the restrained manner of the older house and employed P C Hardwick to build a new house on a new site in 1848-50, incorporating the intricately carved wooden staircase from the older building which had been illustrated by Joseph Nash in his

Mansions of England.[17] It is built of red brick, with a 'diaper' or criss cross patterning of blue bricks across the surface and the initials of Burr's art-loving wife Mary prominently displayed in the gables. With its prominent tower and spire, it proclaims the romantic sensibility and love of visual sensation shared by many Victorian country-house builders and architects.



Aldermaston Court

A romantic yearning for 'Old England' explains the choice of style at Lambourn Place, built for Henry Hippisley in 1843 to the designs of Thomas Leverton Donaldson, Professor of Architecture at University College, London.[18] Here the most distinctive feature was the array of shaped gables of the Flemish type which were widely imitated in Elizabethan and Jacobean England; together with the tower over the entrance porch and the tall chimneys they helped give the house a dramatic,

picturesque skyline which presented a marked contrast to what most contemporaries saw as the blandness of Regency architecture.

The neo-Jacobean style was also employed *c.*1860 at Easthampstead Park, near Bracknell, the English *pied-à-terre* of the 4th Marquess of Downshire, whose prodigious wealth derived from vast estates in Ulster (his main seat was Hillsborough Castle, Co. Down). At Easthampstead Park, unlike Lambourn Place, the main facade is symmetrical and the effect slightly austere, with decoration confined to the shaped gables over the central bay and the two slightly projecting wings.

These houses are put into the shade by Bear Wood, the second largest house in Berkshire after Windsor Castle.[19] The estate was carved out of an outlying Crown property, formerly part of the Bishop of Salisbury's estates, by John Walter's father in 1816. He had employed James Sanderson, a pupil of James Wyatt, to erect a stuccoed villa of relatively modest size and conventional appearance overlooking a lake within the newly created grounds, which soon became well-known for their exotic and coniferous trees.[20] This attractive building was not grand enough for the second John Walter who, ostensibly needing more space for his family, brought in Robert Kerr, author of *The Gentleman's House* (1864), to design a new and much larger house in a grandiose, almost megalomaniac, version of the neo-Jacobean manner.[21] Great pains were taken to demarcate clearly the different activities of the members of the household - the owner, his family and guests, the servants - resulting in a proliferation of passages and staircases which must have been bewildering even when there was an army of servants to make the mechanism run smoothly.[22] The main reception rooms are grouped around a top-lit picture gallery, with a wing leading off to one side from which the service courtyard projects forward. The divisions of the house are clearly expressed externally, especially on the entrance front, which is dominated by a spectacular staircase tower, but on the very long garden front the accumulation of gables, turrets and chimneys reduces the elevation to aesthetic incoherence. No country house of the period better proclaims the somewhat brash self-confidence of the Victorian businessman-turned-landowner on the eve of the agricultural depression. And, with a total cost of £120,000, none was to be built again in Berkshire on a remotely comparable scale.

Some of the largest Victorian country houses were built on relatively small estates of less than 1000 acres, notably in the Windsor area where there had already been extensive villa building in the previous generation. They include New Lodge, Winkfield, built in 1858 by Silvian Van de Weyer, the Belgian ambassador to the Court of St James, on the site of Hounds Lodge in the former Windsor Forest. The

estate totalled 861 acres in 1873, and brought in an annual income of £1700: a mere fraction of the income of the larger landowners in the county. But the Tudor-Gothic house, designed by A W N Pugin's pupil Talbot Bury, is on the grand scale, reflecting the wealth of the owner, a friend of the Queen and Prince Consort and son-in-law of an American partner in Baring's Bank, who is alleged to have paid £35,000 for its construction, more than twice the original contract price.[23] Not far away, on the banks of the River Thames in the parish of Bray, is Oakley Court, a smaller but still substantial Tudor-Gothic house built on an estate of only 225 acres by Richard Hall Say in 1859; its architect has so far eluded detection. At Silwood Park, Sunninghill, Charles Stewart, head of a Manchester locomotive manufacturing firm, called in Alfred Waterhouse, architect of Manchester Town Hall, to replace the existing late-Georgian house with a massive neo-Tudor pile in 1876-9 costing £37,655.[24]

South Hill Park

Some builders continued to employ the classical style for their houses, either in the so-called Italianate guise popularised by Sir Charles Barry or in the French Renaissance manner found at its most sumptuous in the houses of the Rothschilds in neighbouring Buckinghamshire. South Hill Park, near Bracknell, the former home of the politician William Canning, was greatly enlarged in the Italianate style by its new owner Sir William Hayter, a lawyer and M P for Wells, soon after purchasing the 429-acre estate in 1853; the unknown architect retained part of the existing Regency stuccoed house, but he added a tower - virtually a *sine qua non* in this type

of house in the Victorian era - and a Tuscan colonnade, as well as laying out the grounds with terraces and balustrades in the approved manner.[25] A similar style was employed in many smaller houses and villas of the mid nineteenth century, like Inglewood, near Kintbury, built by Major-General Dunn in 1858, and Leighton Park, to the south of Reading, built in 1856 by J Sievewright and surrounded by a 55-acre park.[26]

The best examples of French Renaissance-inspired country houses in Berkshire were both built at the beginning of the 1870s: Park Place, just outside Henley-on-Thames, and St Leonards Hill, overlooking Windsor Castle and the Great Park. In the second half of the eighteenth century Park Place was one of the most celebrated of all Thames-side houses, with superb gardens laid out by Horace Walpole's friend General Conway. It subsequently passed through several hands before being sold in 1867 to the speculator Charles Easton, who was also responsible for carving up the estate at Whiteknights, near Reading, for villa residences. Park Place, unlike Whiteknights, was allowed to survive, albeit in a mauled state, and a new house, Temple Combe, was built in the grounds. But Easton's plans to divide the rest of the estate into villa plots was never carried out, and the truncated property was sold in 1870 to John Noble, owner of a paint and varnish company.[27] He built a new house in 1871-3 after the existing building had been damaged by fire, employing as his architect Thomas Cundy, architect to the Grosvenor Estate in London. The most striking feature of the remodelled Park Place is the array of steep mansards and pavilion roofs, which are also a prominent feature of contemporary buildings on the Grosvenor Estate in Belgravia. The plan is L-shaped, with the main reception rooms looking west over the river and reached by an impressive ceremonial route from the carriage-porch through an entrance hall and inner hall containing the main staircase. Great attention was also paid to the grounds, whose landscaping was entrusted to the well-known gardener Richard Marnock, and to the provision of glasshouses and improved farm buildings.

St Leonards Hill was in some respects similar to Park Place, though the estate was smaller: 261 acres, compared to the 505 of Park Place. It too was built out of an industrial fortune, made by the millionaire Francis Tress Barry out of copper-mining in Portugal, and it also stood on the site of an earlier house, Gloucester Lodge, rebuilt in the late eighteenth century by Lady Waldegrave, later Duchess of Gloucester, under the direction of the painter Thomas Sandby, Deputy Ranger of Windsor Great Park. Some of the rooms, with their neo-classical decoration, were allowed to survive in the Victorian reconstruction, which was carried out in 1872-5 by the little-known architect C H Howell.[28] But externally the house became far more varied and dramatic than before, with a profusion of bay windows - also a

feature of Park Place - and an extravagant roofline made up of towers with mansard roofs in the Loire Valley fashion; inside Howell managed to contrive a suitably impressive entry route, the most impressive feature of which was an octagonal hall from which staircases mounted to the upper floors.[29] The grounds were liberally planted with conifers, camellias and rhododendrons, and, as at Park Place and some other *nouveau riche* houses in the area,[30] a conscious effort was made by the new owner to behave in the manner expected of a benevolent squire: efforts which were rewarded when he was elected M P for Windsor in 1890, a baronetcy following nine years later. The house was not, however, to the taste of his son, who blew it up in 1923, having chosen to live in the restored late-medieval manor house of Ockwells, not far away; the grounds are now covered with villas.

Country house building on the larger Berkshire estates virtually ceased with the Agricultural Depression of the 1880s. But the building of large houses on smaller estates continued apace, a process which is sometimes difficult to distinguish from the continuing outward spread of the larger towns, as on the Whiteknights estate, where six substantial new houses were built on leasehold estates, each of about twenty or thirty acres, created by Charles Easton after he bought the estate from the millionaire bullion broker Sir Isaac Goldsmid in 1867. Among the occupants was the architect Alfred Waterhouse, who designed his own house, Foxhill, and two of the others.[31] But it is indicative of the social mores of the English upper-middle class both then and subsequently that Waterhouse, who ran an efficient and highly successful practice, should decide only a few years after the building of Foxhill to migrate to the 'real' countryside at Yattendon, a few miles to the west, where he could play the squire and build a new and larger house, Yattendon Court (1880-1), an essay in the 'Old English' manner costing £28,000, with the usual appurtenances of late-Victorian country-house life, extensive gardens and an unencumbered view. The existing Georgian manor house was retained and leased to the poet Robert Bridges, the church restored, a school, reading room and cottages built, and an Arts and Crafts guild, the Yattendon Guild, founded by his wife.[32] Thus the seductive neo-feudal idyll was re-enacted, and it continued to played out into the Edwardian period and even, albeit in a contracted form, down to modern times.

Appendix

Berkshire estates of over 1000 acres, with their estimated annual value (from Return of Owners of Land, *Parliamentary Papers* (1874) IXXii(1).[33] Owners who lived outside the county are in brackets. Estates outside Berkshire are not included in the total acreage and value, and estates in the hands of corporate bodies are excluded.

Owner	Residence	Acreage	Value(£)
Lt-Col Loyd-Lindsay	Lockinge House	20,528	26,492
Lord Craven	Ashdown Park	19,225	21,767
The Crown	Windsor Castle	10,203	22,434
Richard Benyon	Englefield House	10,129	13,303
Philip Wroughton	Woolley Park	8692	9357
Earl of Abingdon	Wytham Abbey	7738	10,261
Charles Morrison	Basildon Park	6987	12,206
(Sir R Burdett	Ramsbury Manor, Wilts	6541	6243)
Charles Eyre	Welford Park	5737	7121
John Waiter	Bear Wood	5678	9178
Lord Downshire	Easthampstead Park	5287	4853
E B Pusey	Pusey House	5022	7082
W H. H Hartley	Bucklebury	4952	5325
Sir George Bowyer	Radley Park	4451	9412
Lord Radnor	Coleshill House	4394	7114
William Mount	Wasing Place	4191	5153
Robert Campbell	Buscot Park	4183	8398
Revd Richard Palmer	Holme Park	3818	6159
(Lord Braybrook	Audley End, Essex[34]	3590	4955)
Lord Barrington	Beckett Park	3477	7193
Sir G A East	Hall Place	3172	5969
Sir William Throckmorton	Buckland House	3008	4539
C J Eyston	East Hendred	2857	3488
D H Burr	Aldermaston Court	2778	3054
E M. Atkins	Kingston Lisle	2625	3177
Thomas Garth	Haines Hill	2581	4082
Charles Duffield	Marcham Park	2521	3037
(Grenfell family	Taplow Court, Bucks	2505	4775)
Sir Charles Russell	Swallowfield Park	2381	3220
Revd Thomas Stevens	Bradfield Rectory	2263	2879
James Blyth	Woolhampton House	2195	4413
John Blagrave	Calcot Park	2041	4385
Thomas Goodlake	Wadley House, Faringdon	2041	3479
John Leveson	Gower Bill Hill	2038	2807

P H Crutchley	Sunninghill Park	2017	3391
(W Honeywood	London	2017	2870)
Henry Hippisley	Lambourn Place	2013	1959
Albert Tull	Crookham House, Thatcham	2001	3222
Mortimer Thoyts	Sulhamstead Park	1837	2348
(R C Vansittart	Paris	1922	3015)[35]
G H Vansittart	Bisham Abbey	1833	3766
C C Ferard	Ascot Place[36]	1671	2148
J S Bowles	Milton Hill House	1647	2194
(C A Dundas	Bristol	1637	2184)
Henry Eyre	Shaw House	1634	2634
John Aldridge	Inholmes	1626	1626
G C Cherry	Denford House, Hungerford	1587	2325
(Lord Ailesbury	Marlborough, Wilts	1566	1485)
John Loader Symonds	Hinton Waldrist	1556	2571
John Bligh Monck	Coley Park, Reading	1540	2144
E Breedon	Bere Court, Pangbourne	1438	2418
John Butler	Kirby House, Inkpen	1397	1351
Revd John Sloper	West Woodhay House	1367	1307
John Aldworth	Frilford	1343	2176
A B Croft	Greenham	1340	1826
(Col W Dickson	Portman Sq, London	1294	1687)
(Hopewell Morrell	Clyro, Radnorshire	1288	1193
B B Green	Midgham House	1286	2363
Miss Wasey	Priors Court, Chieveley	1260	1490
Frederick Wilder	Purley Hall	1165	1518
John Allin	Hendred Down House	1127	1410
Henry Bunbury	Marlston House	1121	1216
Alex Cobham	Shinfield	1107	1806
John Rowles	Letcombe Regis	1078	1244
(W S Burton	Walton, Bucks	1053	1299)
William Vidler	Remenham	1044	2080
Robert Alfrey	Wokefield Park	1033	1543
(Frederick Whitbourne	London	1080	5940)
(Mrs Ann Valpy	Bristol[37]	1027	964)
J H Pocock	Donnington	1007	1244

References and Notes

1 This is an extended version of a paper read at a day-school on Victorian Berkshire held at Bulmershe Court, University of Reading, in December 1998. I have taken Berkshire to mean the historic county as it was before the local government reforms of 1974.

2 Return of Owners of Land, *Parliamentary Papers* (1874) lxxii(I); F M L Thompson, *English Landed Society in the 19th Century* (1963), pp 32, 113-5.

3 J Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1876), pp 55, 137.

4 The Cravens' Berkshire seats, at Hampstead Marshall and Benham Park, had been either sold or demolished by the 1870s, leaving them only with the exquisite seventeenth century hunting lodge at Ashdown; their main residence was at Combe Abbey near Coventry. Lord Braybrooke lived at Audley End, Essex.

5 J Dils, editor, *Historical Atlas of Berkshire* (1999), pp 58-61, 68-9, 86-7, 110-1.

6 J Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveaux Riches* (1999), p 46.

7 Thompson, op. cit. pp 116-8.

8 S Lysons, *Magna Britannia: Berkshire*, pp 182-6.

9 J Dils, op. cit. pp 96-7. Many are mentioned in J. Hakewill, *History of Windsor* (1813) and A.Robertson, *The Great Road from London to Bristol* (1792), and were illustrated in publications like J P Neale, *Views of Seats*, 1st series, iv (1820-1), R Ackermann. *Views of the County Seats of the Royal Family. Nobility and Gentry in England* (1830), and Beard & Co, *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* (*c.*1860), of which there is a copy in Reading Local Studies Library (Acc 3454).

10 National Trust, *Basildon Park* (1979), pp 38-40. The architect of the original house was John Carr of York.

11 Examples, both in the classical style, include Woolhampton Park, where Lewis Vulliamy carried out alterations for the 2nd Earl of Falmouth in 1848 and Sulhamstead Park, remodelled by Thomas Allason for Mortimer Thoytes, M P, in 1852; H M Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects* (1995), pp 73, 1014.

12 M Havinden, *Estate Villages* (1966), pp 31-7; *Complete Peerage* xxii(2), pp 340-2. See also J E Vincent, *Highways and Byways in Berkshire* (1906), pp 223-235.

13 Lord and Lady Wantage acted as their own architects for their new estate cottages at Lockinge.

14 *Country Life* 12 March 1981, pp 642-5; *Englefield House*, guidebook (n.d.).

15 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p 616. The York architect Thomas Atkinson was also involved in the design. Liddell was one of the members of the Parliamentary committee chosen in 1835 to select the design for the new Houses of Parliament.

16 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p 107; *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* i, pl. 39. The builder was Sampson Ricardo and the architect George Basevi.

17 J. Nash, *Mansions of England in the Olden Time*. M. Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (1971), p 174; Country Life, 13 July 1907, pp 54-9.

18 Burke, *Landed Gentry* (1952), p 1238; R. Strong, et al, *The Destruction of the English Country House*, p 188 and pl. 181. The house was demolished in 1938.

19 Girouard, op cit, pp 121-4.

20 The house was built after John Walter senior's death: Colvin, *Dictionary*, p 845. It is illustrated in *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* ii, pl. 46.
21 He had previously consulted William Burn, one of the leading Victorian country-house architects, who had recently in 1855-6 remodelled Taplow Court, on the Buckinghamshire side of the Thames, for Charles Pascoe Grenfell.
22 The plan is discussed in J Franklin, *The Gentleman's Country House and its Plan* (1981), p 146.
23 Girouard, op. cit. p 184; *Builder* 17 (1859), p 322 and 18 (1860), p 291; Franklin, op. cit. p 265. The house is attributed to Messrs Cubitt in *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* i, pl. 28.
24 C Cunningham and P Waterhouse, *Alfred Waterhouse* (1992), p 250; Franklin, op. cit. p 267, where the cost is given as £27,500. The earlier house is illustrated in *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* i, pp 32-3
25 *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* i, p 35. Hayter's son, who was made Lord Heversham by the Liberals in 1906, employed Temple Moore - an architect better known for his Gothic churches - to make further alterations.
26 They are illustrated in *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* ii, pls 63-4, and iii, pl. 19.
27 P Noble, *Park Place* (1905), pp 182-6.
28 Colvin, *Dictionary*, p 844. There is a photograph of the house before rebuilding in *Berkshire Seats and Mansions* ii, pl 67.
29 S and P Rooney, *St Leonard's Hill* (1991), pp 40-65, Girouard, *Victorian Country House*, pp 135, 187; *Country Life* 23 March 1901, pp 368-71.
30 e.g. Cliveden under the Astors: see G Tyack, *Cliveden and the Astor Household* (1982).
31 Whiteknights and Erleigh Park: Cunningham & Waterhouse, op. cit. pp 93, 213, 245.
32 Ibid, pp 102-4, 251. Waterhouse also designed Buckhold House for H Watney in 1884-8 at a cost of £34,600: ibid, p 259.
33 Most of the houses are shown on the map in J Dils, editor, op.cit. p 97.
34 He also owned Billingbear House, Berkshire.
35 This is probably the Shottesbrooke Park estate, owned by the Vansittarts until the late nineteenth century.
36 He gave his residence as Brighton.
37 R H Valpy lived at Enborne Lodge.

THE BEDDINGS OF BUCKLEBURY

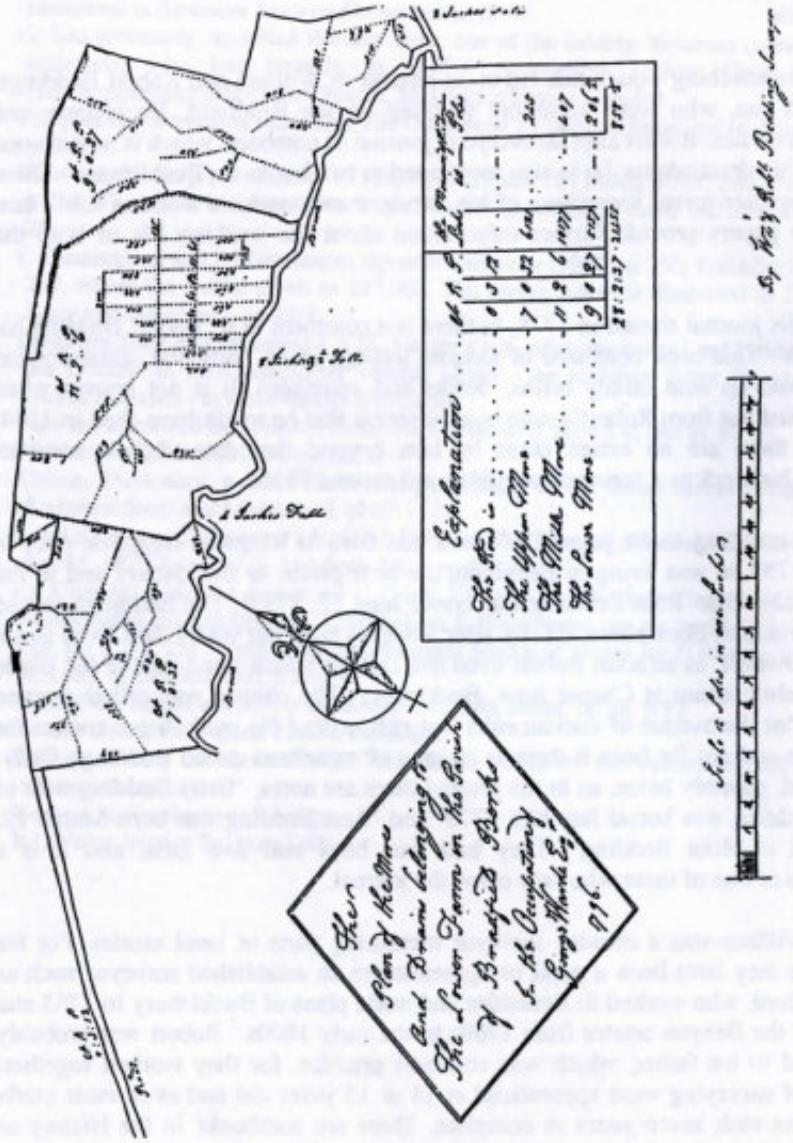
Pat Preece

Researching woodlands led to an interest in William and Robert Beddings, father and son, who were surveyors working on the Bradfield, Bucklebury and Englefield estates. Robert kept an everyday journal or notebook which is now owned by one of his descendants; he is also mentioned in two books on Bucklebury.[1] These sources together reveal something of his family events and his working life. Plans and estate papers provide further information about the working life of both the Beddings.

His journal started in 1778, as there is a comment in it 'Robert Bedding his book 1778'. This book consisted of random jottings in no particular chronological order, mixed up with family births, deaths and marriages. It is not known when William died but from Robert's note book it seems that he might have died in 1804; certainly, there are no extant plans by him beyond that date. Robert however continued his work as a surveyor possibly until around 1815.

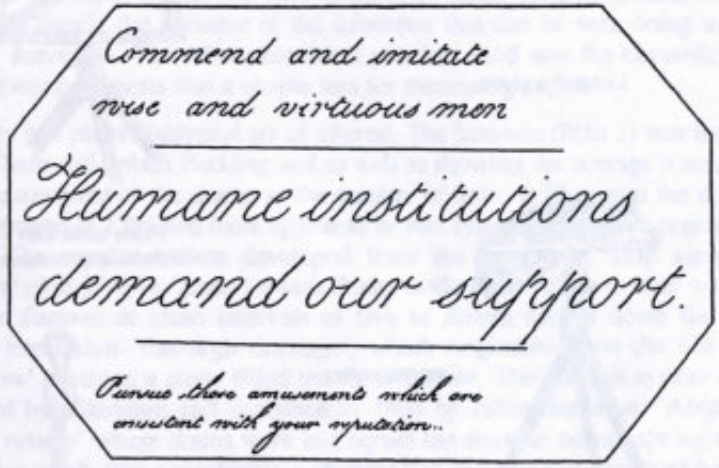
According to the journal William was born at Kingston Bagpuise (sic) in 1726. In 1759 he was living in Beenham, the next parish to Bucklebury and in the journal it says that 'Robt Bedding was bornd June 22, 1759'. The Beddings moved from Beenham to Bucklebury shortly after Robert's birth but where they lived is not known. However, as an adult Robert lived in a cottage which stood next to the Blade Bone, a public house at Chapel Row, Bucklebury. The cottage was called Avenue Cottage after the avenue of ancient oaks that still exists.[2] He paid £6 per annum for his cottage and not far from it there is an area of woodland called Beddings Gully. He married, possibly twice, as in the journal there are notes, 'Betty Bedding wife of Robert Bedding was bornd Jan 30th 1770' and 'Ann Bedding was born March 22, 1798 wife of Robt Bedding'. They had four boys and five girls, and it is a descendant of one of them who now owns the journal.

William was a country surveyor measuring parts of local estates. For his training he may have been a pupil or apprentice to an established surveyor such as Josiah Ballard, who worked in Berkshire and made plans of Bucklebury in 1763 and of parts of the Benyon estates from 1760s to the early 1800s.[3] Robert was probably apprenticed to his father, which was common practice, for they worked together. Students of surveying were apprenticed at 14 or 15 years old and as in most crafts their studies took seven years to complete. There are notebooks in the History of Science Museum in Oxford showing the exercises and mapping performed by their apprentices. In the Berkshire Record Office is a collection of plans belonging to the Englefield estate.[4] These plans are both finished and unfinished drawings, several



Plan 1

are on tracing paper and annotated in pencil. They carry the names of both the Beddings and this demonstrates that they worked together. The plans show various pieces of woodland, fields and rough plans of Englefield village. The latter are very delicately executed in ink and pencil with the houses indicated in the modern manner; looking at these one thinks that William was a better draughtsman than his son. Included amongst the plans is what appears to be a writing exercise and one would like to think that this was an example of Robert learning his trade, but it is more likely to have been a sample of writing from which the estate owner could choose.



One observation which can be made from the Beddings' plans is the improvement in spelling when Robert was working with his father. In 1766 William surveyed a coppice in Bucklebury:

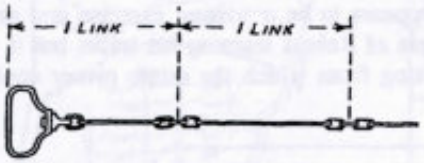
> 'Survaid for W. Winchern (Winchcombe) Henry Hartley esq[ur]
> The uper end of the furder guley in Carbins Wood
> In stattute measuer 2a 2r 21p
> In customary measuer 2a 0r 33p
> By me W. Bedding of Buckelbuty'.[5]

Contrast this entry with:

> '1789 Atleys Shaws by William Bedding Land Surveyor Buclebury
> In Statute measure 4a lr 23p
> In customary measure 3a 2r 3p'

A more sophisticated approach!

How would small country surveyors such as the Beddings have done their mensuration? The Museum of Science in Oxford were very helpful in describing the instruments which may have been used by the Beddings. They would not have used a theodolite, as that instrument, although available, would have been too expensive.



Links of a chain

Plane table with alidade and compass

Circumferentor

Waywiser

George Adams said in 1797 that the cost of instruments to the average land surveyor would be over £125 and it is unlikely that small country surveyors such as the Beddings could afford as much as that.[6] For linear measurement it is likely that they would have used a Gunters Chain which was 66 feet long, consisting of 100 links each 7.92 inches long. This explains why on one of the plans the length is given in

chains. They could also have used a plane table which was from 15 inches square to 18 x 24 inches. This was fitted with a centre pivot to allow the table top to revolve and tilt if necessary. The edges were marked with measurements and there was often a compass fixed to the front.[7] The alidade, a straight piece of wood with sights at its ends, could have been attached to the plane table for more accurate sighting. By looking through the back sight and aligning the fore sight on a distant object, the straight edge of the alidade gave the exact direction between the surveyor and the object. The surveyor's sheet of paper could be fixed to the top of the table and the initial drawing was done in situ. Another instrument in use at the time was what was then called a waywiser, which was used to measure roads, streams or sides of fields etc. This was clearly the ancestor of the odometer that can be seen being used by present-day surveyors. The other instrument possibly used was the circumferentor, which as its name suggests was a simple tool for measuring angles.

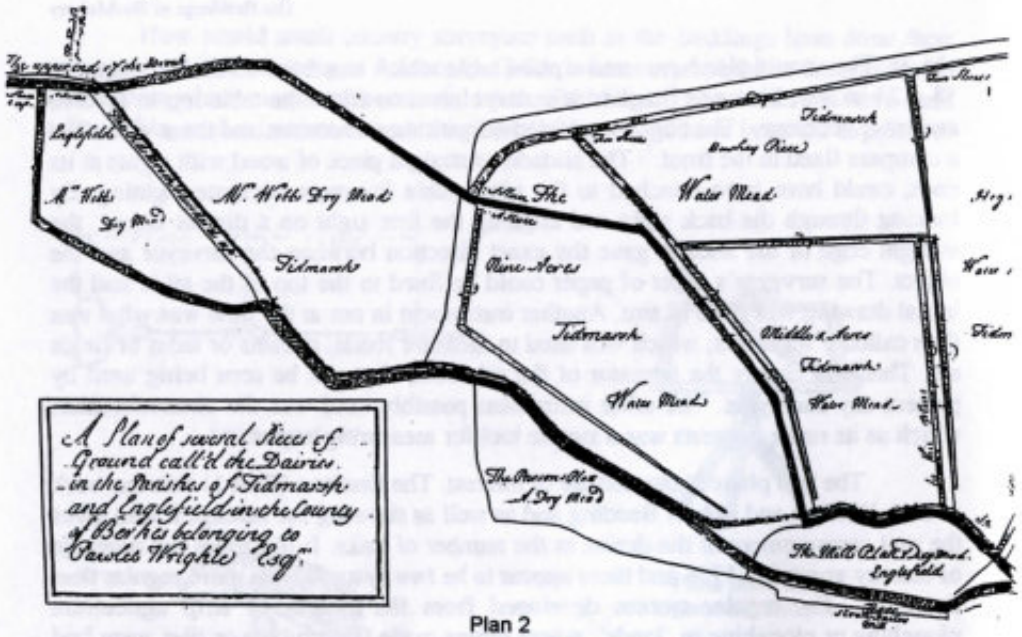
The two plans illustrated are of interest. The first one (Plan 1) was the work of both William and Robert Bedding and as well as showing the acreage it also gives the unit measurement of the drains as the number of links. It illustrates the drainage of marshy ground in 1796 and there appear to be two systems, one more regular than the other. The regular system developed from the system of strip agriculture ploughing or ploughing in 'lands', where drains made from rubble or tiles were laid in ploughed furrows at close intervals of five to fifteen metres down the slope. Hence the expression 'thorough drainage', which originated from the old Essex word 'thorow' meaning a stone filled trench or furrow. The random system shown was evolved by Elkington and described in 1808 by Johnstone in an 'Account of Elkingtons system' where drains were laid across the slope to collect spring water.[8] Does the plan imply that a combination of these two systems was practised here? At the end of the eighteenth century circular earthenware pipes were coming into fashion, although bricks with a semi-circular cavity resting on the earth or a flat tile at the bottom of a trench were probably more common.[9]

The second plan (Plan 2) by Robert Bedding, undated but probably from the beginning of the nineteenth century, shows water meadows in this part of Berkshire, illustrating the sluices on the brooks. A note in the top right corner of the plan reads 'the sluice gate putt up to float'. Water meadows like these were in use from the seventeenth century onwards, particularly in Wiltshire. The process demonstrated in the plan seems to be that of 'drowning' or 'floating upwards' which was carried out in wide flat valleys such as here in the valley of the Pang.[10]

In an account book for 1810 there are two relevant entries:

'B. Higg water Dairies 40 chain at 5s 6d
Cutt drains 465 at 7s 6d per 100 £13.14.10d'.

and also: 'Bedding measuring Dairies 57a 3r 21p'.[11]



Plan 2

The Beddings were countrymen and the use of the term 'flunder'd up' in the top left of the plan is interesting. In the Oxford English Dictionary an unusual use of 'to flounder' is the falling in of earth into a trench so this may be a Berkshire dialect derivative or a spelling variation, meaning that the brook was blocked up.

The estate and field plans drawn by the Beddings are not the only sources of information about their working lives. Robert's journal as well as recording family details described working practices as diverse as making ink and reducing statute measures to customary ones.

One entry which seems relevant to his profession was a recipe for ink:

'To make good ink Take 5 ounces of the best Nuttgalls, break them in a mortar but not in small pieces, then put the gall into one quart of clear rain water or soft spring water, then let them stand 4 or 5 days shaking them often then take 2 ounces of white gum arabick 1 ounce of double refined sugar 1 piece of indigo and put in the same and shake them well and let them stand 4 or 5 days more. Then take 2 ounces of good green copperis the larger the better and having first washed off the filth put it to the rest and also a piece of clear allum, about as big as a walnut to set the colour and it will be fit for use'.

If this was the way he made his ink it certainly was effective, as the plans are still very clear.

He was very interested in mathematics and there are various calculations in the book such as:

How to reduce Hedge measure
Suppose a hedge 100 poles in length statute Mesr that is 16½ to this pole

100
11
100

100
12)1100(91 poles
108
20
12
8

There were other rather obscure sums and presumably he understood them! Several of them reduce statute to customary measures and vice versa.

There were also such notes as:

'The weight of air pressing on man is 28000 pound that is 250 hundred weight, that is twelve tons and a half. How is it that man is not crushed to death? They are preserved by the air that is in the inside'

This is immediately followed by:

For the sheep rot in the foot
One ounce of vitriol
One ounce of verdigrease
Half a pint of white wine vinegar. Boil it together some time then take it of (sic) the fire and ad (sic) half a pint of spirits of turpentine.

Whether it did the sheep any good we do not know but it sounds a fearsome brew!

Two comments show the problems with the weather:

'Oct.7th 1829 a verry snowey day and verry cold and harvest not done'.

One can imagine the hardship caused by this. Ten years later:

'1839 a verry wet year. Rainey hay time a good deal of hay spoilt. A rainey harvest, a good deal of wheat barley and oats much damaged. Rain continued wett for the wheat sowing season, some of the wheat was perished with the rain and a great quantity of land not sow^{d}. Rain continued until Christmas a frost lasted about a week then rainey weather came on again'.

In the days when Bucklebury was a fairly remote village and there was no doctor available, it seems that Robert 'doctored' the villagers. In his journal there are various remedies noted. The following is typical:

> 'A sure cure for the hooping cough.
> Garlic steeped in rum. Rub the palm of the hands, the bottoms of the feet, all the joints, the back and chest. Then wrap them in flannel and keep them warm'.

The patient might have felt better if it was applied internally! He apparently also inoculated people against smallpox and bled them.[12]

A fair known as the revels was held in Bucklebury and Robert acted as chief director. He apparently wore a white coat and a chimney pot hat which he wore both indoors and out and was a well known figure.[13] He was the referee in the 'backswording' contests where two men with their left hands tied behind their backs and using cudgels tried to hit each other on the top of the head, it was foul if it landed elsewhere. If the blow caused bleeding showing more than an inch of blood the spectators cried "blood", and the hitter was declared the winner. This was a dangerous sport and in 1816 the squire who was also the parson (Winchcombe Henry Hartley) wrote 'How can I reconcile the sword playing at Chapel Row with Christianity - suppose an unlucky blow shd kill a man ... ?'[14] As squire it was customary for him to give a purse of five guineas for a prize. In the Bucklebury estate account book October 4th 1815:

> 'The purse at Chappelrow Revel £5.5.0.
> For heads broken at , " " £2.5.0.[15]

The inevitable happened and in 1818 Robert wrote 'July 29th John Wooderson was kild by Chapel Row Butt by a blow of John Farmer'. The squire then banned sword playing and for a while a cricket match took its place. An advertisement in the *Reading Mercury* 18 July 1831 for Chapel Row fair offered 'a purse of 5 sovereigns to be played for at cricket .... No backsword playing, Wrestling, fighting or any unlawful games will be allowed'. However in his notes Robert wrote '1835 Aug. 2nd Chaplerow Fair Back sword playing on Monday' – so the event was obviously resumed. Winchcombe Henry Hartley. the main opponent to backswording, had died in September 1832.[16]

Robert had many duties connected with the estate. Among other country tasks mentioned in his book were:

> 1835 July 30 Began reaping at Johnson
> July 22 Finished thatching rick
> June 15 began mowing for N. Hedges

He also made himself useful in other ways. It seems possible that he may have had his own transport in the form of a gig or horse-drawn conveyance.

> 1835 March 2nd went to the assizes
> Nov 3rd Took Step[n] up by warrant to Mr Stevens and then to prison for stealing Mr Hedges and Teggs fruits
> Jan lst Journey to Newbury to inform against Michael Kenton for poaching.
> Jan 8th ditto 2 months hard labour.

There were other similar expeditions mentioned and later in the book:

> 'On July 7th 1828 John Farmer cast for death for house breaking. Reprived'.

One wonders whether it was the John Farmer whose blow in 1818 'kild' John Wooderson when back sword playing. It was a time when the death sentence could be used for many types of offences. There is no mention of what replaced the death sentence.

In August 1835 the manor house caught fire and he writes 'Fire broke out about 4 pm I attend all night - at the fire until 4 o'clock next day'. Unfortunately it was the oldest part of the house that was destroyed, leaving the stables, kitchens and out-buildings. The old part was built by John Winchcombe who had acquired it after the dissolution of Reading Abbey.

There is an entry about the planting of oaks in the Avenue in 1822. 'The 1st oake tree was planted of this row that goes down the Common to Woodgate by Joseph and Thos Nailor'. This row was thought to commemorate the victory over Napoleon. The older oaks in the present row are said to have been planted by John Winchcombe and the row originally started at the manor house, although there are only a very few of those surviving. The Bucklebury oaks are well worth seeing.

In his older days Robert was a timber merchant, possibly in partnership with his son-in-law Charles Davis and there are journal references to cutting timber, faggotting and coppice cutting. He still made references to local happenings - a fat sheep was roasted on the Common by Mr John George on June 7th 1842, but no reason was given for this happening.

In 1845 Robert Bedding left the Avenue Cottage to live with his daughter Martha who was married to Charles Davis, the foreman of the manor timber yard and in 1846 they all moved to a cottage by the church.[17] In 1847 Robert Bedding died. His descendants continued to use his journal to keep family records.

References and Notes

1 A L Humphreys, *Bucklebury: a Berkshire Parish*, (York Lodge, Reading, 1932).
Cecilia Millson, *Bucklebury's Heritage*, 1994.
2 Cecilia Millson p 39.
3 Private Papers Berkshire Record Office D/EHy E10; D/EBy P22.
4 B R O, D/EBy P30.
5 Private Papers, B R O, D/Ehy E1O.
The customary measure to which he refers is the woodland linear perch of 18 feet and the statutory measure was $16^1/_2$ feet. There are other customary measurements, mostly applicable to arable, which varied even from 12 to 25 feet to the linear perch. The forest perch was 21 feet but in Sherwood Forest it was 25 feet! This minefield of measurements, which directly affects acreage, demonstrates how careful local historians must be in using them.
6 Peter Eden, editor., *Dictionary Of Land Surveyors* 1550-1850, (1975).
George Adams, *Geometrical and Graphical Essays*, (London, 1797).
7 David Smith, *Maps and Plans for Local Historians*, (London, 1988), p 65.
8 *Old Underdrainage Systems*, (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food leaflet 732, amended 1982) No.12.
9 G E Fussell, 'The Evolution of Field Drainage', *Journal of the Bath and West and Southern Counties Society*, 6th series Vol.4 (1929-30), pp 159-166.
10 Christopher Taylor, *Fields in the English Landscape*, (London, 1975), p 136.
11 B R O, D/EBy A16.
12 Cecilia Millson, p 46.
13 Cecilia Millson, p 46.
14 Cecilia Millson, p 43.
15 B R O, D/EHy A17.
16 Cecilia Millson, p 55.
17 Cecilia Millson, p 65.

Acknowledgements

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WILFRED OWEN 1893-1918

THE THAMES VALLEY CONNECTION

Bridgeen Fox

In August 1911 a young man from Shrewsbury arrived in the parish of Dunsden, Oxfordshire, to begin work as assistant to the vicar, the Revd Herbert Wigan. Although he was now living in the Midlands, the young man, Wilfred Owen, who was to become arguably the best poet of the First World War, knew the area well. His uncle, Mr John Gunston, a prosperous businessman, had built himself a large house at Kidmore End called 'Alpenrose' which is still standing today. It was here that the Owen family spent many a happy holiday and here, too, that Wilfred built up a strong and warm relationship with his cousin Leslie who was later to become the architect responsible for Reading's War Memorial. In a letter home, dated 31st December 1908, Wilfred described going to Kidmore Pond to see if there was skating but ' found ice broken and covered with snow.' Later he and some friends spent the evening tobogganing in the area around Peppard Common: 'Had a simply splendidrippinggrandmajesticgloriousdelightfulscrumtiousexquisitelyexcruciating time. The moon was overclouded but there was light enough to see the dark forms against the snow.'[1]

Owen was a prolific letter-writer and we are fortunate to have most of the correspondence with his mother which gives details of his holidays in Kidmore End and of his time at Dunsden. In January 1909, as we learn, he visited Huntley and Palmer's factories - 'description here impossible,' he wrote - and Reading Museum.[2] His growing interest in archaeology was further stimulated by another visit to the Museum in Reading with his cousin Leslie, when '(joy of joys) we were shown all over Roman Remains from Silchester by Assist: Curator --- Explained everything what a morning! And what a Museum even to Shrewsbury's !!'[3]

When he did go to Silchester with Mr Colyer, the Assistant Curator, he was 'rather disappointed since the mounds have been levelled down and the pits filled up, so that the city presents the same appearance as the ordinary country, except for the walls.'[4] However, a visit to Twyford on 17th August 1910 more than made up for that disappointment. Here he met Mr Llewellyn Treacher, Fellow of the Geological Society, described by Owen as having 'long grey hair, philosophical manner, and dirty old coat. Hearing I was interested in Roman remains, he took me round to a shed and fished out a small sack. "You can have all this pottery from Silchester,' he said, 'No, don't open it, because if I should keep half, I should always be regretting that I gave the other half away."[5]

Reading provided Owen with the opportunity to go to concerts, lectures at University College, as it then was, and to West's Picture Palace in West Street, one of the earliest cinemas in the town. But one of the main reasons for his frequent trips into Reading was to visit the many second-hand bookshops there where he was almost certain of picking up a bargain. 'Reading is the place for 'Second-hands', he wrote, and he preferred to spend money on books rather than on sweets. 'I was attracted by a pile of Liquorice Sticks in a window - and nearly bought one - but not quite! Instead, I picked up two shilling books of real value to me at ld. each! My Bible is a gem. I knew there must exist one which would come up to my requirements. I have found it - after many months! That is, it is marvellous for the price, 8/6d.'[6]

Owen also spent a great deal of time with his cousin, going on outings, visiting friends of the Gunston family. On one occasion in 1912 he went to see Leslie performing as the Duke in Kendrick School's production of 'The Merchant of Venice' in Reading Town Hall. Of his performance, Owen wrote: 'Leslie looked a very ducal personage on Monday, spoke very distinctly too'.[7]

In June 1911, Owen went to see the Revd Herbert Robson, vicar of Kidmore End, to discuss various ideas about what he should do to occupy his time meaningfully before starting his studies at University College, Reading. One suggestion was teaching in a secondary school but Mr Robson was of the opinion that teaching was 'killing work' and thought that Owen should do something easier which was 'to become the 'assistant' of some hardworked or studiously inclined parson, helping in parish work, correspondence etc.' Owen liked the idea and wrote: 'Parish work would not be by any means uncongenial to me and as I suppose, far less worrying than teaching.'[8] Mr Robson had heard that the Revd Herbert Wigan of Dunsden wanted help in the parish and he suggested that Wilfred should apply to him. This pleased Wilfred's parents who always worshipped at Dunsden when they stayed at Kidmore End because they liked the Revd Wigan's sermons. So it was that Owen was able to secure a position as pupil and lay-reader to the vicar. Owen had only gained a pass in his Matric. and was hoping for a First Class Honours in order to go to university; so when he arrived in Dunsden he expected the vicar to give him some coaching for his university entrance examination in return for his parish work. But the coaching did not materialise and Owen was able to spend time experimenting with poetry and getting to know the village children.

He wrote to his sister in November: 'I addressed the Children's Service in the Parish Hall on Sunday Afternoon. I enjoy speaking very much. I use no notes, and spend no time in preparation, but I use no high falutin' words, but try to express

myself in simple straightforward English. I believe the children are impressed for the time being. I hope they will really benefit, for, of course I give them the Messages, with one Purpose, and not with any idea of displaying my own bumptiousness.'[9] The 'Parish Hall', a large room built onto the vicarage, still has the same door through which the children would go for their services on Sundays.

Owen did a great deal of parish visiting and was particularly concerned about the poverty and the pitiable living conditions of many of the local families. The contrast between the lives of the poor and the well-to-do was brought home to him very forcibly when he was taken to hear an address by Bishop Ingham, Home Secretary of the Home Mission Society, at Earley Court. He wrote to his mother of 'the fine residence of some of the Sutton's' Seeds people. From such mansions as these, I pass, next afternoon to the wretched hovels of this Parish, and carry myself with equal ease in the crazy, evil-smelling huts of the poor, as in the wide, luxurious chambers of the rich. Numbers of old people cannot read, those who can seldom do so. Scores of them have passed their whole lives in the same stone box with a straw lid which they call their cottage; and are numbed to all interest beyond it.'[10]

He was frequently upset by the illnesses and, often, by the deaths of many of the children, and tried to help in small ways such as giving some of his precious shortbreads to a five-year old girl dying of consumption; toy soldiers to a little boy who almost died of peritonitis and trying, by his presence, to bring 'a stray gleam of pleasure into a sick room'.[11]

But there were compensations to be gained from the beauty of the surrounding countryside and Owen wrote of doing 'a little Botany when walking around the Parish'. He also described how, on the way to Reading with the boys on the Choir Outing, he had tested their botanical knowledge 'and found them well instructed in hedgerow plant life.' As well as being interested in the study of botany, he was very aware of the soothing side of nature. Writing to his brother, Harold, who was something of an artist, he said: 'I wished you could daub some representation of a Field which I saw, blazing with yellow charlock, backed by a Beech-wood, of a deep green so nearly black, that it puts one in mind of an ancient black coat assuming its green-old-age tints'.[12]

Even in winter he derived comfort from the landscape. 'The aspect of the Chiltern Downs is perfectly wintry now, but the land is by no means devoid of beauty or interest. The village of Sonning is one of the prettiest in the Thames Valley, and no wonder Holman Hunt chose to live there'.[13]

In August 1912, he went with Revd Wigan and some friends on a motor-launch trip to Mapledurham and he told his mother that he had never seen 'a finer company of noble trees than populate the Thames Basin around here. Before this, I had made up my mind that if I had enjoyed nothing else around here this summer, I have seen more wonderful tree-forms to gladden me than ever before'.[14]

Many of the features of the vicarage mentioned by Owen in letters home to his mother are still there today. When he arrived at the vicarage for a preliminary meeting with Mr Wigan he writes of standing in the neo-gothic porch tugging the cast-iron bell-pull, shaped like a huge inverted lily. Standing in the same porch today, the first thing that attracts one's attention is that same beautiful bell-pull which, no doubt, rang in the servants' quarters - those bells are also there to-day. In the 'collected letters' there is a sketch showing Owen working at a bureau-bookcase in the dining-room from which he could look out into the garden, a view unchanged today, as is the outlook from Owen's bedroom at the front of the house over the fields to Littlestead Green and, in the distance, to Reading.

University College

On 20th. February 1912, Owen cycled down the country lanes to Reading for an interview with Dr Childs, Principal of University College. He wanted to sit for the 'Intermediate Arts' degree in English, Latin, Botany, French and History in

1913. As they talked, Dr Childs jotted down: 'May come next term for Lat. Bot.(& possibly Fr.). Fees to be about 3/5 x £11 for term'. Six weeks later, Owen was back in University College arranging to attend Botany classes for six hours a week. He spoke to one of the lecturers, Miss Rayner, and reported to his mother that she seemed very nice indeed. He also noted that the 'Premises and all appurtenancies are admirable. The lady, with her satellites, was photographing the eclipse when I interviewed her. I was riding home at *12 10*; the sky was clear; and very weird the universe seemed; the atmosphere dulled as if charged with volcanic dust, especially on the horizon'.[15]

However, although Owen enjoyed his parish work and his contact with the parishioners, especially the children, he was discovering that his christianity and that of the vicar had very little in common. He told his mother- 'the Vicar has only one way to God when I can think of at least three'. He was also missing the curate, Mr Kemp, who had left the parish in May 1912. Mr Kemp had managed to lighten the somewhat stultifying atmosphere in the vicarage but even he found the imposed silences of the evenings difficult to bear. Reminiscing years later about his time at Dunsden, Kemp wrote: ' I remember the awful evening silences. I was homesick, watching the smoke of the London trains in the valley. It was all very quiet, and very dull'.[16]

So, in February 1913, Owen left Dunsden, having gained a great deal from the two years spent in the parish and 'having been educated in the Book of Life', as he put it.

Later that year, he failed to gain a scholarship to University College, Reading, and contemplated returning to Dunsden but, in September 1913 he was offered part-time employment as a teacher of English at the Berlitz School in Bordeaux.

He remained in France until September 1915 when he returned to England and joined the Artists' Rifles. In May 1916 Owen was gazetted as a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, and in January 1917 he was posted to the Second Manchesters on the Somme. He served with them until the end of May when he was diagnosed as suffering from shell-shock and was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital, Edinburgh. There he met Siegfried Sassoon who had a great influence on him and encouraged him to continue writing poetry. Between August and October twelve important poems were completed.

involved in the assault on the Hindenburg Defences, north of St Quentin. It was here that he won the Military Cross 'for conspicuous gallantry and devotion'.

Tragically, Owen was killed on 4th November 1918, helping his men across the Sambre-Oise Canal under a heavy enemy bombardment. The Armistice bells were ringing in Shrewsbury as the telegram announcing his death arrived at his parents' home. Although he is buried in the Communal Cemetery in Ors, Northern France, there is a handsome memorial plaque to his memory in Dunsden Parish Church. The bodies of his parents, and his sister, Mary, lie in a quiet corner of the churchyard at Dunsden.

WILFRED OWEN MC
1893-1918

Lay Assistant to the Vicar of Dunsden
1911-1913

My subject is War and the pity of War
The Poetry is in the pity

Transcript of plaque in Dunsden Parish Church

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2 Ibid. Letter N° 52, p 49.
3 Ibid. Postcard N° 63, p 57.
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5 Ibid. Letter N° 73, p 64.
6 Ibid. Letter N° 120, p 114.

7 Ibid. Letter N° 132, p 130.
8 Ibid. Letter N° 83, p 75.
9 Ibid. Letter N° 100, p 94.
10 Ibid. Letter N° 100, p 95.
11 Ibid. Letter N° 114, p 108.
12 Ibid. Letter N° 82, p 73.
13 Ibid. Letter N° 105, p 100.
14 Ibid. Letter N° 155, p 158.
15 Ibid. Letter N° 132, p 129..
16 John Bell (editor), *Selected Letters: Wilfred Owen* (OUP. 1985). Footnote N° 5 p 28.

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A SUBURBAN TRIO

EARLEY, TILEHURST AND CAVERSHAM 1851-1911

Joan A Dils

The 1851 national census of population showed that for the first time in English history more people were living in towns than in the countryside; by 1901 they numbered 75% of the population. Some of these urban centres were the great cities of the North and the Midlands, but some market towns, though small by comparison, also grew and absorbed parts or the whole of local villages. One such town was Reading.

In 1887 an extension of the borough boundary, the first since the granting of a charter by Elizabeth I, took into Reading a large slice of Earley and a smaller one of Tilehurst, pushing the town's population over the 50,000 mark. This made Reading large enough to qualify for county borough status in the local government reorganisation of 1889, giving the borough council all the powers of a county, including control over education and planning, financed by its own rates.[1] In 1911 Reading again extended its boundaries to include almost all of Tilehurst and, remarkably, part of Caversham, despite this being across the county boundary with Oxfordshire. The newly acquired areas of 1911 increased the population of the Borough to 87,693. In just over a century Reading had grown from market town of 9,421 inhabitants to a substantial industrial and commercial centre. Adjoining areas of its neighbouring parishes, Earley, Tilehurst and Caversham, were not only within its borders but built-up areas, seamlessly joined to its own spreading streets. This article will consider the impact of urbanisation on these communities and landscapes.

Earley, Tilehurst and Caversham in 1851

The 1851 census, taken before any significant changes began, showed these parishes to be rural communities, though Caversham already had a well-established commercial area near the bridge and in Prospect Street where its population of 1,752 was concentrated. It was a large parish with outlying hamlets at Lower Caversham and Emmer Green; those in the north around Kidmore End had been detached to form a new parish of St John the Baptist in 1854. Two substantial estates, Caversham Park and Cane End, were prominent in the landscape. Tilehurst with a population of 2,188 consisted of a small village centre around the church, about three miles from Reading, a few isolated farms, several scattered hamlets and a large proto-urban settlement at Theale on the Bath Road which had become a separate parish in 1832. The elegant houses of Calcot Park and Prospecthill Park contrasted with small industrial enterprises of brick and tile makers at Kentwood. Earley was

by far the smallest in population, only 487 in 1851. Until 1854 when it was granted parish status, it was merely a liberty and chapelry within the large parish of Sonning.[2] Its church, St Peter's, was built in 1844, though there was as yet only the suggestion of a village centre in its vicinity - a blacksmith's forge, a pub and a farm near a cross roads. The estates of Maiden Erlegh, Whiteknights and Earley Court occupied a very substantial part of the higher ground.[3]

The expansion of Reading after *c.*1860

By contrast with these rural, thinly populated parishes, Reading was becoming crowded, despite new housing developments which by 1860 had spread out in places to the borough boundary. This resulted in many areas of mixed properties, villas alongside cottages, but also some small 'integrated urban areas', each with a distinct social class; Reading at this date was too small to have true suburbs. However by the early 1860s a distinctive working-class development, the future suburb of Newtown, was begun in the east of the town, near to the railway and the new site of Huntley and Palmer's biscuit factory, soon to become Reading's largest employer. On the other side of the town, streets of terraced cottages were emerging alongside the Oxford Road east of the railway line, and elegant villas bordered the Bath Road.[4]

This physical expansion was necessary to house a growing population, mainly of newcomers to the town; 73% of the 2,122 heads of household in St Mary's parish in 1861 were immigrants. The 1911 census included Reading among the large towns with a significantly high number of immigrants (48.9% of males and 52.2% of females).[5] They included men and women from all levels of society: agricultural labourers attracted by work in the biscuit factory, the breweries, the iron or the brick works; building craftsmen in demand by housing developers; business men, middle-class professionals and those of independent means for whom Reading offered good prospects for advancement or an attractive place to live with easy access to London by rail.

Population growth in Earley, Tilehurst and Caversham

All the census returns from 1851-1891 show that parishes bordering the town were also attracting migrants in large numbers. They were drawn, not so much by what the growing suburbs could offer but by the opportunities within the borough for work, professional advancement and wide-ranging leisure activities. A few examples of the birthplaces of the heads of household, as shown by the 1881 census enumerators' returns, will illustrate the point. Forty-six households occupied the terraces of Granby Gardens, Earley; only five (11 %) of the heads of these families

were born in Reading or one of its adjacent parishes. Fifteen came from the rest of Berkshire, the same number from neighbouring counties - Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire - and eleven (24%) from further afield. It was a similar situation in Grovelands (later Waverley) Road, Tilehurst, where none of the twenty-five household heads was born in the parish and only 16% originated in Reading. In North Street, Caversham, a third of thirty-two household heads was born in Caversham or Reading, another third in Oxfordshire or nearby counties and a third elsewhere; overall 83% of 164 heads of household in the whole of the newly developed areas of Caversham village in 1881 were incomers.[6]

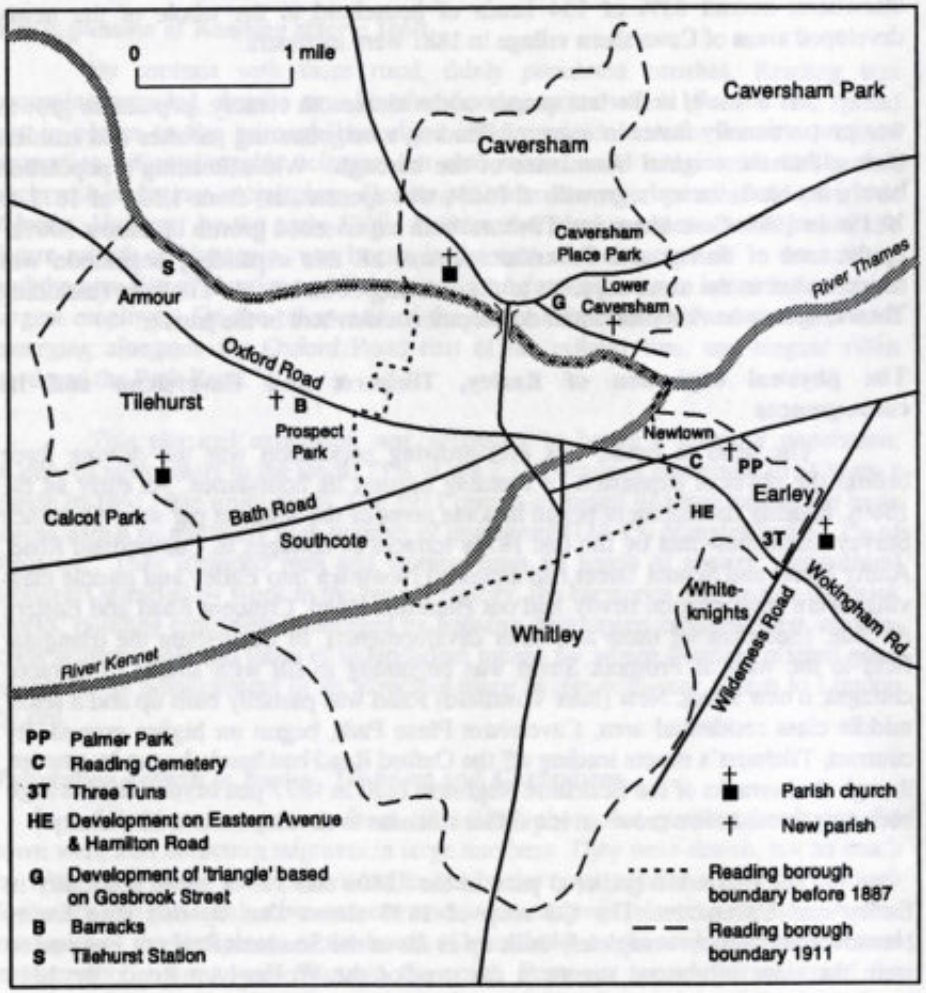
As a result, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, population growth was proportionally faster in some of Reading's neighbouring parishes and hamlets than within the original boundaries of the borough.[7] While Reading's population barely doubled, Earley's growth of 660% was spectacular; from 1,534 in 1871 to 10,196 in 1901. Caversham and Tilehurst both experienced growth of almost 300%.[8] In the case of Earley and Caversham almost all this expanding population was concentrated in the areas adjacent to the Reading boundary; in Tilehurst (including Theale) there was also substantial development elsewhere in the parish.

The physical expansion of Earley, Tilehurst and Caversham and its consequences

The need to house this ever-growing population was the driving force behind the physical expansion of Reading beyond its boundaries. As early as the 1860s, housing development began in some areas of the adjacent parishes. Ordnance Survey maps show that by the late 1870s terraces of cottages in Cumberland Road, Amity Street and School Street had extended Newtown into Earley and middle class villas were appearing on newly laid out Hamilton Road, Crescent Road and Eastern Avenue. (See map for these and other developments). In Caversham the triangular field to the west of Prospect Street was beginning to fill with streets of terraced cottages, a new street, New (later Westfield) Road was partially built up and a select middle class residential area, Caversham Place Park, begun on higher ground. By contrast, Tilehurst's streets leading off the Oxford Road had barely begun to emerge, though the barracks of the Berkshire Regiment built in 1877 just beyond the borough boundary, would soon prove an important stimulus to development in its vicinity.[9]

The expansion gathered pace in the 1880s and 1890s, more especially in Earley and Caversham. The OS map of 1897 shows that by this date Earley Newtown was almost completely built up as far as the Southern Railway line and so were the more salubrious streets to the west of the Wokingham Road. By 1914 housing had spread beyond the open spaces of the Cemetery and Palmer Park

towards Wilderness Road. Across the Thames, streets of terraced cottages covered the fields of Lower Caversham; superior villas on St Peter's Hill and the Warren were separated from even more prestigious houses in Caversham Place Park by more modest dwellings in Hemdean Road, Chester and Oxford Streets. In Tilehurst some streets had been built up and others laid out on both sides of Oxford Road as far as Pond House, but for the most part the Bath Road still ran through open country.



Reading's Suburban Villages *c.*1860-1911

Integrated urban areas' with distinct social geographies and occupational structures emerged in each of the three parishes.[10] Not unnaturally, each parish had a preponderance of terraced cottages and houses for factory workers, tradesmen and labourers close to the borough boundary and within easy walking distance of the major places of employment. In Earley these were concentrated in Newtown, the most densely populated area of the parish. It was dominated by Huntley and Palmer's employees who comprised ninety-nine of 260 male heads of household and lodgers living here in 1881. Thirty-seven were general labourers, twenty-eight were in the building trades (a large number because there was so much new building) and only fourteen worked on the railway, the brewery or in other factories.

The equivalent area in Caversham village was the triangle of streets with its base on Gosbrook Street, and Lower Caversham south of Gosbrook Road. The Clappers footbridge gave easy access to Reading from Lower Caversham; here in 1891 at least eighty-three men worked at the biscuit factory, seventy on the railways and twenty-two at the iron and tin-plate works.[11]

The Oxford Road and the adjacent streets in Tilehurst between the Barracks and Pond House had a more differentiated occupational structure. In 1881 a large number of the working population were lodgers, mostly labourers and soldiers. Overall over 25% of 240 men in work were labourers, 18% belonged to the Berks. Regiment and 12% were in the building trades. Only a few worked on the railway or in the biscuit factory. A small number of clerks, professionals and those of independent means lived cheek-by-jowl with their working class neighbours. Shops were concentrated on the Oxford Road.

Areas of superior housing for the middle class were to be found in each parish. Some were intended for the very wealthy: the detached villas of Caversham Place Park built along gated roads and each needing the service of several domestics; spacious houses atop the Wokingham Road in Earley; Dellwood, Parkhurst and Inglewood overlooking Prospect Park in Tilehurst.

Other areas were laid out as streets of less expensive semi-detached villas intended for professionals, business men, the retired and those of independent means. One such was the Mockbeggar Estate in Earley; in 1891 half the households in Eastern Avenue on this estate were headed by a retired person or one with independent means (including the former proprietor of the *Reading Mercury*), as were nine out of twenty-two in College Road. A total of nine clerks lived in these streets together with a schoolmaster, a civil engineer and several commercial travellers among others. Waverley Road in Tilehurst was similar and across the river

Caversham Heights, laid out in 1898, was developed mainly as a middle-class enclave.

The increased population had other needs besides housing. New parishes were formed: Earley St Bartholomew from Earley St Peter in 1879, Tylehurst St George from Reading St Mary in 1882 and St John, Lower Caversham from Caversham St Peter in 1888. New church schools were built but they were overwhelmed by the numbers of potential scholars and other means had to be found to provide adequate education. It is indicative of the population drift into the Reading area that of ten School Boards in Berkshire established to comply with the 1870 Education Act: one was in Reading Borough, one in Earley (Reading and Earley School Boards together built Newtown School in 1874) and the other in Tilehurst which built Grovelands School in 1880.[12]

Of more importance to the population in general and more difficult to meet was the need for good public health provision, largely forgotten in a period of rapid and uncontrolled development. Only after the passing of the 1872 Public Health Act were urban and rural sanitary authorities (the latter an additional role for the poor law unions) set up. Unfortunately for Earley and Tilehurst, Wokingham and Bradfield Poor Law Unions (to which they belonged) were ill-equipped to deal with the problems of the suburban areas within their jurisdictions. Caversham with its local board of health, independent of Henley Poor Law Union, was better placed though it was never able to provide a pure water supply and only managed a sewerage system in 1896. Most houses in all three areas were built with cess pits; wells or shared taps often provided the only water supply. The inevitable problems of disease, especially typhoid and diphtheria, could be prevented only by the provision of good sanitary arrangements and pure, piped water. These services (with the exception of Caversham's overstretched sewerage scheme) were available only from Reading. Thus as well as being dependent on the borough for employment, the growing suburbs relied on it for public health provision. This dependency had political consequences when in 1887, and again in 1911, the campaign for Reading's boundary extension was largely driven by the public health issue.[13] Once the suburbs were incorporated into the borough, the process of controlling epidemic disease and providing good sanitary arrangements in the new areas was begun, though full implementation took some time.[14]

On the eve of World War 1 Reading's newly acquired suburbs, similar to each other, were distinct from the rest of their parishes in topography, occupational structure and social provision. Most of that part of Caversham which was in Reading was a densely-developed residential district, half of whose workers were employed

in Reading. As well as its own police station and public library it had a thriving retail and commercial area with professional services such as lawyers and auctioneers. Even Emmer Green was expanding and losing its rural character. By contrast the house and estate of Caversham Park survived undisturbed and the hamlets in the north of the ancient parish, still in Oxfordshire, remained small, rural

Detached Villa Caversham Place Park

and remote. The crowded streets of Newtown, firmly orientated towards the borough, were a world away from the green fields in Earley beyond the extended borough boundary, where farms, cottages and the estates with their great houses still dominated the landscape. Change was coming to rural Earley, though slowly: a semblance of a village centre complete with church, smithy, post office near the Three Tuns; a terrace of cottages and a few villas along the main roads; six opulent villas set in the original parkland of the Whiteknights Estate. The Oxford Road area of Tilehurst, taken into Reading in 1887, was indistinguishable from the borough onto which it once abutted. Unlike the other two suburbs, it was not the only built-up area in the parish. Theale continued to expand, but a larger community of about 1,300 grew up at Armour from the early 1880s where the brick, tile and pottery works and the railway were major employers. Though many workers would have been employed in the immediate locality, the area became part of Reading in 1911

as did rural Tilehurst as far west as the parish church. Calcot Park with its deer park and farms and Theale remained outside. In view of the amount of construction in the area, it is not surprising that all three parishes had thriving brickyards, most set in rural or semi-rural locations. The population growth of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had thus surrounded the borough with three suburbs, remarkably similar in character Together they formed the largest built-up area in a predominantly rural county.

References and Notes

1 A Alexander, *Borough Government and Politics: Reading 1835-1985* (1985), p 89.
2 Earley lay on the western side of the ancient parish of Sonning and until 1887 it extended as far as the Reading boundary at what is now Cemetery Junction.
3 1851 Census enumerators' returns (PRO HO107/1725 Caversham; HO107/1693 Earley; HO107/1691 Tilehurst).
4 S T Blake, 'The physical expansion of the Borough of Reading' unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Reading (1976).
5 Blake, op. cit. Blake quotes figures for St Mary's parish only, though a similar situation would be found in St Giles', the other fast-growing parish; Census of England and Wales 1911 vol. vi (HMSO 1913).
6 Census enumerators' returns 1881: (PRO RG/11/1489 Caversham; RG/11/1313 Earley; RG/11/1299 Tilehurst).
7 The hamlets of Southcote and Whitley, within the parishes of St Mary and St Giles respectively, lay outside the borough until 1887. Caversham's population was 2,406 in 1871, rising to 7,135 in 1901. Tilehurst's was 2,418 in 1871, boosted to 4,408 ten years later after the building of the barracks. In 1901 it reached 6,899.
8 Table of Population 1801-1901 *Victoria County History* Berkshire ii pp 236-243. The figures quoted include the whole of the area of Earley and Tilehurst within their ancient boundaries as it is difficult to separate accurately the developed from the undeveloped areas. This article has followed the convention adopted by the Table of Population whose figures refer to the boundaries of the ancient ecclesiastical parishes.
9 25" Ordnance Survey map 1st edition. Surveyed 1877, published 1881.
10 The term 'integrated urban areas' was used by Blake to describe distinct areas of Reading
11 Census enumerators' returns: (PRO RG 11/1313 Earley 1881; RG 11 / 1299 Tilehurst 1881; RG 12/1158 Caversham 1891).
12 The 1870 Act stipulated that where schools founded by religious bodies could not provide sufficient school places, a locally elected school board should fill up the gap; S M Gold, *A Biographical Dictionary Of Architects At Reading* (privately published 1999).
13 The extension of Reading's boundaries is fully discussed in Alexander, op. cit. pp 90 – 124. In Caversham and Earley, only the built up areas were 'annexed' but the 1911 extension into Tilehurst also included a large area of open land.
14 For details see the reports of the Medical Officer to Reading Board of Health in the Berkshire Record Office.

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