

Berkshire Old and New

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Berkshire Local History Association

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Cover illustrations

Front: Abingdon County Hall, early twentieth century.

Back: Fair Mile Hospital, c. 1870.

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Berkshire and Jacobitism

Jonathan Oates

At first glance, the county of Berkshire would seem to have little, if any, connection to the attempts to restore the exiled Stuarts in the early eighteenth century, which are often associated purely with Bonnie Prince Charlie and Scotland. Yet this would be an error. There were those in the county who were sympathetic towards the Jacobite cause and those who supported George I and II. This article explains the political conflict in the county, using sources from the National Archives, Berkshire Record Office, the national and local press and other published primary sources.

Berkshire was a county whose political sympathies lay with the Tories, some of whom were Jacobite. The Elector of Hanover, who became George I in 1714, favoured their enemies, the Whigs, and so conflict was probable. There were a number of instances in Jacobitism in the county in the early years of his reign when it seemed to some that a Jacobite restoration was possible. There were also a few Non-jurors in the county, at least during the reign of William III (1689-1702); Anglicans who refused to take the oaths to the King which were required for public office as they believed that the true King was James III, known to his enemies as the Old Pretender. They were few in number, but were based in Shottesbrooke, residence of Francis Cherry, gentleman and a noted Non-juror. William Sloper, a Wantage schoolmaster, was another Non-juror, as was Mr Vincent, a curate of Sulhamstead.¹ Others may have carried on their mantle in the eighteenth century; certainly Thomas Hearne's Jacobitism sprang from Cherry's influence, though Hearne spent all his adult life in Oxford.

The first outburst of Jacobitism in the county took place on the new King's coronation day, 20 October 1714. On this day in Reading, there was to be a loyal display by local supporters of George I, when 'a Parcel of honest and zealous gentlemen, for the Present King's Interest, met together to drink the King's health'. They also made a bonfire in order that their political affiliations be widely known. Yet their celebration was rudely interrupted by 'a tumultuous and riotous Mob', who 'rose upon them' and 'routed them with large Clubs'. The Jacobites shouted 'No Hanover, no Cadogan, but Calvert and Clarges'. They then pulled the bonfire down, carried the sticks home and shouted 'No foreign government'.²

The language employed by the mob requires a little explanation. William Cadogan was a senior officer in the British Army and a staunch supporter of

the new King, and, in the following year, was to play his part in suppressing the rebellion in Scotland. Felix Calvert (1671-1736) and Robert Clarges (c1693-c1727) were the two incumbent Tory MPs, who were to be re-elected in the following year.³ The reference to the foreign government was also explicitly anti-Hanoverian, as the new King was German and had brought over a number of German advisers and mistresses with him. This demonstration was a clear indication that the sympathies of a vociferous faction in the town were anti-Hanoverian and possibly Jacobite, too, though they made no positive reference to James Francis.⁴ That there should be such conflict in Reading can be further explained by the fact that it was a relatively open borough, with a large electorate, and many Dissenters and Tories, who were antagonistic towards one another.

Eight days later, another Berkshire man, loyal to King George, was attacked. This was the Revd. Joseph Acres (1667-1746), of Blewberry, later Rector of Newbury from 1720. He was preaching a pro-Hanoverian sermon in a church in Whitechapel, London, when he was pulled out of his pulpit by an angry mob. Not deterred, he had his sermon published for a wider audience. This sermon was titled *Glad Tidings to Great Britain: A Thanksgiving Sermon...published for His Majesty's Accession*. Thomas Hearne (1678-1735), an Oxford Jacobite, poured scorn on it: "Tis wretched Stuff, in commendation of Usurpers, for which he deserved to be mobbed as he was."⁵

Acres was undeterred. He went on to have published *The True Method of Propagating Religion and Loyalty* in the following year, and *Great Britain's Jubilee: or a Joyful Day, a Sermon* later in 1715. The first of these sermons was preached at Blewbury on 20 January and was to give thanksgiving to God for George I's 'peaceful' accession. He praised the new king, stating 'We consider that we have a King that is the Delight of Mankind, A Man after God's own Heart'. Acres said George was prudent, yet brave, but above all a Protestant, in an unspoken contrast to James Francis, who was Catholic. Acres referred to the 'merciless Temper of the papists' and to the martyrs of Smithfield during Mary's reign. With regard to the Jacobite riots of 1714, he said 'Their Behaviour is a disgrace'.⁶

The second of these sermons was preached on 1 August 1715, exactly a year after George I's accession, in order to celebrate that accession. Again, Acres spent much time attacking Catholicism, reminding his congregation and readers, not only of Mary's reign, but also of that of another Catholic monarch, James II, who, Acres declared, was planning 'to destroy our Church'. However, he argued, as with Israel in Biblical times, England had had a mighty deliverer. 'Who can remember, without an Heart full of Joy, the Extacy of Gladness that spread over the whole of the Nation, upon filling

the throne with the Illustrious WILLIAM [III]?' Acres beseeched God to 'defeat all the secret counsels of the ungodly' and 'upon him [George I] and his posterity, let the Crown for ever flourish'. Acres was a fervent supporter of the Hanoverian dynasty and was evidently eager to impress his views on others – perhaps with an eye to self-advancement. It is, however, impossible to know how successful he was, though, in the latter, his advancement to the rectorship of Newbury in 1720 might indicate success.

In 1715, open rebellion broke out in England under Thomas Forster, a Tory MP for Northumberland, and in Scotland under the Earl of Mar. There were a number of people in Berkshire who were indicted at the Assizes for speaking favourably in public about the Jacobites. Robert Forester, of Bewcastle in Cumberland, a Scottish pedlar, was at The Thistle Inn in Reading and a soldier heard him say 'Prosperity and health to the Earl of Mar'. Forester later said that he meant to say Argyll, who was the general leading the regular troops against Mar's Jacobites. Richard Blissett, a Reading clothmaker, was reported as 'speaking words against His Majesty [George I]'. He also said that one John Moore would have 13d or 14d per day if he joined Mar's forces. Two women also allegedly spoke 'seditious words against the King and government'.⁸

Jacobitism was not restricted to the lower orders of society. Dorothy Mingham reported that the Revd. George Reed, vicar of Chilton, did 'declare and say that the Pretender was a good Protestant and had been so for three years then past and that it would be well for this Nation if he were King, and that King George must have a care what he did, otherwise he would lose his head as King Charles had done'. William Goddard reported that Reed often remarked that he wished 'that King George's head were cut off'.⁹

Instances of seditious rhetoric in Berkshire, were, however, limited. In a study of the eight counties of the Oxford Assize Circuit, of such cases between 1689-1752 Berkshire had the lowest number: 11, compared to 45 in Staffordshire and 20 in Oxfordshire, for example.¹⁰

The only other mass instance of Jacobitism occurred in Abingdon, the then county town, on 20 October 1716. The Supervisor of the Excise and all his officers, being government employees, together with 'several other gentlemen', met at the Post Office to celebrate the second anniversary of the Coronation of George I. They 'drunk his Majesty's and other loyal Healths; and when the Town's Bonfire was lighted; every man...went to it with his Bottle of wine, to drink those Healths'. But they were rudely interrupted:

'the Jacobite Mob hallow'd, Down with the Round Heads. No Cows, no bulls &c. and threw Dirt, Stones and Firebrands so thick, that the loyal gentlemen were forc'd to retire into the Post House'.¹¹

Jacobites often termed the Whigs Roundheads as an insult; equating them with Dissent and republicanism, but to call them cows and bulls was unusual and it is not evident what these terms meant. The riot may have been due to the fact that there was a large concentration of Dissenters in Abingdon – as in Reading – and Dissenters favoured the new order as it promised to continue to offer them religious toleration. Such enthusiasm for the new status quo clearly was not universally popular, especially with Tories who had been ousted from power and feared that the Anglican Church might be in danger.¹²

Yet not all in the county were Jacobite. The official county response was to send, in early October, a loyal address to George I, on behalf of the lieutenant, the sheriff, the Justices of the Peace, the Grand Jury and the freeholders, pledging their loyalty. This was presented by the county's newly appointed Lord Lieutenant, Charles Beauclerk, Duke of St. Albans.¹³ When the rebellion was quelled, a similar address was sent.¹⁴ The corporation of Windsor on 7 June 1716, ordered likewise:

'It is ordered that the Address to His Majesty now read be further engrossed and signed by the respective members of this corporation and afterwards carried by the serjeant to the gentlemen and inhabitants of this town and presented to His majesty by Mr mayor, four aldermen and Mr Chamberlain at the charge of the corporation.'¹⁵

As a more practical step, the militia was summoned, though exactly which Jacobites they were meant to oppose is unclear. It would seem that four companies were raised, numbering several hundred men in all. Each recruit had to swear the following oath of loyalty: I 'do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George: so help me God ... I do swear that I do from my heart abhor, detest and abjure as impious and heretical that Damnable Doctrine and position that princes excommunicated or deprived by the pope or any authority of these of the see of Rome may be deposed and murdered by their subjects'. These forces were not raised, it would seem, until 23-24 November 1715, judging by the dates that some of the men swore their oaths – a few days after the decisive battles of the rebellion had taken place at Preston and at Dunblane.¹⁶ Unfortunately, we know nothing about the occupations or the parishes which these men belonged to, so further analysis of these men is impossible. One recruit was John Wingfield and he and his fellows were warned by Reed that 'they would turn to the Rebellion when he comes to be sure, for ... they were foolish if they did not turn to the strongest sides'.¹⁷

There is a little reference to military activity in the Hungerford

constable's accounts. There was a payment of nine shillings for 'two train soldiers for going forth'. This might mean that the parish paid expenses for two men to join the county militia. There is a further laconic payment 'for the militia' in 1716, but no explanation. The constable also had to obtain a warrant to commandeer transport for soldiers passing through the district.¹⁸

Loyalist behaviour was also seen in the responses of Anglican churches, whose bells rang to celebrate anniversaries associated with the new dynasty and anti-Catholicism. At Reading St. Mary's, the bell ringers were paid ten shillings on each of the following occasions in 1715: George I's birthday (28 May), on the anniversary of his accession (1 August), on the anniversary of his coronation (20 October), on the birthday of the Prince of Wales (30 October) and on the day to commemorate 'Gunpowder Treason' (5 November).¹⁹ Other church accounts record smaller payments to their bell ringers on some or all of these occasions, including Hungerford, Buckland, Shinfield, Reading St. Giles', Stratfield Mortimer and Chieveley. Those at Buckland rang for the 'victory over ye rebels' in 1716.²⁰

After 1715, affairs were calmer. Despite the mob's clamouring for Calvert and Clarges in 1714, they were quiet in 1716. This is noteworthy because in 1716 there was a petition to have the election result of 1715 overturned, and Charles Cadogan gained one of the Reading seats, with neither Clarges nor Calvert being re-elected. Neither seem to have been Jacobites; their removal was probably in order to increase the number of Whigs sitting on the Commons.²¹ Dudley Ryder, visiting Reading a day before the polling, wrote in his diary, 'There does not seem to be any great noise or hurry in the town upon this account.'²² Perhaps the defeat of the rebellion had taken the ardour out of the Jacobites.

This conclusion should not be taken too far. Attitudes towards Jacobitism remained mixed in the county in the 1720s. This is unsurprising. The early 1720s were nationally a time of tension. This was because in the aftermath of the financial scandal known as the South Sea Bubble, in which members of the government and courtiers were involved, and which ruined investors, there was an important Jacobite conspiracy, centred around the bishop of Rochester, Francis Atterbury, and Christopher Layer, a Norfolk lawyer. Supporters of the dynasty and government were rightly concerned.

Given this background of conspiracy, there emerged in the early 1720s, in both Berkshire and Hampshire, the Waltham (after Bishop's Waltham, Hampshire) Blacks, poaching gangs, who may also have had Jacobite links. Historians are divided as to whether the gang were 'merely' thieves who stole game animals from the parks of the wealthy, or were allied to the Jacobite cause in their fight against the 'ruling class'. Thompson considers

that the Blacks were not Jacobite, whereas Cruickshanks and Monod consider them to have been so. Evidence is limited and ambiguous and may never be resolved, though the Hampshire Blacks appear to have been potentially allied to the Jacobites, whereas the Berkshire Blacks seem not to have been.²³

There was certainly concern among some that these criminals may also have been Jacobites. The Duke of Newcastle was told on 3 August 1723 by Stephen Poyntz that:

‘There is a great reason to fear that a man who had made discoveries of a great Number of Ruffians lurking about Guildford, Farnham [both of which are in Surrey] and other places in Hamshire and Berkshire, completely horsed and armed, and associated under a pretence of deer slaying, but in reality intending to begin an insurrection when ordered, is since made away with.’²⁴

In an anonymous pamphlet, the following was noted:

‘And it being then about the time wherein the late horrid conspiracy was said to be on Foot, they were judged (as well they might) by some who were in the Secret of Affairs to be in the Pretender’s Interest and went about thus armed to be prepared for a general Insurrection.’²⁵

The government sent an agent, ‘our Trusted and well beloved’ Revd. Thomas Power of Easthamstead, to investigate and to ‘penetrate into the bottom of their treasonable intentions’. He was to be given royal authority to do so and to be indemnified for any actions he would have to undertake. As matters transpired, the latter was to be very useful.²⁶

Yet it would seem that these were fears, not reality. The above pamphlet went on to note:

‘But this prov’d to be nothing but surmise, for his mock Majesty, King John...gave out in his printed Manifestos...That he and his were faithful and true subjects to their liege lord and sovereign King George, and would stand by the succession in the illustrious House of Hanover to the last drop of Blood.’²⁷

His followers, 300 in number, swore ‘that they were well affected to king George and that they loved him, and would be ready to sacrifice their loves to maintain his Right, That they had no other design but to do Justice, and to see that the Rich did not insult or oppress the Poor’. Toasts were then drunk to the King and the Royal Family.²⁸

Newspaper reports of the Blacks describe them as attacking the Keeper of Windsor Forest, shooting his son and carrying off the King’s deer. Those Waltham Blacks who were arrested and conveyed to Reading gaol for trial in the summer of 1723 were not tried for sedition, but for murder, deer stealing and assault.²⁹ Dr Stratford of Christ Church Oxford wrote thus to a friend at this time: ‘The trials of our “Blacks” are over, and to our comfort though to our disappointment too, nothing of treason or even sedition appeared upon any of the trial. The extraordinary commission had no other business than to give due correction to the old sin of deer steeling.’³⁰

It seems likely that the Waltham Blacks were not Jacobite, though we can never be certain, such is the paucity of the evidence.

The Blacks even had the audacity to blacken their opponents’ names with Jacobite accusations. On 24 April 1723, Power was indicted at the Quarter Sessions for ‘a Riott and other misdemeanours ... guilty of Treasonable Practices against the King and Government in aiding and abetting the raising of forces for ye bringing in ye person called King James the Third and other treasonable acts’. Three men from Wokingham had accused him of trying to recruit them to the Jacobite cause; one said Power had offered to settle an estate of £14 p.a. on him. He was sent to the county gaol in Reading.³¹ Yet Power, who, as noted, had been acting on behalf of the government, had travelled with soldiers to search premises for the Blacks, who in their turn accused him of treason. On being arrested he showed no concern and offered no defence. He was subsequently released and pardoned.³²

Catholics were suspected of sympathising with the Jacobites; after all, James Francis was a Catholic, and his restoration would see an end to their burdens under the penal laws. The government took measures to render them unable to assist any Jacobite plot. In May 1722, the High Constable of the Hundred of Cookham, which included the parishes of Binfield and Sunninghill as well as Cookham, was told to ‘make diligent search and enquiry after all Papists, reputed Papists, Non Jurors and other disaffected persons to His Majesty’s Government’. All petty constables had to search Catholic property within their jurisdiction and to seize horses, arms and ammunition of resident Catholics. Furthermore, all Catholics had to appear before the Justices of the Peace at the Bear Inn in Maidenhead on the afternoon of 28 May in order to swear allegiance to King George.³³

It is unknown how rigorously this was carried out. However, according to Dr Stratford, a like event on the following year certainly caused distress. He wrote on 3 August 1723:

‘I find great confusion amongst my neighbours about your last Act for taking the oath or registering. Many women as well as men, who have

forty shillings or three pounds per annum, who never heard of a state oath in their lives, and scarce knew who was King in Israel, are told that they must leave their harvest work and trot fifteen or sixteen miles, to take the oaths and register. The poor creatures are frightened out of their wits.³⁴

It was believed among Jacobite circles that there was a degree of elite support in Berkshire for the Stuart cause. In 1721, the county's two Tory MPs, Robert Packer (1675-1731) of Shellingford and Donnington, and Sir John Stonhouse (c1672-1733) of Radley, were included in a list of potential Jacobite supporters in England in 1721.³⁵ None of them on either instance are known to have been involved in any actual Jacobite activity, however. Another Jacobite was James Bayloss (surname unclear) of Wingfield, heard to say 'God damn the King and all his posterity, I hope to have a new master in a little time'.³⁶

Finally there was the discovery of a cache of weaponry in Reading which was bound for Bristol. Lord Townshend, Secretary of State, issued John Crawford, a King's Messenger, with a warrant on 4 September 1722, informing him that 'I have received information that a considerable quantity of arms and warlike stores has lately been conveyed to Reading and thence towards Bristol ... intended for traitorous purposes'. Crawford was sent to Reading, where he was to be accompanied by a constable and to search for arms and take their owner into custody for questioning.³⁷

Crawford arrived at Reading on the morning of the following day. He arrested both a bargemaster and one William Greenaway who had brought the stores to Reading, which consisted of a parcel of gunpowder and thirteen cases of arms. Greenaway said that the goods were intended for one William Wilders, a waggoner of Thatcham, and who had departed for Bristol.³⁸ Viscount Townshend was pleased with Crawford's work, writing that his subordinate had 'done extremely well'. Townshend believed that 'The principal business is now to get Wilder ... who appears to be principally concerned and can give an account of ye persons for whom the arms and ammunition are conveyed'. A warrant was issued for Wilder's arrest.³⁹

In the end it turned out to be a false alarm. Although Aaron Deane, Wilder's servant, was questioned, he could shed no light on his master's business affairs. In fact, in the light of a letter shortly afterwards from the Mayor of Bristol, it seems that the weaponry was intended for merchants trading with Africans.⁴⁰ Yet this incident does highlight the government's concern with security and the need to investigate any possible incident which might pertain to Jacobite activity.

Hearne records attending a dinner in which Martin Benson (1689-1752), Archdeacon of Berkshire and later Bishop of Gloucester, also attended.

Hearne wrote that Benson was 'a most vile Whig'. He claimed that Benson, on his recent travels on the Continent, had been spying on exiled Jacobites.⁴¹ Benson was a fervent Whig and in 1745 was in Newcastle upon Tyne, and sent information about the state of defences there against a possible Jacobite incursion from Scotland.

After the 1720s, Jacobitism in Berkshire subsided, as was the case nationally, for a couple of decades. Yet with Britain and France at war again, the 1740s saw a revival. A number of Berkshire noblemen and gentry were identified by James Butler in 1743 as sympathetic towards a Jacobite restoration. These were Winchcombe Packer and Penyston Powney, Tory MPs for the county, and John Blagrave and William Strode, Tory MPs for Reading.⁴²

In 1745, the country was once again faced with the possibility of a Jacobite invasion. Although the rebellion began in Scotland in July, it was not until late September, when the news came of the defeat of a small portion of the British army under Sir John Cope at Prestonpans, that many counties, including Berkshire, reacted. Unlike in 1715, the corporations, as well as the county, sent loyal addresses to the King. These were New Windsor, Reading, Wallingford, Wokingham and Maidenhead. The text of these addresses was very similar. That of New Windsor congratulated the King on his safe return from the Continent and for his military success in America. They also said: 'We are too sensible of the many and Great Benefits and Advantages we at present enjoy, and of the certain and Fatal Consequences that must ensue, should the Enemies of our happy constitution succeed.' That of Reading claimed they would 'contribute anything in our power to suppress Popery and Slavery, and to support and defend your Majesty against all opposers'.⁴³

That of Wallingford was very similar. They claimed that their 'Religion, Liberty and prosperity' were the 'most valuable Blessings of this life' and were 'inseparable from your Majesty's Person and Government'. They wrote of 'Rebellious and ungrateful people' making 'so bold and audacious an attempt to subvert our happy establishment' and would do all possible to defeat it.⁴⁴

On 29 September, the Lord Lieutenant, Charles Beauclerk, second Duke of St. Albans, sent messages to his deputies and to the Justices of the Peace in the vicinity of Reading that they should meet on 12 October at Reading Town Hall. He wrote to the King's principal Secretary of State, the Duke of Newcastle, for a commission to enable him to raise men as volunteer troops in order to oppose the rebellion.⁴⁵ An advertisement was put in the county newspaper by William Brookland, clerk of the peace, to remind readers, especially those who were noblemen, gentlemen, clergy and freeholders, to attend.⁴⁶

Loyalties were different in 1745. John Loveday (1711-1789) of Caversham, antiquary and traveller, had been a great friend of Hearne and was himself at least sympathetic towards the Tory cause. Yet on 12 October 1745, he attended the county meeting. This was in order to discuss with other nobility and gentry what should be done to display their support towards George II. Apparently 500 men attended – a large gathering indeed. According to a newspaper report, they ‘unanimously agreed on an Association, to raise 1000 men forthwith to defend His Majesty and the Protestant Religion, against the Pretender and Popish superstition’. Loveday attended the Oxfordshire county meeting three days later.⁴⁷ Other meetings were for the same purpose at Reading Town Hall – on 24 October and 1 November – and a committee was established to ‘Carry into execution the Association entered into’ at previous meetings.⁴⁸ However, we do not know how successful this association was. Many others were created, for example in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, but they only raised a small number of men to fight against the Jacobites. Hertfordshire’s raised less than 100.⁴⁹

It is uncertain whether there were any active Jacobites in the county. Newcastle apparently thought so, having information in his possession about ‘the proceedings of Papists and other Disaffected Persons in Reading which are represented to be very Insolent’, and on 28 September wrote to St. Albans about this matter, wishing him to investigate and report to him.⁵⁰ There were, in fact, few Catholics in Berkshire, and very little property in the county was in Catholic hands in 1715-1720; and in 1767, only between 0.6 and 1% of the population was Catholic.⁵¹

St. Albans found little for Newcastle, informing him that there was one Mrs Morey, a Catholic widow in Reading, who maintained a priest. He did not think he was dangerous – ‘I don’t hear he meddles’ – but he asked Newcastle for advice on how to act in the matter.⁵² Nothing more was heard of the matter. However, three men – William Leach and Thomas Kenton, both of Reading and both bargemen, and John Wiggins, a sawyer of Bradfield – had enlisted in Captain Greenhill’s company of Lord Harcourt’s Foot. They deserted from the army in early December 1745 and a reward of 20 shillings per man was offered. However, their actions may not be indicative of any Jacobitism, but rather discontent with the military life.⁵³ There were no instances of anyone being indicted for making remarks sympathetic towards the Jacobites in 1745 as there had been in 1715.⁵⁴

Security was not seen as important as it was in the north of England. There are only two surviving constables’ accounts for any parish in the county for 1745-46. The Hungerford constable paid for horses to be hired in order to move soldiers’ baggage, and there is a reference for paying for two new watch bills, which may indicate that the constable took part in some

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Charles, second Duke of St Albans at the coronation of George II

form of surveillance duties. The account for Midgham (a tithing of Thatcham parish) gives no indication of any payment which would suggest that anything untoward was occurring in the county. The constable was not called upon to provide men or arms for the militia, nor to make lists of local Catholics, nor to search their property as his peers were doing in the northern counties.⁵⁵

The county appears to have been loyal to George II, according to the evidence available. As in 1715, church bells rang for the King’s birthday, the anniversary of his coronation and on 5 November. Those at Hungerford and St. Mary’s, Reading, certainly did so.⁵⁶ When news came that Stirling Castle had been relieved by the Duke of Cumberland’s forces in early February 1746, the local press noted that in Reading:

‘The Bells rang at all our churches; in the Evening, the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses, met at the Town Hall, from thence they proceeded to the market place, where a large Bonfire was made, & drank the Healths of His Majesty, the Prince [of Wales], the Duke of Cumberland, and several other loyal Healths ... The whole Town was illuminated.’⁵⁷

With the end of the rebellion in 1746, a number of addresses came from the county, to congratulate the King on the success of his arms. Newbury’s in May begged ‘leave to congratulate your Majesty on the late and glorious Victory obtained over the Rebels in Scotland’. Reading’s wished ‘May those admirable virtues in your Majesty, which adorn your Crown, attract the Hearts of all your subjects’. As well as Newbury, Wokingham and Abingdon sent such addresses.⁵⁸

Finally, on 9 October 1746, the day appointed nationally for thanksgiving for the suppression of the rebellion, Reading was the scene of celebrations:

‘Thursday last being appointed a day of Thanksgiving for suppressing the late Rebellion, the same was observed by Ringing of Bells, Bonfires, Illuminations & all other Demonstrations of Joy.’⁵⁹

The defeat of the rebellion was celebrated by bell-ringing in many churches. That of Hungerford rang for ‘ye success of ye Duke [of Cumberland] in Scotland’ and on ‘all ye particular times, viz Thanksgiving days and ye Duke’s birthday’.⁶⁰ At Reading St. Mary, the bells rang ‘when the Duke came through ye Town’.⁶¹ At Chieveley, the accounts noted ‘Gave the Ringers for the Victory at Culloden against the Rebels’.⁶²

The last known instance of Jacobitism in the county occurred in Reading in early November of 1752. According to three soldiers belonging to Huske’s Regiment who were stationed there, one Richard Astley, son of the Jacobite Sir John Astley of Shropshire, was guilty of ‘Treasonable Expressions and Declarations’ against ‘His Majesty and the Royal Family’. Orders were given to have the junior Astley arrested, but he had escaped to France in the meantime.⁶³ It may also be significant that the Revd. George Woodward, Rector of East Hendred, in his letters of 1755-1761 makes no reference to Jacobitism. He does make a reference to the Black Act, when writing about damage done to his garden in 1755, but does not make any remark about Jacobitism.⁶⁴

The evidence for Jacobite sympathy and anti-Jacobitism in Berkshire is limited. It was clearly stronger during the earlier years of George I’s reign than it was in that of his son, when it would appear that Berkshire

Jacobitism was almost non-existent. There was certainly a great deal of suspicion about Berkshire loyalties in 1714-1716 and in the early 1720s, though how well founded this was is open to dispute. Yet, even after Culloden, there was at least one instance of Jacobitism in Berkshire. This mirrors national trends. By 1745, in England, support for the Hanoverian dynasty was far stronger than it was for Jacobitism, at least judging from the evidence of activity in Berkshire.

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From 'white elephant' to town's museum: the changing fortunes of Abingdon's County Hall

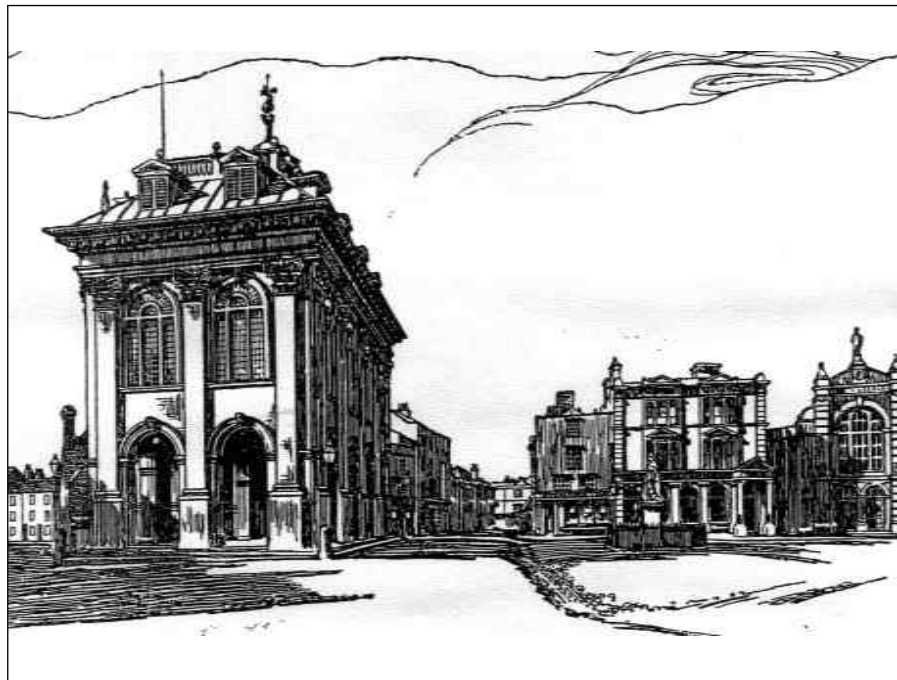
J. Dunleavy

'One of the town's most impressive buildings is the County Hall: not just scenically unique, it is architecturally the finest County Hall, Market Hall, or Session House in all England.'

Nigel Hammond, *The Book of Abingdon*

Abingdon's historian asserts confidently his conviction that the County Hall is unsurpassed among the municipal buildings of this country. He explains how the hall, built between 1678 and 1682, amounted to an emphatic statement by the townspeople of their pride in Abingdon, and an advertisement of the status and wealth of what was then the county town of Berkshire. In addition to serving as a court of law, the building has accommodated meetings of the county authorities, concerts and entertainments, balls and musical functions, election campaign meetings, and public lectures, while the arcaded ground floor still does service as a market hall. County Hall's first floor is home to the town's museum, the windows providing visitors with a grandstand view of the town centre, while those prepared to negotiate the numerous stairs to the balustraded roof are rewarded with a superb view of the town and surrounding countryside. On special occasions the mayor accompanied by councillors can be observed on the roof performing what is known as the 'bun-throwing ceremony', in which small loaves are thrown to members of the public in the Market Square below.¹

For two hundred years or so the Hall was very much the focus of town and county life. Nikolaus Pevsner in his *Berkshire* in the *Buildings of England* series states the 'undertaker' of the building was Christopher Kempster of Burford, one of Wren's associates, though it is not known whether he was the designer. 'Of the free-standing town halls of England with open ground floors this is the grandest,' he writes, and quotes with approval the verdict of Celia Fiennes to the effect that it represents the finest municipal pile in England. Surprisingly few writers dwell on the original *raison d'être* of the hall that was nothing less than Abingdon's assertion that it had first claim to be regarded as the county town of Berkshire. While other



The Market Square, c1900, showing the County Hall, and the Corn Exchange on the extreme right

counties had a clearly recognised principal town, this was not the case in Berkshire. The hall was to provide suitable facilities where the county magistrates, meeting in quarter sessions, might exercise their administrative functions as the county authority for maintaining roads and bridges and other services. In support of its claim to be county town, the townspeople were prepared to go to the expense of building what we call County Hall. A detailed architectural and historical survey of County Hall was made in 1956 by R. Gilyard-Bear. He stated the cellars had been used for a considerable period as a storage warehouse, the ground floor was a covered market, and the first floor had served as a court room. The County Assizes for a considerable period met alternately at Reading and Abingdon until, in 1869, they were transferred permanently to Reading. The removal of the county jail to Reading in the same year signified Abingdon's failure to retain its title as the principal town for county business. County Hall now came to be used mainly for popular entertainments and continued to fulfil this role until 1886. The decision of the borough council to construct a more spacious and accessible amenity to be styled the Corn Exchange caused

promoters of popular entertainments to avoid County Hall, leaving that notable landmark empty and apparently deprived of any useful role.²

The present writer was prompted to delve further into the fate of the County Hall after 1886, since a considerable period of time was to elapse before the building assumed its present function as the town's museum. From time to time suggestions were made as to an alternative use for the hall; for one period it fulfilled a useful role, though this proved to be short-lived. Broadly speaking, the future function of County Hall – leaving aside the lengthy period when it was closed completely – was to be that of education. Having been deemed inconvenient for social gatherings, County Hall came to be considered as suitable for the dissemination of learning. The late nineteenth century saw not only the expansion of elementary education, but also determined efforts led by the government to improve and extend facilities for further and higher education. The promise of aid from taxes to local authorities to provide what was termed technical education induced Abingdon and many other places to bid for a grant for this purpose.³

This was by no means the first attempt to promote further education in Abingdon. During the 1850s, for example, the town boasted both a literary and a mechanics' institute, and, later, a school of art, evening classes in the elementary schools, as well as the occasional course of lectures, though the earlier efforts had foundered for a number of reasons. Inadequate earlier schooling was one reason usually advanced for the failure of these courses to grow, while the fees were beyond the means of some people. Sir George Bowyer, patron-president of the Literary Institute, might contest the view that Abingdonians lacked literary tastes, yet the demise of the institutes and reports in the local press suggest that after a day's work townspeople were more inclined to seek a less cerebral diversion, such as the penny readings, or even the more convivial surroundings of a local inn. With the prospect of more generous funding from public sources to supplement voluntary effort, and a growing realisation that Britain's industrial lead was being challenged as never before by foreign competitors, a change in attitudes at local and national level became discernible in the 1890s.⁴

The Local Government Act of 1888 was the first measure to give authorities power to aid technical education while subsequent measures provided aid from customs and excise revenue, the so-called whisky money, that prompted places like Abingdon to exert themselves through the borough council. The Abingdon Borough Technical Education Committee's request for the use of County Hall was granted, though improvements in the heating and lighting had first to be effected. In fact the adoption of the Technical Instruction Act by the borough provided the County Hall with a new role. The importance of the Hall had diminished markedly with the

transfer of the judicial and civic business elsewhere, while the opening of the Corn Exchange in 1886 had seemed like a death-blow. Social functions and dealings in wheat were now relocated to the new, more commodious and accessible building, leaving County Hall largely abandoned. From time to time it was described as a ‘white elephant’, being little used and earning no revenue. There was some speculation as to what to do with County Hall; the suggestion of Bromley Challoner, the town clerk, that it be adapted for use as a library and museum was one of the more tenable.⁵

Classes in art and what might be termed building crafts commenced in February 1892, although it was not until the autumn of that year that the first full programme was announced. Lacking a technical institute the craft courses in building, carpentry, plumbing, and ironwork, were held in various workshops in the town. County Hall with its generous natural lighting on the first floor proved to be an ideal venue for the art classes conducted by Alexander Macdonald, of the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford. He also used some of the smaller rooms on the top floor. No stranger to Abingdon, Macdonald, a friend and pupil of John Ruskin, had taught classes in the short-lived Abingdon School of Art in the 1860s. In that sense he provided a living link with earlier local attempts to extend educational opportunities. On returning to Abingdon in 1892 he taught classes in the mornings and evenings. The class in Magnetism and Electricity taught by Henry Fathers of Culham College also met at County Hall and the occasional lecture course was held there. The main drawback to the use of County Hall was that of access. This problem was highlighted in a humorous article in the *Abingdon Herald* when a ‘Martha Brown’ described

OPENING OF THE NEW CORN
EXCHANGE

*By permission and under the patronage of the Worshipful
The Mayor and Corporation*

A CONCERT

Will be given by the

ABINGDON MUSICAL ASSOCIATION,

On FRIDAY APRIL 30th, 1886.

ROMBERG'S

“LAY OF THE BELL,”

And selections from HAYDN'S

“SEASONS.”

.....

MISS FANNY MOODY Soprano

MAJOR J. COLEBROOKS CARTER Bass

Full Band and Chorus

Admission—Front Seats, 2s. 6d. Second Seats, 1s.

Back Seats, 6d.

Concert to commence at 8 o'clock.

[Text source *Abingdon Herald*, April 24, 1886, p.4]

The old ... and the new. Two advertisements from Abingdon Herald, 1886, referring to (a) the first concert to be held in the new Corn Exchange, and (b) one of the last popular entertainments in the County Hall.

COUNTY HALL, ABINGDON
(By Permission of the Worshipful the Mayor).
SPECIAL ATTRACTION FOR ONE NIGHT
ONLY,

TUESDAY, MAY 4th, 1886.

MR. C.H. HAWTREY'S

CELEBRATED COMEDY COMPANY,

From the Globe Theatre, London.

THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Adapted from Von Moser's "Der Bibliothekar," by
C.H. Hawtrely.

The Phenomenal Success of the London and New York
Season's, represented at the Globe Theatre, London, to
crowded houses, 785 times.

And now playing to crowded houses at the Madison
Square Theatre, New York City.

Admission. - Reserved Seats, 3s; Second Seats, 2s.;
Back Seats (limited), 1s.

Tickets to be had and Reserved Seats secured at Mr.
Hughes, Market place, where a Plan of the Hall can be
seen.

Doors open at 7.30. Commence at 8. Carriages at 10.15.

[Text source *Abingdon Herald*, May 1, 1886, p.4]

how, ignoring the ridicule of her sceptical husband, she managed to join what she termed the ‘teknerkul chemistry’ class but only after negotiating several hundred stairs. Not only was she apprehensive about the mysteries of chemistry, but likened the physical effort of reaching the classroom to a pilgrimage, and much more demanding than tackling the steps in the Monument, the Tower, or even St Paul's Cathedral. Clearly, technical education was not for the faint-hearted. In Abingdon the students were to be not only mentally inquisitive but physically fit.⁶

Opinion with regard to the introduction of technical education generally was favourable, if the local press notices are a reliable indicator. One warm supporter of the innovation was the incumbent of St Helen's, who, in a bid to allay the sceptics, threw down a challenge to the doubters who had sneered ‘Technical education won't succeed: Abingdon people won't take it up.’ ‘Let's prove them wrong!’ declared the Rev. R.C.F. Griffith, vicar of Abingdon. Yet technical education was a term difficult to define: it was (the vicar admitted sometime later) ‘a vast subject to grapple with: in fact he had never heard a true description of it. The subject was unlimited.’ Over the next few years, Abingdonians were to be offered a variety of classes under the umbrella of technical education. In the first full session, for instance, in addition to art and science in County Hall, classes in building construction, carpentry, plumbing and ironwork appeared in the programme. Not all proved to be successful, and were replaced in later sessions by other subjects such as domestic science and shorthand. The taught courses were supplemented by short courses of lectures, such as those promoted by the Gilchrist Trust. Borrowing an idea from the old mechanics' institutes, it was believed public lectures stimulated curiosity about scientific and specialised subjects and might induce the hearers to enrol in organised courses of study.⁷

Further evidence that interest in education was deepening is apparent with the revival of the plan for a free or public library. Such a scheme had first been mooted in 1859, when the Charity Commissioners approved a plan submitted to them by the local charity, Christ's Hospital. Christ's allocated £1,000 towards a library and news-room, and four years later sought what they considered to be suitable accommodation by the Queen's Hotel. For some reason this was not realised, Abingdonians having to rely instead on the semi-public libraries of the mechanics' and literary institutes, or the commercial lending libraries. Initially, the borough displayed little interest in the legislation providing for rate-supported public libraries, while a generous donation towards a library offered by Algernon Herbert in 1869 was declined. The idea was aired yet again in 1887, a library being deemed by some to be a suitable memorial to commemorate Queen Victoria's jubilee, but majority opinion voted for a 'knife and fork' celebration instead. Four years later, with the imminent introduction of technical education to the town, Bromley Challoner, the town clerk, suggested enclosing the ground floor of County Hall for use as a library. However, it was not until 1891 that an initiative launched by Christ's Hospital resulted in the establishment of what was termed the Free Library. The estimated cost, between £1,700 and £1,800, was accepted by the governors of Christ's Hospital. The Borough Council, having adopted the Library Act, resolved to allocate £150 annually towards the Library which finally opened its doors in 1896.⁸

Meanwhile, given that the nature of the beast had never been defined, it is not surprising that other educational institutions should seek a share of the technical education budget. At Abingdon the most insistent requests for a share of the funds came from Roysse's School. The school's request for aid towards its science classes resulted in the committee granting it £27. Subsequent requests from the same school over the next few years for additional grants towards the teaching of scientific subjects resulted in a total of £750 of unspent funds from the Technical Education Committee going to Roysse's. There were precedents: Wantage School had already received grants exceeding £200 from Berkshire County Council, although at Abingdon, a minority of the members of the local committee maintained that the whole of the grant should be devoted to the technical education classes under their direct control. This controversy, between the advocates of popular education being controlled by elected representatives, and those who felt that part of the public funds should be diverted to the support of an endowed grammar school, is of interest for the light it throws on class feeling at that period. Most Abingdonians had to be content with an elementary education for their children in one of the town's voluntary

schools. Roysse's, among the older schools of England, drew a significant number of its pupils from outside Abingdon. It was perceived by some as belonging to a privileged section of society who were now demanding part of the technical education budget to improve facilities at the grammar school.⁹

The operation of the classes managed by the Technical Education Committee (TEC) proved to be so unsatisfactory in respect of numbers enrolled and actual attendance that the committee decided to suspend all classes (except dressmaking) following the end of the 1895 session. One member stated that Berkshire County Council felt they were not getting good value for the amounts spent by urban authorities: 'This was especially true of Abingdon. The amount spent per pupil in the several classes working out at a very high figure.' He thought better value might be realised if Roysse's School established a science school with a limited number of scholarships funded by the TEC for boys attending local elementary schools. County Hall, in the meantime, would be used as a place to store the equipment and furniture acquired by the TEC until such times as classes might be resumed.¹⁰

Over the following few years the funds at the disposal of the TEC were devoted to offering scholarships for elementary school pupils who had passed a selective examination enabling them to attend a secondary school; providing financial assistance for apprentices, trainees and pupil teachers who were undertaking part-time studies (most of these courses were available in Oxford); and occasional lecture courses dealing mainly, though not exclusively, with agriculture and allied subjects. When the powers of the TEC were subsumed in the Berkshire County Education Committee in 1903, it was obvious that Abingdon's attempts to introduce what it perceived to be technical education in the town had met with only limited success. This was due partly to the fact that provision of that branch of education by a small authority such as Abingdon was not really viable. What is more, even though at the outset the TEC had established courses in what it clearly conceived to be the spirit of the Technical Instruction Acts, Abingdon found that the government department responsible, the Science and Art Department at South Kensington, was biased in favour of science. This helps explain how South Kensington apparently raised no objection to the Abingdon TEC diverting the equivalent of three years annual grant to Roysse's School, enabling that institution to enhance its science courses.¹¹

If a building appears to serve no useful purpose, it is likely to be neglected, fall into disrepair, and, unless a benefactor or an environmentally-conscious council accepts responsibility, sooner or later it will be demolished. While the last-mentioned drastic step was never apparently contemplated, there were long periods when the 'white elephant'

was sadly ignored. Renewed interest in the building became discernible in 1926 when the state of the hall was the subject for discussion at a series of borough council meetings. It was resolved to call for an investigation and report on the situation. Growing concern about the state of the building had prompted the council in 1926 to call for an investigation and report on the situation. What had been described by the Office of Works as ‘an architectural gem’ had fallen into a dilapidated condition. Messrs. West, the architects, suggested something like £1,500 was needed to make good the faults in the building after years of neglect. Others, more pessimistic, estimated a figure nearer to £2,000 would be more realistic. The Office of Works, having praised County Hall for its architectural merits, asserted ‘[it] was probably unsurpassed by any structure of its kind in the kingdom’. It was, however, unable to provide any material aid but was prepared to offer advice. When the experts reported towards the end of the year, the extent of dilapidation was revealed, and a wide range of problems highlighted. The roof, for instance, was in urgent need of attention, while the indoor gas pipes and fittings should go. Some windows needed repair while others needed to be replaced. The unsightly pipes on the tower, placed there to link a water cistern with an engine in the basement, should be removed.¹²

Whichever report people chose to accept, the amounts quoted for the restoration were substantial for a community the size of Abingdon. For this reason the mayor urged the need for a county-wide appeal, given that the building had served the needs of Berkshire for many years. Curiously, the publicity for the appeal made no mention of the use to which the hall might be put after all the work had been accomplished. The mayor (Councillor Godfrey) maintained that the object of the council, supplemented by the efforts of the restoration appeal committee headed by the Earl of Abingdon, should be to ‘restore the old County Hall and put it back into such a state that it would serve some useful purpose’. It is not unusual for work on buildings of this vintage to over-run estimates in terms of time and cost. What is more, while the work was in progress, some thought and discussion took place as to a possible role for the building and, in the apparent absence of any other suggestion, a home for the museum eventuated.¹³

Under the headline ‘ABINGDON MUSEUM OPENED. MAYOR PERFORMS CEREMONY AT COUNTY HALL,’ readers of the *North Berkshire Herald*, dated 5 July 1931, learned that the town had finally got its museum. The project had come through a long gestation period, and reading the press account it is obvious much remained to be done before the plans of the promoters were fully realised. Probably because of this, the opening ceremony was a low-key affair attended by some members of the council and ‘a few others’. Councillor Godfrey, a long-time advocate of the museum,

explained they had no wish to compete with the national or university museums, but instead have exhibits of a local character. Those attending the opening on perusing the exhibits noted a diverse number of items, such as spectacles, keys, tinder-boxes, stirrups, sheep bells, and a man-trap. Local regimental and civic uniforms were on display alongside old prints, swords, tiles, and ‘an interesting collection of buns, now varnished, which were broadcast from the Hall on coronation and jubilee days’. The museum’s collection represented donations of items made over the years, notably by two individuals in particular, the architect John G. T. West, and a general practitioner, Dr Paulin Martin (both of whom were dead). The former had also been instrumental in arranging the cases, while Dr Martin had donated casts of reptiles and fossils. The task of arranging the collections had fallen to Mr O. Wright, and since the work of unpacking and classifying all specimens was incomplete, the catalogue would not be published for some time.¹⁴

Like most buildings of this vintage, repair and maintenance proved to be a constant concern. In the early 1950s a further restoration was undertaken. While the work was in progress, there were those who once again raised the issue of the future use of the Hall. Essentially, they indicated, in voicing their concerns, that the building might be used more efficiently, certainly more than serving solely as a museum. Some argued it might be adapted for use as the town’s library, the High Street premises being no longer adequate to serve the needs of a growing town, while another school of thought maintained it should revert to its original function, that of a court of justice. These suggestions were dismissed, the practical problems associated with such proposals having been recognised even in Victorian times. The question of access would always prevent some from attending functions, while there was the matter of the need for an additional fire exit.¹⁵

The completion of restoration work in 1956 coincided with the celebration of the four-hundredth anniversary of the Borough’s charter. The re-opening ceremony, in marked contrast to the original opening in 1931, had an additional interest in that the Queen came to preside. Queen Elizabeth II had an opportunity to observe the ‘bun throwing’ ceremony, no earlier event ever having attracted a monarch. Given the nature of the building, the museum, since its reopening, has defined its role as that of a selective museum (many of its exhibits being kept in storage), with flexible fittings that can be adapted for visiting displays and exhibitions.¹⁶

Notes and references

1 N. Hammond, *The book of Abingdon* (Buckingham, 1979), p. 61. M. Cox, *Abingdon Museum: a guide* (Woodstock, Oxon., n.d.), passim. P. Gale, *Pride of*

Place: the story of Abingdon's County Hall (2006) esp ch. 7. Gale states that bun-throwing is believed to date back to the coronation of George IV in 1821, and the ceremony has been maintained since then, marking royal or civic events.

2 N Pevsner, *Berkshire* (1969), p. 56. J. Simmons, *A selective guide to England* (1979), pp. 33-5. R. Gilyard-Beer, *The County Hall, Abingdon* [1956] passim. From the outset, County Hall (to give it its modern name) served two functions: an assize court and a market hall. Shire Hall was sometimes used in Victorian times.

3. *Abingdon Herald*, 16 May, 1 August 1891. Technical education was stimulated in the 1890s by two measures. The Technical Instruction Act 1889 (amended 1891) permitted local authorities to raise a penny rate in support of technical instruction, while the Local Taxation (Customs and Excise) Act of 1891 made funds raised by duties on drink (popularly known as 'whisky money') available to promote technical education. Berkshire County Council acted as agent for the government in making these funds available to local councils such as Abingdon. M. Argles, *South Kensington to Robbins: an account of English technical and scientific education since 1851* (1964).

4 J. Dunleavy, 'Leisure and learning in Victorian Abingdon,' *Oxfordshire Local History*, v. 1, no. 8 (Spring, 1984) pp. 2-10. Also, 'The mechanics' institutes of the home counties: the two Abingdon societies compared', *The Vocational Aspect of Education*, v. XXXVII, no. 96 (April, 1985) pp. 17-22. *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 2 February 1856.

5 J. Townsend, *A history of Abingdon* (London, 1910) p. 141. *Abingdon Herald*, 16 May, 6 June 1891, 10 May 1902. Challoner suggested County Hall be converted into use as a library and museum by enclosing the arcades. Sufficient room at ground level could be found for a library and reading room, while the first floor could be used as a museum.

6 *Abingdon Herald*, 5 March, 15 Oct. 1892. *Reading Mercury*, 20 January 1866. K. Garlic, *The Ruskin Drawing School under Sydney Carline and his staff* (Oxford, 1977) p. iv.

7 *Abingdon Herald*, 1 August 1891, 6, 27 February 1892.

8 *Abingdon Herald*, 30 May, 6 June 1891. J. Smith, 'Abingdon Library – the first hundred years' (Typescript in Abingdon Library, ABN 027 SMI. N.d.). Herbert's generous offer towards defraying the cost of providing public libraries in Berkshire would have amounted to £150 in the case of Abingdon. *Abingdon Herald*, 9 August 1869.

9 *Abingdon Herald*, 4, 11, 18, 25 Nov. 1893, 23 March 1901. The anomalies inherent in the TI Acts were highlighted by the Revd R. S. G. Edwards, who pointed out that while the legislation prohibited any part of the grant being diverted to elementary schools, aid could be applied to what he termed 'the schools of the classes.'

10 Borough of Abingdon, Minutes of the Committee for Technical Instruction, 1896, 22 July, 11 September 1896.

11 *Ibid*, 9 Oct. 1899, 26 July 1900, 21 Sept. 1901, 14 Feb. 1902. Evening classes, concentrating mainly on commercial subjects, were provided by the Berkshire County Education Committee, at the Council School in Ock Street. *Berkshire Education Committee. Directory of Secondary and Higher Education, 1911-12*

(Reading, 1911) p. 73. Art classes continued to be held at County Hall until the session 1911-12.

12 The term 'white elephant' was applied to the hall in an editorial in the *Abingdon Herald*, 10 May 1902. *North Berks Herald*, 5 February, 22 October, 24 December 1926. Gale, *Pride of place*, ch. 7 is extremely informative on this subject.

13 *North Berks Herald*, 5 July 1931. *Borough of Abingdon Public Library and Museum Committee, Museum (County Hall)* (Abingdon, n.d. [1935]).

14 *North Berks Herald*, 28 May, 22 Oct., 24 Dec. 1926.

15 *North Berks Herald*, 27 January 1956.

16 *North Berks Herald*, 26 October, 2 November 1956 (Supplements).

Fair Mile Hospital, Cholsey, 1870-1948

Kate Tyte

Fair Mile Hospital served as Berkshire's mental hospital between 1870 and 2003, and was situated in Cholsey.

Creating the Asylum

The County Asylums Act 1808 allowed local authorities to create public asylums, but it was not mandatory to do so. Most counties did not therefore make any special provision for the mentally ill, who were usually cared for by their families, or in workhouses or prisons.¹

The Lunatics Act 1845 compelled all counties to make provision for the treatment of their 'pauper lunatics', and made this the responsibility of the local magistrates.² The Berkshire magistrates responded by contracting out the care of the mentally ill to Oxfordshire's newly built Littlemore Asylum. By 1867 this was no longer adequate for Berkshire's needs, so the county magistrates formed a union with the magistrates of the Boroughs of Reading and Newbury, and appointed a Committee of Visitors to oversee the creation and management of a new asylum. The Committee purchased land in the parish of Cholsey, close to Moulsoford Railway Station, and began building work that year. The Moulsoford Asylum, as it was first called, opened in September 1870 and the first patients were transferred from Littlemore. In 1897 its name was changed to the Berkshire Lunatic Asylum, and at some point between 1915 and 1920 (the exact date is unclear) its name was changed again to the Berkshire Mental Hospital.

Like many contemporary asylums it was situated in an isolated rural spot, thought to be soothing for the patients, and to limit the possibility of escapes. The proximity to the railway station was an essential factor because of the large quantities of coal that had to be delivered to such a big institution.³

It was designed in typical style by C. H. Howell of Islington (1824–1905), the leading asylum architect of the time.⁴ It had a central administrative block, with separate wings accommodating the patients, who were strictly sex segregated in dormitories to the left and right of the central blocks. The complex had various outbuildings, including a boiler room, workshops, bakery, laundry, chapel, gatehouse, and outlying farms and gardens. Each ward had a single corridor running its whole length, with sleeping accommodation on one side. These corridors were used as day rooms and

enabled the staff to continually observe the patients.⁵ This feature of asylum design was partly a practical consideration, and partly influenced by Jeremy Bentham's concept of the panopticon: the idea that continual surveillance could induce people to 'survey' themselves and therefore learn to behave in accordance with the social norms.⁶

The asylum was managed by the Medical Superintendent, who also attended to the patients. The onsite facilities and large range of auxiliary staff meant that the asylum functioned as an almost self-sufficient community. In 1873 the farm saved the asylum a great deal of money by producing 575lbs of butter, 1832 gallons of milk, 2137 gallons of skimmed milk, 6436lbs of pork, 491lbs of veal, 41 fowls, 744 eggs, 237 sacks of potatoes, and vegetables worth £94 7s 7d.⁷



The lodge, photographed in 2001

Patient care

Many of the asylum's patients did not have what we would now consider to be mental illnesses, but most of them obviously needed care.

James Willoughby, a 75-year-old agricultural labourer from Wantage was admitted on 11 February 1888 suffering from senile dementia. He had been ill for two years and in the workhouse for one week. He was very thin, weighing only 8½ stone, 'feeble and helpless', suffering from memory loss and unable to say where he was or how long he had been there. He died on 29 March that year after an illness lasting a few hours, the cause said to be 'senile decay'.⁸ The asylum admitted a large proportion of elderly patients, and many of them died soon after arrival like this, particularly if they had been in the workhouse, where they had often endured neglect and a punitive regime.

The asylum frequently admitted people with serious learning disabilities such as Mary Lewington, who was 9 years old when she entered the hospital on 5 October 1888 and remained there until she died in 1898, aged 18. She had been a 'congenital imbecile' since birth and suffered from frequent epileptic fits. She had little awareness of danger and had been run over by a horse and cart, breaking her leg, and burnt herself several times. The asylum did not have separate children's wards, which was a cause for concern amongst the staff and inspectors. Mary's case notes say that she could not be taught to read, sew, or do much for herself, and that she was

TABLE X.
Showing the probable Causes, Apparent or Assigned, of the Disorder, in the Admissions, Discharges, and Deaths of the Year 1882.

CAUSES.	The Admissions.			The Discharges.			The Deaths.					
				Recovered.			Removed, Relieved, or otherwise.					
	Males.	Females.	Total.	Males.	Females.	Total.	Males.	Females.	Total.			
MORAL:												
Anxiety for Family	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
Death of Husband	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
Domestic Trouble...	...	2	2	1	1	2	...	...	1	
Excitement after Imprisonment	1	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Fright	...	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	1
Fright from Assault	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
Over-Study	2	...	2	...	...	...	...	...	1
Over-Taxed Brain	1	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	1
Over-Work	2	...	2	1	...	1	...	...	1	
Religious Excitement	...	4	4	2	...	2	...	...	...
Reverse of Circumstances	...	2	2	...	...	...	1	1	...
Worry	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
PHYSICAL:												
Amenorrhœa	...	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Brain Disease	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
Change of Life	...	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Climate of India	1	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	2
Congenital	5	4	9	...	1	1	...	...	2	
Epilepsy	2	2	4	...	1	1	...	3	2			
Hereditary	4	9	13	1	2	3	1	1	2			
Hyperlactation	...	1	1	...	2	2	...	...	1	
Injury to Head	5	...	5	2	...	2	...	...	1	
Intemperance	12	4	16	3	1	4	...	...	5	
Masturbation	...	...	...	1	...	1	...	...	...
Old Age	...	1	1	...	...	...	...	...	1
Paralysis	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1
Predisposition	2	5	7	1	1	2	...	...	2	
Premature Labour	...	...	...	1	1	...	...	...	...
Puerperal State	...	3	3	...	2	2	...	...	...
Rheumatic Fever	1	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Scarlet Fever	1	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Sun-stroke	2	...	2	...	...	...	...	...	...
Unknown	29	28	57	1	5	6	1	1	2			
Total	70	68	138	13	17	30	2	3	5	29	26	55

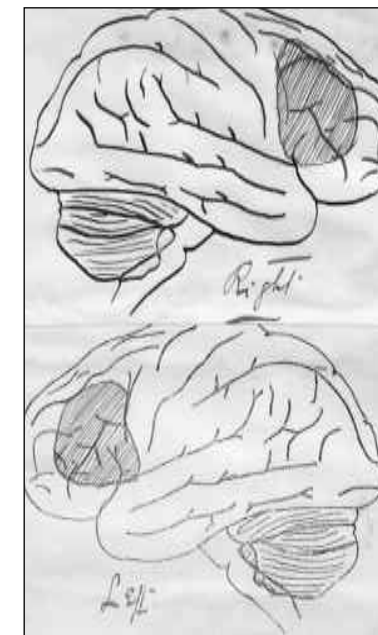
Table of probable causes of insanity, from the 1882 annual report

'hopeless' and 'incapable of improvement.' She died on 18 May 1898, after suffering from typhoid fever for two weeks.⁹ The asylum was plagued by outbreaks of typhoid, caused by contaminated sewage entering the drinking water supply, until the 1920s. Cases were often fatal, and occurred almost

every year, reaching epidemic levels when the asylum was overcrowded. The plumbing was remodelled in 1886 and 1896 and new wells were dug in 1883 and 1889 in various attempts to overcome this problem, but with little effect. Staff and patients were vaccinated against the disease from 1897, and in 1913 the Royal Institute of Public Health was called in to investigate, with inconclusive results.¹⁰

A significant proportion of patients had tertiary syphilis. William Woods was admitted on 8 June 1887 with textbook symptoms of this disease, including a characteristic shuffling gait, unequal pupils and no patellar reflex. Untreated syphilis can cause degeneration of the spinal cord, tremors, seizures, dementia and delusions. Once it has reached this stage it is fatal, but after the Second World War the mass production of penicillin rendered it very rare. Woods was violent, incoherent, used foul language, had delusions such as believing that he owned a great deal of property, and saw and heard imaginary things. He had periods of incontinence, and was sometimes violent and destructive. On 17 December he went home on trial at the request of his family, but was brought back to the asylum on 9 January 1888, as he was too difficult for them to manage. He gradually became immobile and died from 'general paralysis' on the 27 December 1889.¹¹

The asylum frequently admitted women suffering from mental and physical health problems associated with childbirth. 43-year-old Mary Holland was admitted from the Reading workhouse on 12 September 1887, where she had been for two weeks following the birth of her sixth child. She had mania caused by puerperal fever, a post-natal infection. This was one of the main causes of female deaths in Victorian Britain, but with modern standards of hygiene it is virtually unknown, and easily cured with antibiotics. She had a fever, for which she was treated with quinine, complained of abdominal pain, and had swollen legs. She was noisy, excitable and delusional, believing her baby was dead, when in fact the child was healthy. She also refused food, spitting it out or taking an hour to eat a single mouthful. She gradually



Sketches from the post-mortem book, 1885

recovered and was discharged on 23 February 1888.¹²

The asylum could offer little effective medical treatment for mental illness, or for many physical illnesses, but followed the system of 'moral treatment'. This was a humane regime in which patients were offered basic medical care and nursing, a nourishing diet, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and encouraged to work around the asylum if they were well enough.

It was hoped that by removing the patients from their everyday cares, constantly observing them, keeping them occupied, and offering them increased trust and rewards for good behaviour, many of them could be 'persuaded' back to a sane, sober existence of moral values and a Victorian work ethic. Patients were rarely restrained in strait jackets or padded cells, and every instance of such restraint had to be meticulously recorded by order of the Commissioner in Lunacy in the Register of Mechanical Restraint.

Patients' work was sex-segregated, with male patients working outside on the farms or in the gardens, or in the shoemaking or upholstery workshops. Female patients worked in the laundry, the kitchens, and sewed thousands of items for the use of the asylum. In 1871 alone female patients sewed 1070 items, hemmed 2555 items, marked 5385 items with initials, and repaired 6846 items.¹³

There was also a varied programme of entertainments including cricket and football for the men, tennis lessons for the women, outdoor tea dances, evening dances, theatrical and musical performances, a choir and band, and supervised walks outside the grounds on Sundays. In 1872 the asylum cricket team actually won a match against Cholsey cricket club.¹⁴ The patients were also provided with a library, newspapers, pianos and bagatelle tables. In 1884 the asylum took 106 patients on a trip to Wallingford agricultural show.¹⁵

As we have seen, the moral treatment regime could do little for

the elderly, learning disabled, or severely ill, but was surprisingly effective at rehabilitating many of its patients enough to return home. By 1913 the asylum had admitted a total of 5448 patients, 1697 of whom recovered and were discharged.¹⁶

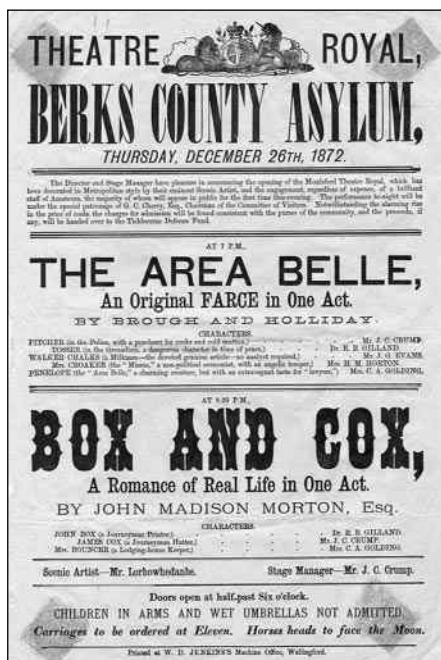
The hospital also admitted a number of 'malingerers,' usually tramps, vagrants and petty criminals who preferred the asylum to the alternatives of prison or the workhouse. John Hewitt was admitted on 15th November 1880, the police having found him loitering around the bank in Newbury and gazing in at the window. He remained in police custody for one night, but the police were unable to ascertain any information about him. He told the police, and later the doctor, that he was an illegitimate son of King George III, the governor of the Bank of England, and the brother of Baroness Burdett-Coutts of Coutts Bank, and said that he could draw a cheque for a million pounds. However, information was received that he had previously been turned out of several asylums as an impostor. After questioning he admitted to this fact, excusing himself by saying 'when I get a little drink I go wrong'. He was discharged on 21 December.¹⁷ The Medical Superintendent complains of several more malingerers in his annual reports, stating in 1898 that there was '[...] a class who find their way into Asylums during the winter stress and hardship, "recovering" in early spring to renew their life of freedom on the road'.¹⁸

Staff

The asylum employed nursing, clerical, and a whole range of skilled and unskilled auxiliary staff. These included a farm bailiff, farm labourers, gardeners, an engineer, a gasman, porters, cooks, kitchen and laundry maids, a baker, a needlewoman, a shoemaker, carpenters, bricklayers, and stokers (their job being to shovel coal into the furnaces needed to fuel the hot water supply, under-floor heating, and steam-driven kitchen and laundry apparatus).¹⁹ In 1912 the asylum bought a mechanical stoking device to replace these men.²⁰

Most of the staff lived on site or in purpose-built cottages nearby. In addition to wages they received uniforms, board and lodging, or an allowance of farm produce to take home, so they had virtually everything they needed provided for them. This was just as well because nursing staff were expected to work from 6am to 8pm, six days a week, and from 6am to 6pm on Sundays. They were allowed just one Sunday off a month, starting at 10am, and one week's annual holiday, on reduced pay.²¹

Staff recruitment and retention was a continual problem for the hospital, especially amongst female nursing staff, partly because of the long hours and demanding nature of the work, and partly because female staff almost



Poster for theatrical entertainment at the asylum, 1872

always left upon marriage. Staff wages were gradually increased through the years, and staff dining rooms and recreation rooms were added, along with a billiard table in 1890.²² Dr Murdoch commented that raising the wages and introducing indoor entertainments could do little to combat the disadvantages of an isolated and dull position.²³

The chaplains appear to have either loved or hated working at the asylum. Some of the chaplains left quickly, often after a year or less, with the Revd A.D. Crake (chaplain 1886-1887) first complaining about the poor condition of the road between Cholsey and the asylum, and then leaving, finding the work 'not to his taste'.²⁴ However, some of the chaplains threw themselves into asylum life with gusto. The Revd F.T.S. Dyer (chaplain 1896-1910), played in the band, worked in the library, and succeeded in getting the Visitors' Committee to give him an annual allowance for the purchase of new library books.²⁵

The Medical Superintendents also had varying attitudes towards their profession. Dr Doughty (Medical Superintendent 1886-1892) was liberal and optimistic in his approach to patient care. He believed that poverty, rather than immorality, was the primary cause of mental illness. He stated that the majority of the patients admitted had physical illnesses, that alcoholism was a symptom of mental illness rather than a cause, and that the majority of patients had had 'an insufficiency rather than an excess of the luxuries of life'.²⁶ He advised that swift admission to the asylum was the best way to cure a patient.²⁷

Dr Murdoch (Medical Superintendent 1892-1918) was far more pessimistic. In contrast to Dr Doughty, he found that alcoholics were 'irresponsible' and complained that 'the cost to the country in maintaining their degenerate progeny is enormous'.²⁸ He stated that those with congenital defects, or who had ever been asylum patients, should not be allowed to have children, as their children were certain to be 'defective', but lamented that 'state interference as regards marriage is I fear out of the question under present-day ideas as to the liberty of the subject, but much might be done however in educating the masses in this matter'.²⁹ He obviously subscribed to the fashionable idea of 'degeneration': an inversion of evolutionary theory taken up to explain the growth in the asylum population. It suggested that mental illnesses and learning disabilities were hereditary conditions that got worse with each generation, unless they were halted by eugenic measures.

The growth in patient numbers

The asylum was designed to accommodate 285 patients, and was full to capacity within its first year. After that the numbers of patients simply grew

and grew, with excess numbers of patients often being housed in the infirmary wards.³⁰

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total number of patients</i>
1870/1	281
1875	343
1880	501
1885	550
1890	601
1896	659
1900	766
1905	880
1910	928

Why did the numbers of patients increase so much at asylums all over England? Doctors and administrators debated this question at the time, and historians continue to do so. The asylum was extended between 1878 and 1880 because Oxfordshire bought out Berkshire's remaining share in the Littlemore Asylum, creating an influx of patients. In 1896 the magistrates of the Borough of New Windsor applied to join the Berkshire union, and the asylum was extended again to accommodate this.³²

The increase in the catchment area, however, could not fully explain the increase. Dr Murdoch, as we have seen, believed that the population was degenerating. Others argued that the numbers of chronically ill patients with little hope of recovery caused a 'backlog', filling up the asylums. The first year's admissions included 30 patients over the age of 60 and suffering from dementia, 17 'idiots', 14 with epilepsy, and a number with tertiary syphilis.³³ In 1897 the increasingly desperate Dr Murdoch states that 'out of the whole 623 patients in the asylum only 23 can reasonably hope to be cured'.³⁴ The asylum had a tendency to become a great warehouse for storing those that no one else wanted to care for, rather than a curative institution.

Another argument is that the presence of the asylum itself, by offering an alternative to home care or the workhouse, tended to decrease people's tolerance for their dependent and helpless relatives. In 1896 Dr Murdoch voiced this theory stating that 'asylums are now looked upon not only as hospitals for the treatment of mental disease, but as nursing homes for demented and aged, and as houses of detention for Idiots and Imbeciles'.³⁵

Fair Mile in wartime

During the First World War additional patients were transferred to the asylum from other hospitals, such as the Sussex County Asylum, when these were taken over as military hospitals. This also happened during the Second World War, when the hospital reached its greatest size, accommodating over 1,400 patients, as patients were transferred from Brookwood Hospital in Surrey, Great Yarmouth Naval Hospital, Norfolk, and Hill End Hospital in St Albans, Hertfordshire.³⁶

As well as having to accommodate more patients, the hospital struggled with a reduced number of male staff as many of them were called up for military service. The Medical Superintendent attended many tribunals to try to get staff members exempted from active military service. By 1918 37 male employees had joined up, 2 had been given medals, 7 had been wounded and 4 had been killed.³⁷ The War also brought some unusual patients to Fair Mile, including two German prisoners of war in November 1914, which understandably caused tensions with the other patients.³⁸

During World War II there were similar issues and the First Medical Assistant, Dr William Ogden, left to join the Army Medical Corps, before returning in 1945 to take up the position of Medical Superintendent.³⁹ Staff shortages also meant that many secretarial and clerical positions, previously only held by men, were taken up by women, and the hospital's first female doctor, Dr Beryl Senneck, became the Assistant Medical Officer in 1945.⁴⁰

Incorporation into the National Health Service

In 1948 the hospital was incorporated into the NHS and its name was changed to Fair Mile Hospital. More effective methods of treatment, higher standards of living and general health, and the care in the community programme gradually led to a reduction in patient numbers, so that by the 1990s there were only approximately 300 patients remaining at Fair Mile. In 2003 Fair Mile closed, as it no longer provided appropriate accommodation, and the remaining patients were transferred to newly built facilities at Prospect Park, Reading.

The early asylum consisted of an isolated and almost self-sufficient community, offering 'moral treatment' to patients who were likely to be seriously ill from old age or physical diseases, and who were largely untreatable at the time. The asylum provided patients with basic health care and fulfilled their physical needs, but also provided for their emotional well being through work, exercise, entertainment and the provision of the chapel. The regime and the attitudes of the Medical Superintendents reflect contemporary values as much as available medical care, with the emphasis on morality, restraint, and a strong work ethic. Changing methods of care,

such as the care in the community movement, continued to reflect not only medical advances, but also changing values, as the curative power of huge institutions came to be questioned.

The Fair Mile archive

Following the award of a grant from the Wellcome Trust in 2005 Berkshire Record Office catalogued and conserved the records of Berkshire's former mental hospital, the Fair Mile Hospital, Cholsey, 1870 – 1980, and made these available for research. An online catalogue is available on the access to archives website, www.a2a.org.uk. A gallery containing images taken from the collection is available <http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk/collections/gallery.htm>. Researchers should note that there will access restrictions on some records to protect patient confidentiality.

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- 28 Annual report 1902, BRO Q/AL 12/6.
- 29 Annual report 1903, BRO Q/AL 12/6.
- 30 Taken from tables in the annual reports.
- 31 There is no surviving annual report for 1895.
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- 34 Annual report 1897 BRO Q/AL 12/5.
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Berkshire County Council Building Contracts, 1892-1939

Jeremy Taylor

Introduction

This article describes a series of contracts for about 270 projects, held at Berkshire Record Office, between Berkshire County Council and various firms, for the construction and maintenance of County property, 1892-1939 (collection reference C/CL/L2/1-270). The projects are varied and relate to most Berkshire civil parishes, but are dominated by building- and highway-related works, on which this article focuses. They are considered in terms of project range, procedure, documents and information conveyed. Architects and contractors are surveyed and research uses suggested. Examples are given to show the range and structure of the files.

Range

The series described here is now about 60 per cent of its original size, following weeding of repetitive material (some samples have been retained). The following table, based on the remaining files, shows the range of projects.

County buildings	162
Dwellings	1
Educational establishments or similar	67
Farm projects	36
Hospitals	2
Police buildings	26
Public assistance institutions	20
Buildings of special interest	3
Other	7
Highways and bridges	102
Bridges	90
By-pass construction	2
Re-surfacing	1
Culverts, drains etc	9

Other	5
Contracts relating to more than one subject	3
TOTAL	272

‘Buildings of special interest’ include the Council’s offices in Reading – the County Offices, Assize Court and no. 1 Abbot’s Walk (C/CL/L2/1, 36, 179), and cottages abutting the medieval Abbey Wall (C/CL/L2/139). ‘Other’ comprises a school taxi service, printing of electoral registers, erection of telegraph equipment, educational supplies and a purchase of land.

Procedure and documents

Contracts were authorised by meetings of council committees, usually Highways and Bridges, Finance, Education and Smallholdings. Procedure corresponds with the sections of each file.

For each contract the architect prepared and sent to selected firms:

- ◆ plans, sections and elevations, often coloured, with his name or title and the draughtsman’s initials
- ◆ specification of works, containing details of building method, materials and site management procedure
- ◆ estimate form for costing tasks and materials, normally arranged by trade. Sometimes the contractor annotated the specification instead
- ◆ form of tender, with duplicate to which each contractor would add his sum

The contractors completed and signed the documents, including plans, and returned them to the architect, who drew up a contract with the chosen firm. Insurance cover was arranged. The contract includes a schedule of conditions, the names of architect and contractor, and the agreed price. The parties, including sureties and witnesses, met at the County Offices to sign the document. The Clerk and one councillor signed for the County Council.

Many contracts have had the corporate seal of the County Council attached to them, a process applied to legal documents, including contracts above a certain value, in conformity with Standing Orders of the council. The Council’s motif was a stag and tree surrounded by nine different emblems; the contractor’s seal was usually plainer. The seals were embossed, stamped directly to the page or through a wax disc.

County buildings

Contracts for three types of building were affected by national legislation. School contracts proliferated after the Education Act 1902 passed responsibility for education from the school boards to county and county borough councils and some larger boroughs. A surge of school contracts between 1903 and 1907 reflects this (C/CL/L2/4-10).

Many farm-related contracts derive from the Smallholdings Acts of 1892 and 1908, and the compulsory purchase of land by Berkshire County Council to provide smallholdings for agricultural workers, including ex-servicemen after World War I.¹ These chiefly concern Brook Farm, Barkham (eg C/CL/L2/103), Charney Bassett Farm (eg C/CL/L2/33), Goosey Wick Farm (eg C/CL/L2/133), Church Farm, Hurst (eg C/CL/L2/34), and Bloomfield Hatch Farm, Wokefield (eg C/CL/L2/232). Work mainly involved the construction, repair and alteration of farmhouses, cottages and other buildings, including dairies (C/CL/L2/108, C/CL/L2/186) and cowhouses. Fencing and gates, drainage and roadworks also feature.

Alteration of former workhouses, renamed public assistance institutions, began when responsibility for the poor was returned to local authorities by the Local Government Act 1929. Most former unions are represented. Plans of buildings at Easthampstead show the layout as it had been for decades under the Poor Law. Dormitories are indicated, vagrants’ cells, laundry and staff quarters, a separate building for Board meetings, a disinfecting shed and a combined mortuary/coal store (C/CL/L2/198).

Design of police premises varied. The four new police stations built before 1914, at Cookham, Winkfield, Didcot and Pangbourne, are identical, with gabled wings at front, steeply pitched roof and tall chimneys. Police houses at Ascot (1936) are a muted form of the same, but Rowstock police station, near Harwell (1937), has a half-timbered upper floor. Cumnor’s (1934) is similar to the early style but has garages. Even the largest do not match the grandeur of Wokingham and, particularly, Maidenhead police stations, 1904.² Early school designs, by Edmund Fisher (see below), have varied roof lines, with windows that rise above eaves level and ceilings high in the roof void. Wide-angled gables give a solid appearance. Fisher favours a turret, tall chimneys rising from side walls and semicircular arches over windows and doors. In the late 1930s traditional but plainer designs on two floors by the County Buildings Inspector are the norm for large senior schools. An exception, at Botley, anticipates a trend to box-shaped buildings with strong horizontal and vertical lines and flat roof (C/CL/L2/240).

A contract for demolition of houses abutting the Abbey Wall, Reading (1926-27), foreshadows greater concern over conservation in later decades. It includes correspondence with those urging restraint in the demolition of

the houses, said to be ancient, and basic instructions to the contractor to take due care of the wall, in a document headed 'Scheme for conservation of an ancient monument' (C/CL/L2/139).

Contracts concern not only major construction but also smaller works - decoration, water supply, electric lighting and installation of domestic equipment. The upgrading of public assistance institutions in the 1930s, such as Bradfield (C/CL/L2/206), frequently included these works.

Example 1 Council School for Girls, Faringdon, 1926 (C/CLJL2/135)

- ◆ Architect: County Buildings Inspector
- ◆ Contractor: Building and Public Works Construction Co, Swindon
- ◆ Cost: £3,213 14s
- ◆ Coloured plans, sections and elevations; specification etc

The school replaced Faringdon Church of England School and catered for 203 pupils aged 5-14; the work took nine months. The building is E-shaped, gabled, symmetrical and single-storey, its walls made of concrete blocks manufactured in Faringdon. The external appearance is domesticated by comparison with post-World War II school designs, the interior simpler in layout.

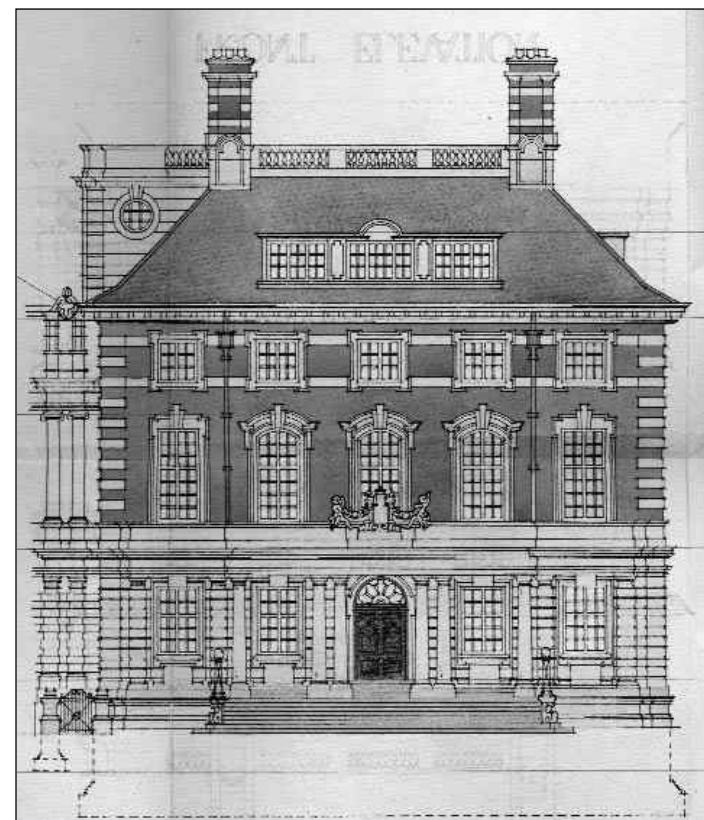


South elevation of Faringdon Council School for Girls, 1926

Example 2 New County Offices, Reading, 1909 (C/CWL2/36)

- ◆ Architect: Warwick and Hall, London
- ◆ Contractor: Edwin Cecil Hughes, Wokingham
- ◆ Cost: £16,398
- ◆ Coloured plans, sections and elevations; specification etc

The specification is rich in detail. Instructions are given to build the side abutting Suttons & Sons' private road 'overhand' – working from the inner side of the wall and reaching over to point the mortar on the outer face, and to 'secretly fix' all hardwood joinery – ensure that the connecting parts of



Elevation of the county offices, 1909

joints were concealed. The plans are labelled with each office and its occupants. An index for all trades includes the design of every door and window. Both masons and bricklayers were employed and many types of stone, tile and timber specified. Central heating and a lift were installed. Varnish and stain were supplied by Manders and Co, Wolverhampton, a household name that ceased paint manufacture only in 1993.

County highways and bridges

Bridge contracts per decade tripled between the 1900s and 1930s. This, and the increasing cost of roadworks reported in Council minutes, reflects road traffic growth in the period. Expenditure rose from about £40,000 in 1913-14 to nearly £400,000 in 1938-39.³ A county-wide traffic census taken during one week in August 1935 recorded a 35% rise since 1931. On the A4 at Punt Hill, Maidenhead, vehicle tonnage since 1931 had increased by 36%, and by 820 tons a year since 1922.⁴

Roadworks contracts involved firms specialising in tarmac surfacing (C/CL/L2/174, 243, 257), perhaps suited to big projects (C/CL/L2/137), and employed to construct culverts. Another is for construction of a cattle grid at Forest Gate, Windsor Great Park in 1936, probably to stop deer escaping (C/CL2/238).

About two-thirds of bridge projects are 'reconstructions' - probably complete rebuilds of an existing bridge, extension of an arch or widening. Most of the rest are described as repairs or alterations, for example to parapet walls. Only two bridges, over watersplashes at West Woodhay, are new (C/CL/L2/253, 270). Another, at Lambourn, was re-aligned to suit a changed road layout (C/CL/L2149). Plans showing both old and new elevations suggest that brick or stone arches were often replaced with a single horizontal span made of steel troughing filled with concrete.

All the bridges are over water, ranging in size from a structure over a ford to two spanning the Thames. Railway bridges were the responsibility of the railway companies concerned rather than the county council.

Example 3 Reconstruction of Goring and Streatley Bridge, 1922 (C/CWL2/107)

- ◆ Architect: County Surveyor
- ◆ Contractor: A Jackaman & Son Ltd, Slough
- ◆ Cost: £32,143
- ◆ Plans, elevations and sections; specification etc

The existing structure was wooden and precarious. In 1914 Berkshire and Oxfordshire county councils took it over from the Bridge Commissioners and abolished the toll, but rebuilding was delayed by the war. These three parties each contributed 15% of the cost of renewing the bridge, the Ministry of Transport the rest.⁵ Methods of building in and over water are revealed: construction of a temporary bridge; coffer dams and pumps to protect concrete laid on the riverbed; pile-driving; testing the strength of the new bridge with traction engines. Progress was smooth except for delays caused by flooding.

Example 4: Sonning and Twyford By-pass, 1925 (C/CL/L2/137)

- ◆ Architect: County Surveyor
- ◆ Contractor: Stewart & Partners Ltd, London
- ◆ Cost: £79,356 16s 9d
- ◆ Specification etc

This was the first post-war road modernisation scheme in Berkshire, with 70 per cent government funding.⁶ Listed in the specification are over 30 day-work trades, including tarpot man, holder-up and watchman with fire and lights. Men with horses and carts work alongside lorries, scarifiers, steam wagons, steam navvies, and steam- and petrol-driven road rollers. Bricks in use include Flettons, brindles and Staffordshire blues. No plans have survived, but those of another big project, the North Hinksey section of the Oxford by-pass (1931), are available (C/CWL2/174A).

Architects

Several patterns emerge in the apportionment of work. At the beginning of the period, design was shared between the County Surveyor, who was employed in a part-time capacity, and architects in private practice. Joseph Morris (1836-1913), County Surveyor 1872-1905, was the last of this type (C/CL/L2/1-2). S. Warwick (1881-1953) and H. A. Hall (1881-1968), of London, had already designed three London town halls when they won the competition to design the new County Hall in Reading (C/CL/L2/36). Each had a distinguished career. Edmund Fisher, also of London (1872-1917), designed more than twenty Berkshire County Council schools between 1905 and 1912. He produced other distinctive work but died during World War I and remains little-known. Only two schools built before 1914 were not privately designed (C/CL/L2/48, 77).

Contracts employing private architects were among the more expensive, worth at least £1,000, including the most grandiose, the County Offices,

1909, costing £16,398. However, the most expensive, the Sonning and Twyford by-pass, £79,356, was, like all later road and bridge works, designed by the County Surveyor.

After 1912 project design of all kinds was usually done in-house. From that year the County Surveyor worked full-time for the Council and had wider responsibilities, including maintenance of all main roads. From 1912 to 1939 the department designed and directed nearly all bridge, road and police accommodation work. The innovations in the management of Berkshire roads made by John Frederick Hawkins (County Surveyor 1904-1946) on his arrival were still in force at his departure. These included the division of the county into three highways



J. F. Hawkins, County Surveyor, 1904-46

districts, each under a foreman, and the employment of lengthmen responsible for four-mile stretches of road.⁷ The design of schools became almost entirely the work of the County Buildings Inspector. At first this officer was connected with the Education Department. From c.1907 to 1931 he is listed as W. H. Sargeant, but his identity thereafter is not disclosed.⁸ From the 1920s his remit widened to include public assistance institutions and children's homes.

Farm design was the responsibility of the County Land Agent, an official responsible to the Smallholdings Committee (formed 1920) and its predecessors. W. E. C. White and Sidney Collins occupied the post for much of the period.

Contractors

Most firms were Berkshire-based and worked in their home area. Francis Bros of Tilehurst were unusual in undertaking work throughout the county. A few firms seem to have been preferred for bridge-building in their own



E. C. Hughes, building contractor, of Wokingham

localities: E. Brown (Bracknell), William Watson (Ascot), and J. Wooldridge & Son (Hungerford), perhaps because of their track record. Boshers (Cholsey) and E. C. Hughes (Wokingham) were more typical, however, in doing a range of jobs with county buildings, roads and bridges. William Henry Randall of Abingdon was employed in smallholding projects in five out of his six contracts.

Information about most of these firms is sparse. Two ex-servicemen, George Pendell and John Spinage, founded Pendell, Spinage & Sons of Stanford-in-the-Vale in 1919 (C/CL/L2/133, 261). Pendell's father and grandfather had been builders.

The firm was a major employer, at times with over 100 men, 10-12 in the joiner's shop alone. It also served as undertaker, employed a blacksmith for 40 years, and quarried building sand and stone locally. Later, it specialised in restoration of older buildings.⁹ Boshers of Cholsey advertised themselves in 1920s trade directories as being over 100 years old. They operated in a 30 to 35-mile radius of Cholsey and also employed over 100 men. Berkshire County Council employed them to build or renovate schools, police stations and bridges. This family business is now (2006) in its seventh generation.¹⁰

The firms most frequently employed were:

- Boshers Ltd, Cholsey (15 contracts)
- Hughes, Edwin Cecil, Wokingham (12)
- Barrett, J. P., & Sons, West Hanney (9)
- Brown, E., Bracknell (11)
- Paddick, S., & Co, Sonning (7)
- Randall, William Henry, Abingdon (7)
- Smallbone, J., & Sons, Streatley (7)
- Wooldridge, J., & Son, Hungerford (7)

There were 23 contractors from outside the county involved in 32 contracts. Most of them were from neighbouring counties and London. The

more distant, such as the National Telephone Company Ltd, Liverpool, were probably chosen for their expertise as well as cost-efficiency (C/CL/L2/16). Although Berkshire County Council did most of its own roadworks, for one major project it employed Tarmac Ltd, of Wolverhampton (C/CL/L2/174). On four occasions steelwork for bridge construction was obtained from the Horsehay Co Ltd, of Shropshire, which also supplied the Great Western Railway.

Research potential

Local historians will find topographical detail in County contracts, and details of particular structures often unique to the collection. Related sources may also help, such as the published set of plans submitted in the competition to design the county offices,¹¹ or records of the County Architect's Department.¹² Local directories list the officers and contractors involved. The progress of some contracts, especially high-profile ones, can be traced in committee minutes.

The collection relates to the history of the building trade. A contract for construction of farm buildings, C/CL/L2/88 (1914), highlights several points of interest:

- ◆ different kinds and uses of concrete and mortar
- ◆ how to mix plaster (lime, putty, sand, cow hair)
- ◆ use of lead, in guttering, flashing, putty and paint (use of asbestos in other contracts)
- ◆ chimney flues pargetted and cored with lime and cow dung (the last is still used for rendering in some countries)
- ◆ mixing paint ingredients on site (lead, oil, turpentine, colours)
- ◆ trade names: Duresco whitewash, Solignum wood preserver, Portland cement, etc
- ◆ carpentry and joinery materials and method

Developments throughout the period could be traced by comparing an example like this with later contracts, for method, products, brands, awareness of toxic substances, and use of local products. The use of locally-made bricks is sometimes stipulated, probably from Tilehurst or Binfield. At the end of the period, brick, stone and concrete blocks are joined by reconstituted stone for jambs and cills (C/CL/L2/245). Trade terminology is also of interest, including milling (C/CL/L2/37) and thatching (C/CL/L2/46).

Schools, police buildings and bridges could be studied for architectural developments, such as the balance between traditional and innovative, domesticated and impersonal, variety and uniformity.

The collection also illustrates aspects of social history. Early contracts coincide with the increase of social legislation after 1900, especially after a reforming Liberal Party was returned in 1906. They reflect changes in educational provision, the motor transport revolution and responses to poverty, and the increasing burden placed upon local authorities in delivering services. The introduction of telephones, electric lighting and traffic signals are also typical of the period (C/CL/L2/16, 206, 231).

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David Cliffe

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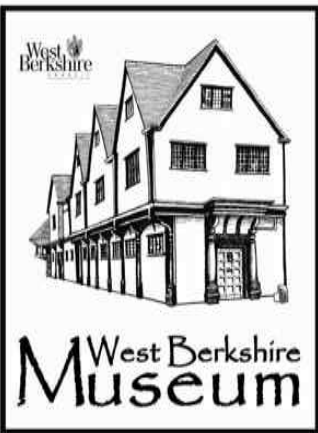
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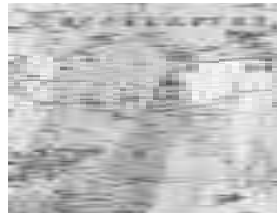


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Plan from the sale catalogue of the
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From the Toomer Archive. [2004.39]



From an 1878 map of Newbury and its
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