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## **Contents**

A window on Windsor's medieval past: the town property deeds <i>David Lewis</i>	3
Woolley and its woods <i>Pat Preece</i>	14
Poor law medical officers in the Wantage Union <i>Hazel Brown</i>	18
Irish in nineteenth century Reading <i>Ann McCormack</i>	28
The Berkshire Bibliography, 2010 <i>David Cliffe</i>	50

## **Berkshire Local History Association**

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Cover illustrations

Front: Windsor seen from Datchet

Back: Crystal Palace, Reading

Both: Berkshire Record Office

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## **A window on Windsor's medieval past: the town property deeds**

*David Lewis*

In recent years a considerable amount of archaeological and historical research has focused on Windsor's famous castle, with the result that its developmental phases are understood and well documented. Such progress forms a stark contrast to the history of the town of Windsor, however. Although the settlement is considerably older than the castle, originating in the seventh century at a site three miles distant from its present location, until recently little detail has been known about its pre-seventeenth century past. Indeed, more has been discovered about Roman and Iron Age settlement in the Thames valley than is understood about, for example, the history of Windsor's main street, Peascod Street.

The reason for this omission is that Windsor's ancient borough archive has not survived, and as this is the most usual source for a town's early history, the story of Windsor's medieval past was thought permanently lost. But Windsor, as a royal town, has another valuable source of its history, not available in most – if any – other towns: its medieval property deeds. These deeds are held in the two royal colleges to which the town plays host: St George's and Eton. These colleges were established by Edward III (1348) and Henry VI (1440) respectively, not as educational colleges as we might think of them today, but as the late-medieval version of the monastic house, popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The foundation of a college was the more potent equivalent of leaving a memorial in the parish church; they were intended to ensure prayer for the college's founder after death, a means of escaping the tribulation of purgatory, but, owing to their scale, a memorial only available to the very wealthy or well connected. Most medieval colleges were closed in 1548, following the earlier dissolution of the monasteries, with the exception of those with royal patronage. For this reason the two Windsor colleges survive to this day, complete with their archives – although Eton, famously, is now a school rather than a religious institution. The connection of this with the town property deeds is that people living in Windsor before the mid-sixteenth century clearly held some affection for these colleges, as many wanted to be remembered after death by inclusion on the college's roll of prayers – the bead roll. In exchange for this powerful favour, they would typically leave their town property to the college. With such donations came a bundle of historic title deeds, many

pre-dating the foundation of the college and some going back to the town's very first written documents. About 2,000 of these deeds survive, representing not only the town's sole historic archive, but also more generally a valuable source of social and economic medieval history.

Several historians have previously noted the survival of these deeds, and recognised them as an important but unused source of the town's history. Most recently Shelagh Bond started to analyse them in the late 1960s, but unfortunately she died before her work was completed. As with most medieval documents they are written in Latin and require skills in palaeography and local geography to be understood. If this was the only complication, then no doubt they would have been used many years ago. The deeds, however, represent a particular challenge as they need to be linked together, sometimes with documents kept in different archives, in order to extract their full significance. Beyond the vagaries of medieval spelling, place names and local topography, it is necessary to use a computer database to analyse and connect the deeds: a significant change from the record cards used in Shelagh Bond's time.

As a category of evidence the deeds repay diligent study, as they yield information which might not have been available from a more traditional borough archive. Moreover, if the information they contain is linked with the urban history coming from other recent town studies, then it is possible to advance considerably our knowledge of medieval Windsor. From no other source could we know about the medieval layout of the town, families and their occupations and, by comparison between periods, changes in the town's social and economic fabric, to name but a few aspects revealed in the deeds. They are not without drawbacks, however. They are unable, for example, to provide information about those who did not own town land, such as the poor, women (property was generally held in the husband's name at this date) or children; equally they give us scant information about diet, clothing and health. It is also evident that the deeds were not always considered important – some have been lost, as those surviving do not form an unbroken series for each property, as they would have done originally. In other cases the important medieval wax seal has been cut away, presumably by collectors in the nineteenth century, or crushed owing to poor storage conditions. Nevertheless, sufficient remain from which aspects of Windsor's early history can be pieced together, coloured-in with non-documentary information coming from archaeological excavations, town plan analysis, landscape study and place-name analysis.

Perhaps surprisingly, the property deeds follow a very stable structure which remained unchanged for more than five hundred years. The same information can be found (more or less) in the same place in each deed. They

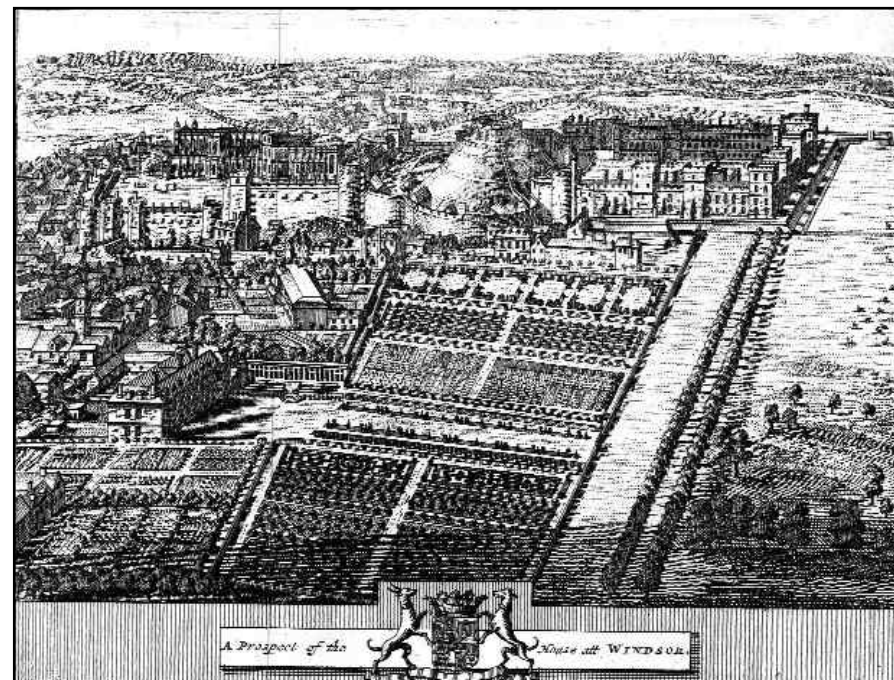
record the current and previous owners of the property and the purchaser, together with the owner's occupation, their neighbours (or what are called 'abutments'), with other incidental information, to identify precisely the property being transferred. The incidental information can be particularly interesting, as it might include the name of a road or near-by town infrastructure. The first mention of Windsor's town gaol in 1352, for example, is described as a boundary to Stephen of Gloucester's property: 'extending from a street near the gaol'.<sup>1</sup> This document is of particular interest as the town gaol and guildhall were co-located, providing a first date for both. In addition, members of the town, perhaps up to eight individuals, witnessed each transaction, their names being added at the end of the document. Usually these names are set out in a strict order of precedence, with the mayor or bailiffs mentioned first, and the scribe or clerk mentioned last. From this it is possible to derive information on town government; when, for example, the position of town mayor superseded either the two town bailiffs or the seneschal of the town guild as the most important civic official.<sup>2</sup>

In Windsor, property transfers were authenticated at the town court, which met every Monday. The transaction was probably verbally described to the parties involved and the witnesses, and was certified by the exchange of a piece of soil. The modern wedding ceremony derives from the same contract-making process, exchanging a ring to visibly conclude the contract before witnesses. Probably from before the late fourteenth century in Windsor, the transaction was then recorded in one of the town's several bound books of record, and for land transactions this was the now lost 'book of inrollments' (*sic*).<sup>3</sup> Evidence for this comes from William Fanner's will noted in a grant dated 1407 which makes reference to these books, noting on the reverse that 'the said will being proved and enrolled in the register of the [court of the] Merchant Guild Hall of New Windsor before the Mayor and Burgesses, as the custom of the town requires'.<sup>4</sup> Probably the reason for making a permanent record was to provide certainty about who owned a particular piece of land. This was an important detail, because tax was assessed on the town as a whole, and allocated between property holders by local government. The permanent record would probably have also noted whether a property transfer was made by gift *inter vivos*, transfer by operation of law (such as a widow's third part share in dower), sale or will: each could have a different legal effect, as town land technically belonged to the crown rather than those who occupied it. It is also apparent from the witness list that a further town custom required neighbours or business competitors of those purchasing land to be asked for their agreement to the transaction: a medieval version of modern planning consents. Presumably

this custom was intended to minimise the risk of later dispute. Simon of Cippenham, for example, bought a piece of land near the river in c. 1280 on which to dig tanning pits.<sup>5</sup> The deed recording this transaction notes that it was witnessed by three other Windsor tanners, Nicholas le Tanner, John Tanner and John Tannerus, presumably Simon's neighbours. Simon's trade was likely a tanner of horse hides, as the royal stud was located in Cippenham (now a suburb of Slough) and bones showing marks of this trade have been widely found in archaeological excavations near Windsor's riverside.<sup>6</sup> In another example, a baker's shop in Peascod Street was transferred to a William, son of Thomas Pasty [Pastee] in 1303, the deeds being witnessed by Edward Bake-house [Bakus], likely another town baker.<sup>7</sup> Again, this deed provides information about the town, and the local custom of baking food in pasties: a type of medieval fast food, one might suppose.

The deeds in fact shed light on a number of social aspects of medieval life in Windsor, such as the arrangements for the financial support of widowed or single women, the formation of family businesses by the purchase of contiguous properties, or the guaranteeing of loans through an early version of the mortgage. Most notably, however, about 60% of the deeds concern land transactions relating to the town's fields. Although we tend to think about towns as being composed of streets, houses and shops, this is a modern notion. In the Middle Ages towns also vitally included a number of surrounding fields in which townspeople could grow some or all of their own food. Mostly the land was given over to growing cereals for brewing and baking bread; oats was a popular crop in Windsor because the town's fields were poorly drained and in consequence the growing season was short. The land may alternatively have been used for grazing stock, sometimes sheep or cattle, but most usually swine, and particularly after harvest, when they were used to eat acorns which might otherwise have poisoned horses. It is notable that the valuable right of access to the town fields after harvest, known as 'pannage', was specifically enshrined in the town's first royal charter of 1277.<sup>8</sup>

The fields in Windsor were laid out in the conventional open field pattern, mirrored not only in other towns but also in the manorial estates of the countryside. Close to the town there were a number of permanent, probably common fields given names such as the Hay (or High) field, or, ominously, the place of execution called La Linch and La Rude.<sup>9</sup> More distant from the town, the land was divided into strips and known by the name of their previous owner, such as Matthew's furlong or Murdin's Croft.<sup>10</sup> An individual might own several of these strips in different parts of the town fields; the land was so divided that no individual came to own all the best land in any one field. This arrangement can clearly be seen in the



*Windsor castle, town and fields*

deeds, where the party acquiring a strip of land is almost always different from the occupiers of neighbouring plots. When Alexander le Paintour, for example, acquired land in the common field of the Sheet in 1331, the neighbouring plots were occupied by Alexander at one head, Peter of Kingston on one side, and extended from royal road (Sheet Street) back to the land of Alexander.<sup>11</sup> The dimensions of these plots are rarely quoted, suggesting that the division of land remained unchanged over several generations: parallels in the marking out of modern allotments come to mind. Unfortunately, as the names of plots changed with their owners, it is almost impossible to identify their exact location in the modern town, but most were set within the area now occupied by Home Park, Frogmore and the grounds surrounding the castle. This area was once a large open field, divided into two principal sections: that to the west called the Worth (near the river) owned by the Abbot of Reading (technically outside the borough of Windsor), and to the east the Sheet common field, giving its name to Sheet Street, still one of the town's main streets.

Windsor had rather small common fields compared with other medieval

towns of a similar population. This was not by design, but owing to the fact that much of the land lying to the south of the town was of limited agricultural value, its underlying geology consisting of heavy London clay. If Windsor had perhaps 200 acres of common fields in total this would represent considerably less than an acre per head of population, whereas towns such as Colchester provided more than eight acres per head.<sup>12</sup> The inadequacy of the town's common fields has been advanced as one reason why Windsor apparently failed to grow in the medieval period: people moving to the town could not grow much of their own food, and would have the expense of purchasing it on the town market. On an initial review of the deeds there appears to be some truth in this proposition; most people who cultivated land in Windsor can also be found as property owners and were probably of the wealthier sort. The further question, of course, is whether the ability to grow food was a determining factor in deciding to relocate to the town: evidence of medieval migration suggests that the pull of work at the castle was a more significant attraction. Medieval Windsor was probably a medium-sized town with above average wealth, and with pretensions to influence, owing to its association with monarchy: has anything changed?

Growing food in the common fields was not the only 'farming' townspeople carried out. Many would additionally keep pigs in their gardens, where they might also grow a limited range of vegetables to provide some variation to their diet. Town plots, set out as long narrow strips of two perches (4 metres) against the street, are a distinctive feature of medieval towns, and can be identified on modern ordnance survey maps of central Windsor. Although the mostly timber buildings which once stood on these plots have long since been pulled down, the medieval boundaries still survive, giving rise to the slightly irregular patchwork streetscape which is particularly noticeable in Peascod Street. Not all buildings in Windsor were built of timber, however: some were of stone. Possibly marking the slightly exceptional nature of these buildings, a Robert of [the] Stonehouse is noted c.1270, and probably additional stone houses once existed near the castle for the small pre-1270 local Jewish community.<sup>13</sup>

An aspect of medieval Windsor most fully recovered from the deeds is an appreciation of how the town earned its living: that is, the town's occupational profile. Before c.1300 surnames were typically not inherited but made reference, in about half of all cases, either to an individual's trade or place of origin. From this information, together with the castle accounts, it is possible to build up a picture of the trades carried on in the town. It will occasion little surprise that a full range of textile, leather-working and food-processing occupations can be identified, as most medieval towns evidence these trades. In Windsor, perhaps leather-working, including light and

heavy tanning, might be considered the most dominant. An explanation for this is probably the presence of the royal household, as they provided both a source of the raw material (cattle hides, from the consumption of meat, and horse hides) and a demand for the finished product – leather apparel (including shoes) and saddles. It might also be expected that many Windsor people earned a living at the castle, either as royal servants, parkers, gate keepers, or in maintaining the castle's fabric, as carpenters, masons or suppliers of building material.

What might be considered exceptional, however, is the large numbers of what might be called luxury goods merchants who traded in Windsor: vintners (French wine), goldsmiths, and mercers (valuable cloth: silk from the far east, velvet and damask). These merchants dealt in high value goods brought from distant parts, and found customers, not in the king himself, as his supplies were purchased in London, but probably in royal courtiers serving in the castle. At the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century there were more of these luxury goods merchants living in Windsor than existed in many larger and more important towns, such as Winchester. The absence of spicers, also to be listed as a luxury trade, is not surprising, as this trade centred on the London grocery merchants and is not found in the provinces.

In addition to the social and economic history contained in the property deeds, they are interesting as documents in themselves. Many are in excellent condition, written on fine-quality parchment and executed in a very precise court-style hand. It seems probable that some were executed by Exchequer clerks, ostensibly working in Windsor on royal business but prepared to act, no doubt for a fee, as a scribe for ordinary townspeople. In the later Middle Ages such scribes or scriveners developed through their work a technical understanding of property transactions, becoming sufficiently skilled to offer advice to their clients, and this is the origin of the modern-day solicitors' profession.

In order to authenticate a transaction the medieval practice was to attach a wax seal to the deed, showing the mark of the purchaser, and many of the Windsor deeds are still complete in this respect. Seals are significant as they were designed by, and were personal to, ordinary townsmen of whom perhaps little or no other information survives. A complete run of more than three hundred years' seals, as found in Windsor, is therefore of considerable interest. The seal was the medieval equivalent of the modern plastic bank card; there were no 'signatures' on medieval documents, with the exception of those executed by Jews. The seal was composed of two parts: a central motif, typically that of an animal, and a cross or *fleur de lys*, surrounded by a legend recording the seal-owner's name. A good number of the seals used

on the Windsor deeds were probably made locally, using off-the-shelf components, as the workmanship of the legend is crude and the seal image not specific to the seal-owner. For example, the boat-maker William, the shipwright who worked near the Thames in the late thirteenth century, used a seal showing a *fleur de lys* surrounded by the words 'S' [*sigillum*: seal] Will' le Chepwrite' (*sic.*).<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the deed records the grantor's name as William le Schipworthe' – a closer approximation to the modern spelling, perhaps. Other seals are of fine quality, denoting an individual of rank, and were most likely made by London goldsmiths. An example of this type is provided by John de London, who was a valet to the king (Edward I) and constable of the castle. His seal shows a finely engraved praying figure with birds, or possibly an angel, descending from above.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that, as previously mentioned, although medieval property rights vested mostly with men, in some cases their wives could be represented in the seal, if not in the written document. The likely reason for this is that although the property concerned was technically owned by the wife, while married it was dealt with by her husband. A deed of 1296 executed by Richard Gerald and his wife Nicola is a case in point. In this deed, Nicola's seal is attached at the bottom of the document and records her surname as 'de Maurdyn', presumably being the name of her former husband, and possibly the person who gave the property to her.<sup>16</sup> In the following year, however, a further document shows the name on her seal had changed to 'Nicola Gerald', and it included the same central image as that of her husband: a crescent moon with four stars above.<sup>17</sup> Nicola's identity, although hidden behind that of her two husbands, clearly established her rights in the property being transferred. Details such as this would be lost, were it not for the survival of the wax seal.

Although the seal carried important legal significance, it is interesting to note that, where possible, people also liked to use their seal as a means of display. In the seals dated between c.1250 and 1400 the colour of the seal wax is often embellished, moving away from the standard red-brown colour to white, green or mixed coloured waxes, some white and green, others red and brown. Presumably the intention was to make the seal stand out, to make the contracting party appear more impressive or substantial than otherwise might be the case. The same subtle use of the seal, as a means of humour, or perhaps even frivolity, can be detected in yet other seal images. Some played on the name of the seal owner (a rebus), such as a barrel with a projecting arrow (bolt-tun: Bolton), or provided some indication of the seal-owner's occupation. Yet others, such as Richard Bungey's seal of 1368, incorporated a subtle dual image, of two four-legged animals (perhaps dogs?) chasing each other, an image also capable of being seen as a

representation of the catherine wheel, the device of St Katherine, perhaps the second most popular medieval female saint.<sup>18</sup>

As previously noted, the two Windsor colleges were not closed in 1548, but nonetheless it is apparent from the division of the deeds today that at some time the two archives were combined but then re-divided. The deeds held in the Eton archive, for example, include all those dated before 1300 and all those relating to the riverside manor of Underore (roughly the area between Windsor Bridge and Victoria Bridge), while St George's archive holds most of the deeds relating to properties near Windsor's market place. The most likely date for this to have happened is 1467, as at that date moves were in hand to combine the two colleges. Edward IV had decided to close Eton College, not only because it was founded by his rival Henry VI, but because he wanted to establish St George's chapel as the grand dynastic mausoleum of the house of York, complete with Eton's holy relics and endowment. Eton's archive was moved to St George's, but it seems that by 1469 Edward had a change of mind, and Eton was to survive as a separate college.<sup>19</sup> At this point presumably the property deeds had been pushed together and it was considered too difficult or time-consuming to disentangle them in the correct order. In any event, the documents were old and probably considered of limited legal significance, and consequently they were roughly divided according to a set of easy-to-follow rules. This probably accounts for the strangely precise allocation of the deeds found between the two archives today, although there is no direct evidence in confirmation.

Certainly the deeds allow some recovery of the 'lost' information that might have been available from the borough archive if it had survived. We know that the major part of this archive existed in c.1665-72 as Elias Ashmole used it to collect information for his history of the Order of the Garter and, as Windsor herald, for information about the town. These notes survive in the Bodleian Library, and although selective and the earliest only dates from the late fifteenth-century borough books, they at least provide some direct evidence about the operation of the late medieval/early modern town.<sup>20</sup> The fate of the archive after its use by Ashmole is unclear. One possibility is that it was destroyed as an unfortunate indirect consequence of the construction of the 'new' guildhall in 1689 – the building which survives in the centre of the modern town. The former guildhall built in c.1352 and located immediately opposite the castle gates was a considerably larger building, and likely had plenty of storage space. We know it included a large hall, or court room, its walls fitted with cupboards, and possibly these were used to store the borough archive. Windsor's old town or guildhall was a substantial building covering the space of about eight conventional town

plots, and included on Priest Street (now St Alban's Street), as previously mentioned, the town gaol.

As the town was not wealthy in 1689, and space in the (smaller) new town hall was at a premium, it is conceivable that a decision to dispose of the old borough archive was taken at this time. The archive must have been thought of little use, dirty and dusty, and in a writing which no one could understand. It is significant perhaps that the few items that have survived from this old archive are of the smallest possible volume: the book of accounts; the most bulky part, perhaps the court rolls and lists of apprentices and freemen, are entirely lost.<sup>21</sup> From this it appears that storage space was a deciding factor in determining whether a record was kept or not. Despite the logic of this chain of events, we have no certain information that the archive was dispersed or burned in the late seventeenth century. We do know, however, that it did not exist in the eighteenth century and that the old guildhall was finally pulled down in 1724.<sup>22</sup> The silence in the surviving borough records concerning the fate of the town's medieval archive is perhaps telling: the old records seem to have been considered of so little value that their destruction could be carried out without any formal sanction.

In most other towns the loss of the medieval borough archive would have placed much of its early history beyond recovery. This must have been the conclusion of Tighe and Davis in the mid-nineteenth century and the reason why so little of the town's social history is included in their monumental volumes *The Annals of Windsor*. It is also the reason why so much of Windsor's published medieval history on websites and in town tourist books amount to no more than speculation. That some part of this history can now be reconstructed with the use of computers and by the chance survival of the archives of two royal colleges is more than a little fortunate. The picture the deeds give us of the medieval town is one more closely integrated with the castle than we would recognise today, yet a town, like many others of the period, where people used their resourcefulness to make a living in what we would consider a harsh and difficult environment.

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## Woolley and its woods

### Pat Preece

There is no village called Woolley nowadays and the name only survives in Woolley Park and Woolley Farm. Strangely, there is another Woolley Green west of Maidenhead on the edge of the Thicket. Our Woolley is in the parish of Chaddleworth and is roughly three and a half miles north of it. It is now owned by the Wroughtons, who own Woolley Park. It is a deserted medieval village, and the remains of the chapel – a few stones – could be seen in a field south of the park a few years ago.

It may be possible, although Margaret Gelling does not connect it, that ‘Wohanloeh’, which was part of lands given to Abingdon Abbey by Cenwulf in 821 AD and is described as ‘Poughley in Chaddle worth’, was Woolley<sup>1</sup>. According to Margaret Gelling there were many ways of spelling Woolley, such as Wollegh, Wallegh, Wolvelegh and Wolley. She thinks that originally it meant a woodland inhabited by wolves .

In Domesday, Woolley is spelled ‘Olvelei’, which is probably due to the Normans not using the letter W. It was held by a William Peveral and strangely there was no mention of woodland.<sup>2</sup> It is described as having ten villagers, eight smallholders and four ‘servi’ or serfs. One might interpret this as ten customary tenants, ie owing duties to the lord, and eight cottagers. There were four serfs also who were lower than the other categories and were bound to the lord of the manor and could only be released by manumission by the lord. William Peveral gave Woolley to the abbey of Montebourg shortly after 1066. The village had a chapel by 1160. This was given eventually to Poughley Priory which was made responsible for the services at Woolley. In 1242-43 Ralph de Woolley held the manor at farm from the priory. The term ‘farm’ meant a rent or service for a land holding.<sup>3</sup> In 1291 ten acres of underwood are listed.<sup>4</sup>

The abbey of Montebourg still seems to have held the manor of Woolley in 1316 but it was described as the property of Appledurcomb in the Isle of Wight, which was a ‘cell’ of Montebourg. In 1324 it was described as the property of Appledurcomb when in the King’s hands, as lands belonging to an alien priory. The manor was confirmed to the Abbey of Montebourg in 1330 and 1333. In 1327 there were twelve persons in the village paying twenty-three shillings and eleven pence halfpenny.<sup>5</sup> These twelve would be men, so the population would have been greater if the women and children were counted – possibly four times as great. The priory of Appledurcomb

was dissolved in 1414 and the manor was given by Henry V to the Nuns Minoreesses without Aldgate (London) in 1443, and confirmed to them in 1461.<sup>6</sup>

On 6 March 1478 the abbess of the Minoreesses leased the manor to John Porter of Steventon and his wife Agnes. They were to have ‘reasonable housbote, heybote, heggebote, cartbote, ploughbote, and firebote’ and also all ‘underwood and wyndefallen wode by the oversyght and assinement of the said styward or surveyor’.<sup>7</sup> The abbess was obviously employing somebody in charge of the woods who had the power to assign the products of the woods. Bote is the right to take wood for the manufacture of various commodities. Heybote is probably the right to take shrubs to make a hedge, whereas heggebote was probably the right to take wood for gates and fences.<sup>8</sup> John Porter was also to close and defend coppices and ‘springe’ from any damage. The spring referred to is an area of new growth of coppice shoots. It was customary to divide the wood into separate coppices by banks topped with wattle fences. These banks can be seen running through many woods nowadays. The coppices would be cut in rotation according to the type of wood growing and what it was to be used for. Oak or ash posts would be grown for ten to fifteen years, and hazel for wattle possibly seven years, but there were factors governing this, such as soil and weather.

John Porter and his wife were to hold the manor for 30 years at £30 per annum, and they were to pay thirteen shillings and four pence (one mark) to the prior of ‘Poghely’ (Poughley Abbey) for divine service at the chapel of Woolley. In 1501 there was a lease for 60 years to Richard Dyton, who in 1503 purchased the wood growing in two groves called the High Spray and Michell Wood, except one acre in the grove next to the manor place and eight oaks in each of the said groves.<sup>9</sup>

The Aldgate nuns leased property to a Richard Paty and enclosed 40 acres of arable in 1493 and another 40 acres in 1497, evicting twelve people. They also enclosed 120 acres for parkland in 1509 but nobody was evicted. This must have been the origin of the present park.<sup>10</sup>

Dame Elizabeth Poulmead, the abbess of Aldgate, leased the manor of Woolley to Sir John Tate ‘gentilman’ in 1507. He is described as of London, Woolley and three other places. He was a wool merchant who held the Mastership of the Guild of Mercers on four occasions and was Mayor of London twice. In 1509 he converted 120 acres of arable to sheep pasture and leased them to William Pay. This was probably the end of the village of Woolley. In the charter leasing the land to John Tate mention was made that Richard Dyton had ‘bargained and bought all ther wode, timbre and underwode growynge within the two groves called the High Spray and Michell wode belonging to the maner of Wallegh’. Incidentally, spray means



the tops and branches of underwood, and michell apparently means big.<sup>11</sup> Richard was obviously what we now would call a coppicer, and he was buying the right to cut the coppices and use the wood for various articles. This was a normal agreement, as described in 'The management of coppices in Berkshire'.<sup>12</sup>

In 1511 the agreement between the nuns and Richard Dyton was renewed for another four years with additional requirements. He was to hedge and enclose (probably with banks) the two groves for salvation and defence of the 'springes there' to protect them for four years after any cutting from the 'bytinge of best (beast) and catall and ... fell the woods in seasonable times within the four yers and to lede and cary away...'. The 'lede' must refer to carts laden with coppice shoots.<sup>13</sup>

Richard Tate, probably John's son, leased Woolley to John Blandy of Chaddleworth for 20 years in 1529, when it was described as the 'mannur graunge or ferme called Welleleghe'.<sup>14</sup> In the Court of Augmentation of 1535 the dissolution of the Aldgate priory took place and the manor seems to have been owned completely by Richard Tate.

The chapel in 1549 had no incumbent although it had lands worth 40 shillings and was said to have been founded (refounded?) by Richard Tate. After the death of Richard Tate in 1554 the manor of Woolley passed via Pauncefoots and Reads to the family of Tipping, who held it until 1798.<sup>15</sup>

In the Terrier of Chaddleworth of 1617 a Thomas Tipping owned the manor and had 'One coppice or wood called Sprea coppice', and John Wicks and Walter Salter were grazing '6 mylch (cows) and 20 weathers' (sheep) in it. The coppices were to be cut at reasonable and convenient times and they were to be allowed the firewood. The 'walks, passages and waterings' were to be open to their beasts.

A deed of 1617<sup>16</sup> refers to the surrounds of B. Tipping's mansion as having an orchard close and a paddock called Woodheyes, mounded (banks) and marked out for a sheep shearing pen. By now the only contributor to the hearth tax was a John Pocock who paid for nine hearths. It seems unlikely that the chapel was still standing by the eighteenth century, but it was said that it was ruined and the timber was used in barns. In 1815 the estate had 1377 acres extending on to the Downs.<sup>17</sup>

The next reference we have to the woods at Woolley is from 1831 onwards, when there are wood accounts mentioning the woods Mitchell and Spray along with woodlands at Lilley and Brightwalton.<sup>18</sup> The accounts show the coppices being cut in separate pieces, such as Spray 4 acres and Mitchell 3 acres. The men were making a great quantity of hurdles, for example:

James Head 64 dozen hurdles at 3s each £9 12 6d

Sheep were evidently important at that time as hurdles were widely used by shepherds. Another interesting entry was 'Prior for drift wood': this is for fencing along the grass tracks along which the sheep and cattle were driven.

Woolley was one of many medieval villages deserted because of the demand for wool for the clothing industry. The nuns of Aldgate started the process of removing the village and Sir John Tate, a wool merchant, probably finished it at the beginning of the sixteenth century. One cannot but wonder what happened to the dispossessed tenants. Thomas More in *Utopia* writes of lands and houses being eaten up by sheep: this certainly happened to Woolley.

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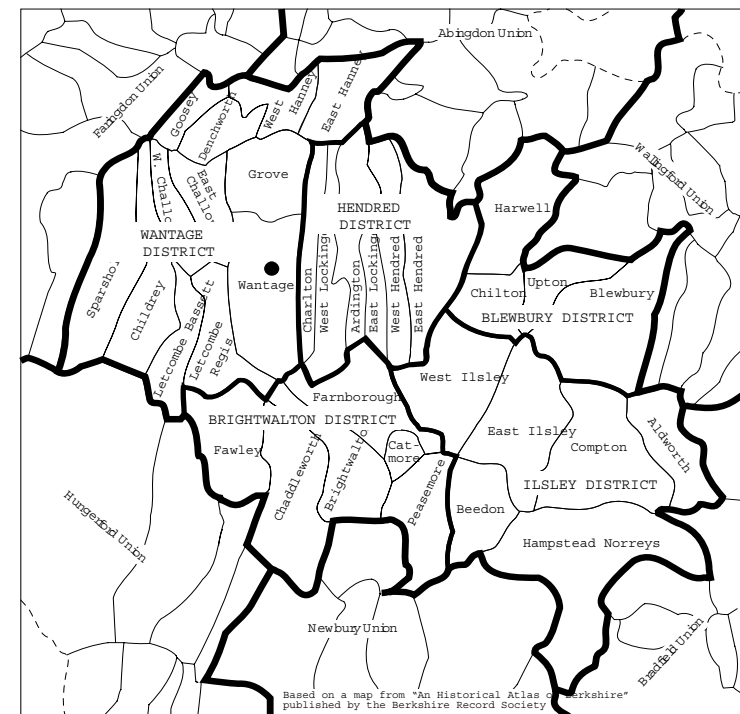
# Poor law medical officers of the Wantage Union

## Hazel Brown

The Poor Law Amendment Act, passed in 1834, divided the country into groups of parishes, or 'unions'. The Wantage Union was one of the first to become operational. Thirty-two of the 34 parishes which made up the Wantage Union had more than half their adult male population involved in agriculture, and as agricultural wages in the early nineteenth century were very low, there had previously been a lot of poverty and hardship in this area, with resulting high poor rates for property owners. The hope was that the new system of no relief for able-bodied paupers in their homes, only in the workhouse, would encourage people to try to manage without asking for financial help, resulting in a decrease in the cost of poor relief. In cases of accident or illness, however, 'out-relief' would be given and this included access to the union's medical officer (a doctor), with free medicines and surgical treatment if necessary. Wantage Union was far too large an area to be covered by one medical officer, and was divided into districts each with its own doctor.<sup>1</sup> The three districts set up at first were still too large and after three years the union was divided into five medical districts,<sup>2</sup> which worked well for many years, until in 1888 the Wantage District, which included care of paupers in the workhouse, was divided into two areas.<sup>3</sup>

A pauper needing medical help would first go to the relieving officer in his district, who would give him a medical order to take to the medical officer. This then permitted him, or a sick member of his family, to have treatment. The cost of medicines was met by the medical officer from his salary, although as time went on he could claim extra for operations, midwifery, visiting lunatics at home, or for carrying out vaccinations against smallpox. Perhaps surprisingly, it was the medically untrained relieving officer who decided whether a person needed attention, and once he had given out the medical order, the medical officer was obliged to treat the patient. Refusal could result in a reprimand from the guardians, the committee of elected men who ran the union. In 1842, when Mr Blaythwayt of the Ilsley district of the union refused medical attention to a woman who came to him with a medical order, he was ordered by the guardians to attend her immediately and in future to obey the relieving officer.<sup>4</sup>

This could mean that there were times when the relieving officer made



*The five medical districts of the Wantage Union after February 1838)*

the wrong decision, and did not get medical help when he ought to have done. In 1866 James Thompson, an old man of 72, had been drinking one night in the Abingdon Arms in Wantage: after leaving the pub he had fallen in the street and broken both bones in one leg. Not realising the extent of his injuries, his friends helped him back to the pub where he spent the night on the floor. It wasn't until the following morning that the landlord became aware that James had a broken leg and sent for Mr Read, the relieving officer, who gave James an order for the workhouse and arranged for him to be taken there on a cart. He did not think it necessary to send for Mr Barker, the Wantage surgeon, who first saw James on a routine visit to the workhouse infirmary the following day. He set the compound fracture, but sadly James died a few days later. At the inquest, Mr Barker said that he thought that the 'fast jolting over rough stones and the point of the fibula jabbing into the muscles of the leg with every motion caused the death'. The jury gave a verdict of accidental death but blamed the relieving officer for not calling the medical officer. Mr Read admitted making an error of

judgement: he thought he had acted for the best but it was the first time he had dealt with a compound fracture.<sup>5</sup>

In the early days of the union, the training previously undergone by the medical officers was often fairly basic. William Savory, the medical officer of the Brightwalton district from 1838, was qualified only as an apothecary.<sup>6</sup> From the early 1840s, new medical officers were expected to have two qualifications,<sup>7</sup> and it seemed these were mostly one from the Royal College of Surgeons or the Royal College of Physicians, and the other as a Licentiate of the Apothecaries Company. In 1859, the Poor Law Board stipulated that no medical man was to be employed by the guardians unless he had qualifications in both medicine and surgery;<sup>8</sup> but occasionally no-one with suitable qualifications applied for a vacant post and the guardians had to make an appointment for a year only, in the hope that a better candidate would turn up after that time. Medical officers were also supposed to live in their district but if there was no-one fitting this condition, a man could be appointed for a year who lived in another district. The Hendred district medical officer was usually re-appointed each year as he lived in Wantage.

Each week, the medical officers were supposed to send in a report which gave names, ages and illnesses of paupers treated, this being necessary for the clerk to bill the appropriate parishes for any extra medical costs, such as midwifery payments, and to check that patients warranted free treatment. A few of the medical officers had to be constantly reminded to send in their weekly reports, a chore that tended to get left undone. The guardians could at times be irritatingly nit-picking: for example, when another doctor stood in for Mr Lightfoot of the Harwell district, in 1874. Mr Lightfoot should have entered the patients seen by himself in black ink but those seen by his deputy in red, which he hadn't done. He was reprovved for this by the guardians and reminded that in future he should not give them the unnecessary trouble of having to remind him to perform his duties properly. He wrote back to them sounding somewhat incensed: 'Considering the munificent salary I receive and the frequent unnecessary trouble I am put to by the Clerk for want of books and papers etc, I think the less said about the trouble I give the better;' and stating that he hadn't any red ink and couldn't get any when he tried.<sup>9</sup>

By the late 1840s, there were extra payments for any operations carried out, a standard payment being given for the most common operations.<sup>10</sup> So amputating a finger would earn the medical officer £2, while setting a fractured thigh would be £3. Walter Barker, who served the workhouse and the Wantage area for forty-five years, must have been a skilled surgeon judging by some of the reports of operations he carried out. In February 1847, Sarah Pembroke of Letcombe Bassett was working on a threshing

machine when her arm got caught in the machinery: as well as extensive lacerations, she ended up with a fracture of her humerus bone extending into the elbow and also damaged an artery. Normally these injuries would have meant having her arm amputated, earning the medical officer the fee of £5; but Mr Barker managed to save her arm by treating her injuries over a five-month period. No amputation, so no standard fee for him; but he pointed out to the guardians that Sarah would now be able to earn her living and would not have to be supported as a cripple by the union, and it was decided to pay him the £5 for the successful outcome.<sup>11</sup> As with the cost of medicines, the cost of splints for setting broken bones came out of medical officers' salaries, and they also had to pay for any special equipment needed for surgery. Mr Barker carried out a complicated operation in the workhouse on a man's bladder. He was paid the comparatively large sum of £8 for this, but as the apparatus he had had to have made to enable him to operate successfully had cost him £7 17s 6d, his remuneration was actually extremely small.<sup>12</sup> Medical officers were only paid the full amount for an operation if the patient survived for longer than 36 hours: death in under that time, and only half the fee was awarded.<sup>13</sup> Which probably ensured that maximum care was given afterwards.

When amputations and other operations were carried out in the early years, there was of course no anaesthetic available. The first mention of its use was in 1848, when once more Walter Barker carried out a successful operation. A boy working at the Bone Mill at East Challow had caught his leg in some machinery which resulted in 'shocking mutilation' of the leg and thigh. Barker had to amputate the leg below the hip joint and the newspaper reported at the time that he had used chloroform.<sup>14</sup> As the first use of chloroform in Britain had only occurred the previous year,<sup>15</sup> one cannot help feeling that Walter Barker was a man who kept up to date, even though he only practised in a little market town.

Normally, childbirth in the villages would be a matter for older female relatives or the village woman who had a reputation for experience in assisting women in labour. Doctors were only called in by the poor when things went badly wrong. When Elizabeth Barnett of East Challow went into labour in 1882, she was helped by her neighbour, Mary Lovegrove, who had acted as village midwife for over twelve years and had attended about a hundred births without needing the assistance of a medical man. She had attended Elizabeth in her eight previous confinements, but this time things went wrong: Elizabeth haemorrhaged. Her husband was sent to Wantage to fetch the doctor, but by the time he arrived in Challow Elizabeth had lost too much blood and she died.<sup>16</sup> In difficult maternity cases like this, if the family had to ask for poor law assistance to pay the bill, the doctor would have been

paid the standard fee by the union. This was 10s 6d for most cases (10s later in the century) but more for very difficult cases. Thomas Brown's wife of Brightwalton had a difficult labour when she produced twins and the medical officer was paid £1;<sup>17</sup> Ann Skinner of Grove developed puerperal convulsions after giving birth which earned the medical officer £2.<sup>18</sup>

Occasionally a medical officer's claim for an extra fee would be refused; usually if the guardians thought the family could afford to pay themselves. Mr Lightfoot was refused vaccination fees when he re-vaccinated 124 children under 12 years of age during an outbreak of smallpox.<sup>19</sup> The regulations stated that only those 'past childhood' should be re-vaccinated. The spread of smallpox was halted but the Poor Law Board in London insisted he had acted against regulations and was not to be reimbursed. Mr Lightfoot was also refused his extra payment when he amputated a finger and the guardians did not consider it an emergency: in the circumstances he should have got a second opinion before chopping the finger off. He wrote to the commissioners in London, 'But my Lords and Gentlemen, I forwarded the finger to another surgeon who dissected it ...'. The commissioners did not think that getting a second opinion after the amputation was keeping to regulations and they upheld the guardians' decision not to pay him.<sup>20</sup> Poor Dr Peachey of the Brightwalton district must have felt cheated when he was refused payment for a confinement he had attended. Elizabeth Smith, a single woman travelling with a basket maker, had gone into labour in a tent by the side of the road at Catmore and Dr Peachey had been sent for. Unfortunately for him, the couple took down their tent and disappeared without paying his fee; so he sent the bill to the guardians, claiming that the couple were paupers. As the woman had not applied to the relieving officer for a medical order before the doctor attended, the normal procedure had not been followed, so no fee for Peachey.<sup>21</sup>

Friction between the medical officers could be caused if one of them treated a patient who was not in his district. In 1889 the medical officer of the Ilsley district, Dr Main, complained that Dr Rice, the medical officer of the Harwell district, had interfered and sent one of Dr Main's patients to the Infirmary. Dr Rice apologised and said he had offered to do this for the patient as an act of charity, 'having entirely forgotten that he was a patient of Dr Main's'. This message was passed on to Dr Main by the guardians, but he was still seething about it and replied: 'Mr Rice has done several unprofessional actions in my district and the only benefit the board would confer upon me would be to present Mr Rice gratuitously with a book on medical etiquette;' and he hoped that the board would kindly tell Mr Rice to confine his charity to his own patients.<sup>22</sup>

On a few occasions, there were complaints of medical officers neglecting

their duties. Mr Duncan was one who caused the guardians problems; being nowhere to be found when a woman at Fawley went into a difficult labour, refusing to visit a dying child, and having to explain why his weekly report sheet showed he had visited a sick man when the man's wife complained he had not seen her husband.<sup>23</sup> He was asked to visit Emily Hughes at Catmore when she broke her arm one Thursday, but didn't attend until the Saturday afternoon. When asked for an explanation by the guardians, he wrote that he hadn't considered it an urgent case, and told them, 'I beg to add that she did not suffer, and was not likely to suffer any detriment in consequence.'<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, having an untreated broken arm for two days cannot have been very comfortable.

The long-serving Wantage doctor, Walter Barker, was followed into practice by his son, Alleyne, who was removed from his post in 1897 when a woman died after he had refused to visit her.<sup>25</sup> Although the woman was a private patient, the guardians felt so strongly about the matter that they terminated his contract as union medical officer for a group of the villages in the Wantage district. He did however continue treating private patients.<sup>26</sup>

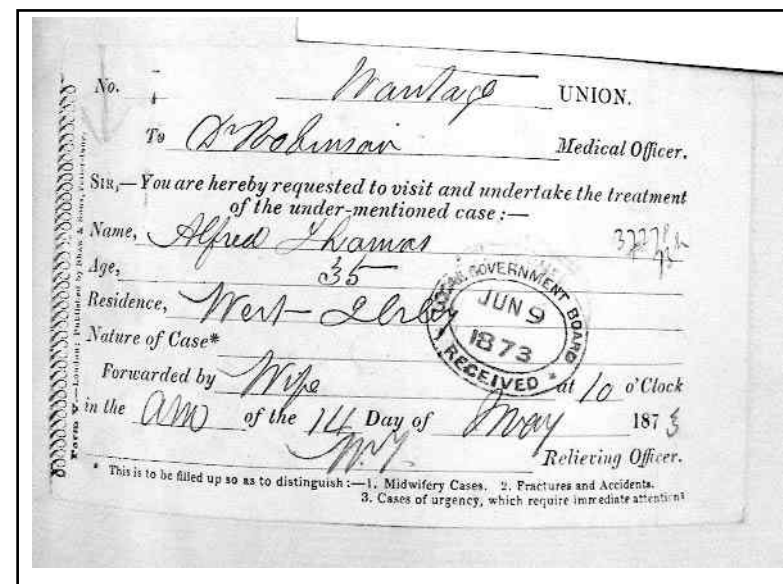
The medical officer who possibly caused more problems than any other was Alexander Robinson, of the Ilsley district, who was appointed in 1852.<sup>27</sup> From the beginning he was somewhat unreliable, needing regular reminders to send his record book in weekly, to report all cases he had visited, and to make sure he attended the sick. In 1857 a fairly serious charge of neglect was made against him: on Monday 2nd March the wife of William Collins of Hampstead Norreys applied to Mr Tanner, the relieving officer at Ilsley, for a medical order for attendance on her child. The relieving officer gave the order, which the mother immediately took to Mr Robinson. He asked questions about the child and said he should not be able to attend that day. The next morning (i.e. the Tuesday) Mrs Collins sent a girl down to Mr Robinson at Ilsley, but he did not attend that day. He failed to do so until four o'clock on Wednesday the 4th, and the child died two hours later. When asked by the guardians for an explanation, Mr Robinson replied: 'I was exceedingly sorry that I could not visit Collins's child of Hampstead Norreys earlier. It was a stupid little deaf girl of nine years old that came for me whom I could make nothing of and who led me to suppose it was of no consequence. Fortunately Mr Lamb [a doctor in the area who only took private patients] kindly visited the case, though it was not from any unintentional neglect I had not done so before [sic]. As I always endeavour to go as soon as I can.'<sup>28</sup> In a letter to the guardians a couple of weeks later, in answer to one from them, he changed his mind about it being a little deaf girl who came to him, saying he had confused it with another occasion a few days later, and continuing, 'The poor frequently present orders to me

desiring I should attend directly and on going I very often find little if anything the matter. These things happening so frequently, you are when much pressed with business apt to put off a case which unfortunately does require your early attendance.' The Poor Law Board in London were duly informed about all of this and considered Mr Robinson's explanation 'by no means satisfactory', but felt that a reprimand would be sufficient.<sup>29</sup> The little girl had died of scarlet fever, there having been several deaths from this in Hampstead Norreys at the time; so even if he had visited immediately she might not have lived.

A few years later, the guardians were still having problems with Robinson over non-attendance of patients, and they pointed out to him that they had also had frequent complaints that he sent medicine to paupers without any written directions as to its application. His reply to this was that he was not in the habit of labelling his bottles of medicine.<sup>30</sup> Still the medical officer in 1870, Mr Robinson warranted one complaint after another of non-attendance on his patients, with two deaths by the April: it took several reminders before he sent an account as to why he had not visited the second of these, Matthew Appleby, aged 70, of Hampstead Norreys, writing to the guardians that he 'had many pressing engagements as well as vaccination appointments when he received the order (on the 6th of April) ... and was not able to attend him until 3 o'clock on the 8th April, when he had just breathed his last.'<sup>31</sup> Other instances of not visiting the sick, not sending his book with the names of patients seen, or of sending it but with no names entered, occurred over the next couple of years. And then in January 1873 there was a hint as to the possible reason for his erratic behaviour over the years. Mr Brown, the guardian for Compton made a complaint when Dr Robinson had not attended Joseph Fisher of Compton after Joseph had had a fit and was left with a severe wound in his leg. The medical order had been given to Robinson on the Wednesday: he did attend the man on the Thursday, but as the patient became much worse, Mr Brown himself went to Robinson's house at Ilsley about 9 o'clock on the Friday evening to ask him to attend again. Mr Robinson was not at home, so Mr Brown requested Mrs Robinson to ask her husband to attend the pauper, and she stated that he would go to Compton the next day. However, Robinson did not attend until Sunday evening 'and was then not in a fit state to see the pauper'.<sup>32</sup> It appeared that he had a drink problem. He was requested to attend the next meeting of the guardians to explain. At the meeting, not only was Mr Robinson interviewed, but the guardians questioned Joseph Fisher's wife and her sister, Mr Tanner the relieving officer, and Mr Robinson's groom. The results of these interviews were sent to the Local Government Board and it was decided to hold an official enquiry

into the matter. By the time this was held at the end of March, there had been three more complaints made against him for non-attendance.

During the enquiry, the comment was made that 'Dr Robinson's habits are I fear notorious in the neighbourhood', and a friend of the patient who was present on the Sunday evening in question said, 'He was not sober, he was the worse for liquor I am quite sure'; although Robinson's groom denied his master had been drinking, and said, 'He was as sober as I am now'. The relieving officer, who was a close neighbour of Robinson and had seen him later that evening, thought Robinson was perfectly fit to attend a patient, but added, 'I think he had had a little drink; I don't think he was quite sober'.<sup>33</sup>



The medical order given to Dr Robinson in 1873 for a patient he did not visit until three days later (TNA: MH12/327, June 1873)]

Following the enquiry, complaints were made that the doctor had neglected to visit two other paupers and was in an unfit state when he finally attended these patients. The inspector who had held the enquiry was asked to investigate these later occasions, and as one of the two patients just mentioned had died, the guardians thought that the time had come to remove Robinson from his position as medical officer. Two other medical officers, Mr Lightfoot and Mr Wood, had said that Robinson occasionally

suffered from ‘congestion of the brain’, which by their description sounded as though it might have been migraine, and they suggested this could have made him appear drunk.<sup>34</sup> However, this did not excuse him from his constant neglect of patients, and he was sent a letter from the Local Government Board in July 1873 asking him to resign. Two weeks later, his letter of resignation, in which he mentions that he has served the union for 22 years, tells the guardians that he still wishes to continue as medical officer.<sup>35</sup> The guardians accepted his resignation.

Robinson continued to practise privately in Ilsley until 1875, when he died,<sup>36</sup> aged 45, leaving his wife with a 13-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son.<sup>37</sup> That, however, was not quite the end of the story. In November 1878 the guardians received an order to remove a girl called Frances Anne Robinson, a parishioner of East Ilsley, from the Chorlton union in Manchester.<sup>38</sup> This was Dr Robinson’s daughter. She was brought to the Wantage workhouse and her grandfather, who lived in Newbury and was also a surgeon,<sup>39</sup> was asked if he would remove her or if he would pay her maintenance in the workhouse. From the correspondence which followed this request, we learn that the grandfather was 86 with a very small annual income of £26: he was prepared to look after his grandson, but didn’t feel able to pay more than a small sum each week for Frances Anne. It then turned out that she had some sort of mental handicap, or was, as the guardians labelled her, ‘an imbecile’. They agreed to settle for a weekly sum of 1s 6d for her, if her grandfather would try to get her into a charitable institution.<sup>40</sup> No more details were given, but it appeared probable that after Dr Robinson died, his wife took the two children to the Manchester area and then died herself, all of which seems rather sad.

Over the years, most of the medical officers carried out their duties conscientiously and to the best of their abilities. Of these men we learn very little apart from fees claimed and areas served. It is the ones who caused problems to the guardians that left most information in the records, but it is also these who can be seen as real human beings and add interest to the story of the medical treatment of the poor.

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# The Irish in nineteenth-century Reading

**Ann McCormack**

## I. Introduction

Until the post-war period the Irish were the most important migrant group in Britain but the County of Berkshire has not featured highly in this story. Instead, historians have focused their attention on the larger urban areas of settlement, such as Liverpool, London, Glasgow or Manchester. Local Berkshire records demonstrate, however, that there has been a consistent link between Ireland and the Royal County. In Reading, for example, the nineteenth-century Census Records reveal that small numbers of Irish people settled here and some were present over several decades. These resident Irish came from a wide social spectrum and they engaged in a range of professions and trades. There were several other groups of Irish who passed through the county but do not appear to have put down roots here. Amongst this second group were seasonal workers, vagrants, Poor Law refugees and soldiers. It is this latter group, the transient Irish rather than the settled Irish, which was more likely to gain the attention of contemporary Berkshire observers, writers and lawmakers. This article will attempt to address the experience of both Irish groups, as well as consider the viewpoint of local Berkshire people.

In the nineteenth century, emigration became an increasingly important aspect of the Irish experience. Between 1820 and 1910 nearly five million people left Ireland. The majority were destined for the New World, particularly North America. Emigration to America was usually permanent. Britain, however, could be either a temporary or a permanent destination. Even before industrialisation, there was a tradition of temporary Irish migration to Britain to work at the harvest, or other peak times of agricultural demand. Quite often, these were groups of people from the same village or town, or members of the same family. The proceeds from these trips helped Irish tenant farmers to pay rents and so retain their own smallholdings. Incomes had long been supplemented in this way, particularly for those parts of Connaught, Munster or the north east, where plots of land were small and terrain less fertile.

The phenomenon of seasonal Irish labour in Berkshire was noted by the writer Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855), who lived near Reading in the

early decades of the nineteenth century. One of her books, *Belford Regis*, although fictional, was based on the town of Reading and her experiences of the surrounding locality. In a chapter entitled ‘The Irish Haymaker’ she described some of the passing Irish who were a familiar sight in the locality. She commented that: ‘... the haymakers, a far more diversified race, inasmuch as Irish people of all classes and ages, if they can but raise money for their passage, are occasionally tempted to try their fortune in the English harvest ...’. According to Mitford, there were three types of transient Irish with which ‘we are from our peculiar position sufficiently familiar’ – pig drovers, haymakers and vagrants. Both in Ireland and Britain, pigs, cattle or other livestock were driven across the countryside, on the way to market or in search of better pastures. The writer included the following description of the pig drovers:

... Irish boys, long, gaunt, shambling ... slow lounging gait and, between the sallow skin, the sunburnt hair and the brown frieze great-coat, the Irish drover ... [is] remarkable for good humour, good spirits, hardihood, and light-heartedness ... he goes the road from stage to stage, from alehouse to alehouse, scattering jokes and compliments, to the despair of our duller clowns and the admiration of our laughing maidens.

The chapter is mainly dedicated to one particular haymaker, Tim Murphy, who worked on a local estate. According to the story, the kindly landowner had allowed the Irish haymakers a barn full of clean straw for lodging and potatoes and buttermilk for board. As a consequence, they were able to carry home nearly all their earnings to Ireland. Tim Murphy appears to have been rather popular and merited a complimentary description: ‘...tall, athletic, active, and strong, with a bright blue eye and a fair but manly complexion ... a finer specimen of a young and spirited Irishman would have been difficult to select ...’.

Tim Murphy returned the following season and presented his benefactor at Denham Park a pocketful of seed potatoes ‘such as never before were grown upon English ground’. According to Mitford, he apparently provided more than a passing interest for the local Berkshire girls!

As well as agricultural labour, the Irish engaged in many other types of work, especially during periods of high demand. This casual, temporary work in Britain could also include dock labouring, mining or construction work. Sometimes this transient existence might lead to permanent residence in Britain. In the eighteenth century Irish settlements had sprung up in Bristol, Canterbury, Norwich and York. The advent of industrialisation in Britain prompted an increase in demand for labour and provided increased

opportunities for a traditionally mobile Irish labour force. The Irish were also involved in the digging of canals and, in the nineteenth century, excavating railroads. Reading station opened in 1840 but it is difficult to map the extent of Irish involvement in local railway construction. This important topic deserves more research. However, temporary labourers can be difficult to track and do not always appear on the Census Returns or other official records. After the opening of the Royal Berkshire Hospital in 1839, many victims of railroad accidents were taken there, but the early records do not show that any Irish-born railway workers were admitted. However, in 1851 the Census shows that there was a group of Irish excavators lodging in Brunswick Place, Reading (Appendix A). These included Timothy Fogarty and his wife and daughter, his brother Daniel, and ten lodgers, eight of whom were Irish, and almost all were excavators. There is no suggestion that this was an 'Irish quarter' of the town. There were no Irish recorded in the other 16 houses in Brunswick Place, nor in the nearby Brunswick Buildings. The neighbours on either side were all English-born. Most were from Reading and were mainly silk weavers, but there were also agricultural labourers and a baker in the street. It is not clear why ten Irish excavators were in Reading in 1851. By this stage the railway extension to Bristol had been completed, as well as the local branches to Newbury, Hungerford and Basingstoke. It has been suggested that this group may have been employed digging clay for brick-making, a chief industry of Reading.

Travel between Britain and Ireland was greatly facilitated by developments in shipping. In 1818 the first steam packet, the *Rob Roy*, linked Belfast with Glasgow and by the 1820s ferry services were also in operation from Dublin and Cork, principally to Liverpool, the main port for trans-Atlantic embarkation. By the 1820s steam passage had substantially improved and fares were relatively low. Competition between ferry companies reduced fares for the Irish Sea routes as low as 10d in steerage, and 3d on deck. To put this in context, according to W. M. Childs, around this time it cost between 12 and 16 shillings to take the coach journey from Reading to London, though this reduced to between 6 and 10 shillings for an outside seat! As this price comparison demonstrates, travel was becoming relatively easy, and sea travel, particularly between Ireland and England, was becoming relatively inexpensive. For those in steady employment, regular passage in either direction across the Irish Sea would have been possible. There were three established routes between Ireland and Britain. From North Connaught and the Ulster counties, migrants took a route via Derry and Belfast to Scotland, via Glasgow; migrants from Connaught and most of Leinster took the midland route, via Dublin, to Holyhead and Liverpool; from South Leinster and Munster the most likely route was via

Cork to Bristol, and perhaps onwards to London. This would be the most important route for the Berkshire Irish.

As British manufacturing developed, Irish communities began to emerge in the industrial heartlands of Scotland, the North East, Manchester, Liverpool, the Midlands and South Wales. The economic disparity between the two islands meant that the Irish people would be increasingly drawn by the prospect of employment in industrial Britain. While there remained a transient and temporary element to the Irish population in Britain, by the middle of the nineteenth century, and increasingly after the Famine, Irish settlement was becoming a permanent feature of British urban life. For some, whose ultimate goal was America, Britain remained a necessary stepping stone; for many hundreds of thousands of Irish people, however, Britain was the final destination. The majority of Irish immigrants were young, single people. Males slightly outnumbered females. Most of the newcomers became urban dwellers in the ports of entry. However, smaller numbers settled further inland in towns such as Reading. The number of Irish in Reading was relatively small and never exceeded 1.2% of the population throughout the nineteenth century. Appendix B provides more detailed information on national and local statistics.

It has been suggested that these national figures greatly underestimate the size of ethnic Irish communities in Britain because they do not take into account the numbers of English-born children of Irish parents. As the nineteenth century progressed, these offspring and the subsequent generations would bolster the importance of this group, and some estimates suggest that, to obtain a more realistic impression of the ethnic Irish in Britain, these numbers should be doubled. The national figures for Irish-born in Britain peaked in the post-Famine decades and thereafter began to decline. In percentage terms, the Irish were 3.6% of the population of Britain at the highest point in 1861. This figure is a national average and it should be remembered that there was significant regional variation. The numbers of Irish in Liverpool, for example, were much higher, in the region of 25% Irish-born. Towns such as Reading, located away from ports of entry and without heavy industry, had relatively few Irish, even after the Famine of the mid-1840s. In Reading there were 108 Irish-born people in 1841. Despite the growth of the town, and the upsurge in migration of Irish in the wake of the Famine, the pace of Irish settlement in Reading was rather sedate. It would be 40 years before the numbers of Irish doubled to 214 in 1881. By then, Reading itself had expanded so much that the Irish represented now only 0.49% of the population. The sharpest rise occurred in the following decade when the number of Irish-born rose to 400, but this was still only 1.07% of the total. From these figures we can conclude that



Famine migration had no effect on the numbers of Irish in Reading. No doubt, such individuals did not have the strength or the finances to stray too far from the port of entry. For those with sufficient means, America was the destination of choice. The gradual increase in numbers of Irish in Reading corresponds to the rapid increase in the size of the town, rather than the Famine migration.

Where did the Irish live? The answer is that they lived in every section of the town and there is no evidence that there was any residential segregation. There is no convincing evidence from the Census that they crowded together in ghetto-style, as was found in Liverpool, for example. Apart from the Fogarty household mentioned above, the Reading Census shows only one other example of a large Irish household in the nineteenth century. The Barry family appear in several sets of local records so it is possible to build up a picture of their experience. In 1841 the Census Returns show that they were amongst the 25 occupants of a house in Coley street (Appendix C). The family included John Barry (c. 1806-1853), his wife Mary (c. 1810-1865), and their two children. John was described as a labourer. Their daughter Mary was aged three and there was a newborn son also called John. Both the children were born in Reading and the birth dates indicate that the parents must have been in Reading for at least three years, i.e. since 1838 or before. The other residents of the house in Coley Street included 11 adult males aged between 25 and 55, nine labourers, two hawkers and a dealer. There were six adult females aged between 20 and 30. None of the women had declared any occupation, though this would not be unusual at the time. There were four other children aged between two and 12. The Irish members of the household consisted of four labourers, a dealer and a hawker. In 1851 the couple still lived in Coley Street with their daughter Mary, who was then 14. John Junior had died in early 1845 at the age of four, but there was now another son, Michael (Dec 1844- ), aged seven (Appendix D). We shall learn more of him later. The house was shared with another Irish family, the Driscolls, and six other individuals. In total, there were eight adult males (aged 14 and upwards), five adult females and two children aged seven. Nine of the 13 adults and the two children were born in Ireland. The male occupations consisted of two agricultural labourers, four hawkers or costermongers and a tinker man. Amongst the women there were one fruit hawker and one charwoman. The evidence from the Census Returns for Reading suggests that households with all-Irish residents were rare, as were examples of Irish families in multiple-occupancy dwellings, though there may well have been such unrecorded cases in the years between the Census. Those examples cited above appear to have been the exception rather than the rule.

## II. Popular perceptions of the Irish

The people of nineteenth-century Reading would have been accustomed to the two categories of Irish in their midst, the transient and the settled. At a time when the Irish did not enjoy a good press, it seems a reasonable question to ask how local people might have felt about the Irish. Ireland was constantly in the news throughout these turbulent decades. Newspapers and other publications regularly reported on Irish affairs. Reading audiences would have been aware of such debates and, no doubt, drawn their own conclusions. It might be interesting to speculate on what local events might have shaped their thinking.

It seems likely that local residents would have been familiar with an event which took place more than a century earlier, known as 'the Reading Skirmish', which involved the most unpopular Irishmen to come to Berkshire. The 'Reading Skirmish', a battle which took place in Broad Street on Thursday 6 December 1688, was fought between the supporters of James II (1633-1701) and William of Orange (c. 1650-1702). The King brought over Irish soldiers to bolster his forces in England. James's forces were encamped at Hounslow Heath and included a unit of Irish Catholics led by Patrick Sarsfield (c.1660-93). The Sarsfield family estates had been confiscated under the terms of the Cromwellian Settlement (1652), when many Irish Catholics lost their lands. Sarsfield's own military career had been curtailed because of his Catholicism but had revived under the reign of James II. Rumours abounded that the Irish soldiers were intent on massacre and plunder at Reading. Not surprisingly, with such a prospect, the townsfolk sided with William of Orange. The 'Battle of Broad Street' was almost a rehearsal for the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and it realised the same result: victory for the forces of William over those of James. The townspeople apparently celebrated the victory of William's army and one version of the story claims that up to 50 Irish Papists lay slain on the streets of Reading.

More than a century later, Mary Russell Mitford wrote about other kinds of Irish groups passing through the county. She was one of several commentators who noted that the location of Berkshire – situated between the ports of Bristol and London – meant that it would witness more than its fair share of Irish passers-by. She wrote in 1835:

That our county stands right in the way from Ireland to London, and in consequence from London back again to Ireland, is a fact well known, not only to our Justices of the Peace in Quarter Session assembled, but also to the Commons House of Parliament; the ... county ... having been so nearly ruined by the cost of passing the Irish paupers home to their own country, that a bill is actually before the Legislature to relieve the local

rates from the expense of this novel species of transportation, and provide a separate fund for the transmittal of that wretched class of homeless poor from the metropolis to Bristol, and from Bristol across the Channel.

In 1832 the notables of Reading were sufficiently worried about this subject that they wrote to the Government. A long, beseeching letter was sent to Viscount Melbourne, the Home Secretary, complaining about Irish vagrants at Maidenhead. Groups of Irish paupers had been expelled from the City of London. Under the Poor Laws, paupers were to be returned to their home parishes and these Irish were apparently required to make their way on foot from London to Bristol. Wherever they were accommodated *en route*, the local ratepayers were expected to foot the bill. The letter to Lord Melbourne begins:

Herewith, that the burden imposed on the County of Berkshire by the transmission of Irish vagrants has been for some years past a constant source of dissatisfaction and complaint on the part of the farmers from whose impoverished and nearly exhausted pockets the cost is almost wholly subtracted ...

It was further argued that:

... the apprehensions thus entertained are neither imaginary nor unreasonable ... these vagrants are brought, upon the first night after leaving London, to Maidenhead, the key or entrance to the County, where they arrive generally at nightfall, in numbers varying ... from twenty to a hundred and twenty ... they have then forty miles to traverse and one more night to remain in this County intermingling, and brought into immediate contact, with its inhabitants especially those of the lowest class.

To bolster their case, the Justices attached a supporting letter, from a Doctor Goolding. He objected to the London policy of returning the Irish overland when they could just as easily have been put on a ship and sent from London directly to Ireland. He complained that:

... it has been seen that under the existing system, these vagrants are conveyed about a hundred and thirty miles to meet a steam vessel which is to transport them into their own country, that the cost of this land carriage amounting to about twenty shillings per head is defrayed from

the Poor Rates of the counties which chance to lie, and only because they chance to lie, in the course of the road between London and Bristol. The object of this removal is, we are told, to clear the Metropolis of a nuisance. Why then should not the expense be borne by the Metropolis, or if not by the Metropolis, why not by the nation at large.

These extracts demonstrate the local sense of injustice as Berkshire taxpayers felt they had to shoulder a burden that should have been paid by London. No doubt the Irish paupers were just as unhappy with the situation. Weary and hungry, they trekked from London to Bristol, through places they were not wanted.

Why were so many Irish paupers criss-crossing the country in the early 1830s? One local dignitary who knew the answer to that question was the Rev. Francis Trench (1805-1886), Vicar of St Giles (1834-37) and later St John's (1837-1857), who lived at Eldon Square. The son of well-connected Irish Huguenots, he had many relatives in Ireland, where there was a large and powerful branch of the family. While still a student at Oriel College, Oxford, he spent many vacations travelling in Ireland and visiting his relatives. Here he witnessed scenes of extreme hardship, eviction and starvation. He was shocked by claims in the press that these accounts were exaggerated and published his own eye-witness reports to counteract this. His personal correspondence with his parents provides further testimony of these harrowing events. Quite possibly our Berkshire transients in the 1830s were refugees from one of the several regional Irish famines which occurred around this time. These local disasters have become overshadowed by the impact of the huge tragedy of 1845-8.

Irish politics was to have an influence on another Berkshire notable, Alderman Lorenzo Quelch (1862-1937). He was born in Hungerford in 1862, and in 1914 became the first socialist elected to Reading Town Council. In his autobiography he recalled how his interest in politics was motivated by discussions of Irish revolutionary ideas; his earliest memories of political matters concerned the Irish Fenian movement, founded in 1858. The Fenians were a network of Irish and Irish-Americans who believed that Ireland had a natural right to independence and that this could be achieved only by revolutionary means. In 1866-7 they attempted uprisings in Ireland, England and Canada. One incident which was imprinted in British minds occurred in November 1867. An attempt was made to rescue Fenian prisoners in London by blowing out the walls of Clerkenwell prison. Twelve people were killed and 126 injured. Not surprisingly, such events alarmed the British public. The press demanded strong action and, as a wave of anti-Irish hysteria ensued, opinions were polarised. Len Quelch in his

autobiography recalled these times during his childhood in Hungerford and local reactions to the Fenians:

... things that appeared in the newspapers about the wicked Fenians, the women and some of the men among our neighbours were really terribly afraid that the Irish would come to England and murder them ...

Len Quelch would have been about five years old at the time of the Clerkenwell bombing and, in Hungerford as elsewhere, these events provoked strong reactions. Later he would admit to some sympathy with Fenian republican ideals, reflecting that these adult discussions in Hungerford stimulated his interest in politics, and he came to believe that 'the propaganda of fear was quite useful to the anti-Irish Tories in those days'.

Another prominent Reading politician who would be concerned with Irish affairs was Goldwin Smith (1823-1910). He was born in Friar Street and became known as a Liberal reformer, journalist and historian. He developed the idea of a network of independent English-speaking nations, and he supported sovereignty for Canada and New Zealand, but did not feel these privileges should be extended to Ireland. As his biographer Elizabeth Wallace pointed out, 'His deep-rooted faith in colonial emancipation did not extend to either India or Ireland.' He was sympathetic to some Irish grievances. He condemned absentee landlordism, for example, and blamed English misrule for many of Ireland's problems. While he supported some of Gladstone's reforms, he opposed Irish Home Rule. In later years he did soften his view on this subject.

Casual Irish labour was still a factor in the locality later in the century, as the novelist Flora Thompson (1876-1847) recounted. Writing in the 1930s, she recalled Irish harvesters in Oxfordshire in the 1880s. This quotation comes from the *Lark Rise to Candleford* series:

Here come the jabberin' old Irish', the country people would say, and some of the women pretended to be afraid of them. They could not have been serious, for the Irishmen showed no disposition to harm anyone. All they desired was to earn as much money as possible to send home to their wives, to have enough left for themselves to get drunk on a Saturday night, and to be in time for Mass on a Sunday morning. All these aims were fulfilled; for, as the other men confessed, they were 'gluttons for work' and more work meant more money at that season; there was an excellent inn handy and a Catholic church within three miles.

### III. The Irish of Reading – origins and occupations

Not all the Irish of Reading belonged to the transient groups of soldiers, labourers and vagrants. Many settled in Reading, some permanently. A sizeable minority of Irish remained settled in Reading for longer periods. There were 45 households where one or both parents were Irish who remained in Reading over two decades, and eight households who remained over three decades. Three families remained over four decades. This proves that a significant number of Irish-born people lived in Reading for an extended time, indicating at least some degree of economic stability and social acceptance.

An attempt has been made to identify whether any counties or towns in Ireland had a particular association with Reading, whether there was any recognisable pattern of movement between a particular region in Ireland and the town of Reading. There are many difficulties with such enquiries, as those who have tried to trace Irish ancestors will already know. Most of the Irish Census Records for the period do not survive, thanks to an infamous event during the Irish Civil War in 1922, when a fire in the Public Records Office in Dublin caused the destruction of so many irreplaceable historical documents. The Census Returns of England recorded both the town and county of birth for persons born in Britain, e.g. 'Berkshire, Reading'. For all others, only the country of birth was requested, e.g. 'Ireland' or 'Scotland'. Consequently, tracing the exact origins of the Irish in Britain can be extremely difficult. However, in some cases the Irish town of birth was also helpfully included, although the householder was not required to do so. There are other problems, such as the deciphering of Irish surnames and Irish place names. Being unfamiliar to contemporaries, many were wrongly spelt or incorrectly transcribed and, regrettably, some errors have been carried over into the modern electronic versions. All these issues conspire to increase the challenge facing the researcher of Irish migration.

Fortunately, on the Reading Census in the period between 1841 and 1901, about a third of Irish-born adults provided information about their counties of origin. From this limited information, it is possible to say that of the 32 Irish counties, 30 had representation in Reading. The highest numbers were recorded for Dublin (107) and Cork (61). After that come Tipperary (25) and Antrim (20) and then Limerick (19) and Kildare (18). Looking at the totals for the provinces, Leinster has the highest number but Dublin accounts for most of that. The Munster counties covering the south and south-west show higher figures and this would tally with what we know about the sea routes from Cork to Bristol. Did Reading Irish come from a rural or an urban background? It is impossible to ascertain whether those who declared their origins as, say, 'Galway', 'Wicklow' or 'Longford' were from an urban or rural

background. Of the 32 Irish counties, 19 bear the same name as the county town; for example, does Galway mean the city of Galway or the county of Galway, and so on. It is also noteworthy that many Reading Irish had spouses or children who were born in Gloucestershire or Hampshire. The link with those counties indicates disembarkation at Bristol, and likely origins in Munster and the southern half of Ireland. This would be in keeping with what is known about patterns of travel between Britain and Ireland.

Irish men in nineteenth-century Reading were engaged in a wide variety of occupations, the most important of which were the Army and labouring. Some men did not declare any occupation on the Census form, or just described themselves as 'labourer' or 'general labourer', so it is not clear in which industries they were employed or what was their level of skill. In Reading there were Irish labourers employed at the beer and biscuit factories, and in the building trade and agriculture.

In 1891 the Census Report for England and Wales declared:

The Irishmen in this country contribute, as is well-known, distinguished members to every profession and every rank; but the bulk of them ... are engaged in the rougher kinds of unskilled labour, the proportion of artisans and of dealers of all kinds and grades being very small.

Reading, of course, was not dominated by these more grimy industries. One happy resident, the surgeon W. Bernard Secretan, was keen to point this out in 1903:

... I was glad I had selected Reading as my home .... Although it contained many factories and a number of engineering works, these never seemed to be so obtrusive or so dirty as one finds in many other localities, for instance, in the Midlands and the North. The manufacture of biscuits, a clean trade, is, as everyone knows, Reading's chief industry.

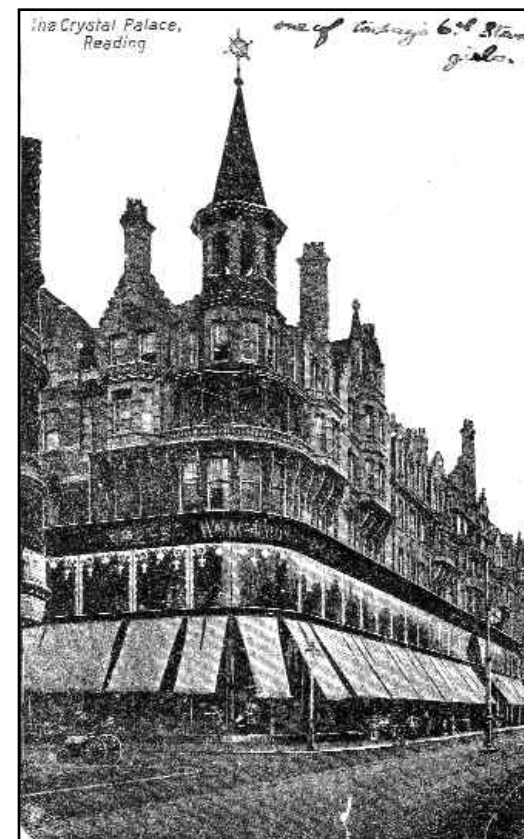
Many ex-army men, including a few Irish, found employment in Huntley & Palmer's, especially towards the end of the century.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Irish men were prominent in all equestrian-related occupations. From dealers and traders to grooms and stablemen, their occupations also included the more highly-skilled areas of harness making and saddle making. They were also involved in every aspect of the cloth trade and could be found at either end of the social scale. On the one hand was Kildare-born Mathew McGovern, aged 15, who lived in Oxford Road in 1891 and described himself as a 'cloth sorter of wool'. At the other

end of the scale was the founder of Reading's 'Crystal Palace', the draper, William McIlroy, who came from Derry. He employed several young men and women from his home town. In 1901 there were eight Irish draper's assistants, aged between 19 and 25, housed above the shop on West Street. In 1861 four Irish tailors were amongst the lodgers at a public house at 20 Minster Street. Also connected with the cloth trade were Irish weavers and tailors, seamstresses, stay makers, hat makers. Drapery and tailoring featured for both men and women.

Individual women are much harder to trace through the records than are men. As well as the problems mentioned above, the researcher has to contend with change of surname on marriage. It has not been possible, for example, to trace the young Mary Barry, born in Reading in 1838. The majority of women, whether married or single, did not declare any occupation outside the home and the column was just left blank on the Census form. Most likely, many women did engage, at least some of the time, in paid work but it was not necessarily recorded. Women were assumed to be involved in domestic duties and childcare, so nothing else may have been recorded. Women were more likely to be employed on a casual, temporary, informal basis, so it was not recorded. Some

paid work undertaken by women could be carried out at home, such as needlework and laundry, but may not be recorded. And women – and children – could be employed in a family business but not necessarily recorded as members of staff. For many women childbearing continued



*The Crystal Palace draper's shop, West Street*

across two or more decades, which is also revealed through Census records. These conditions, of course, applied to women regardless of national origin.

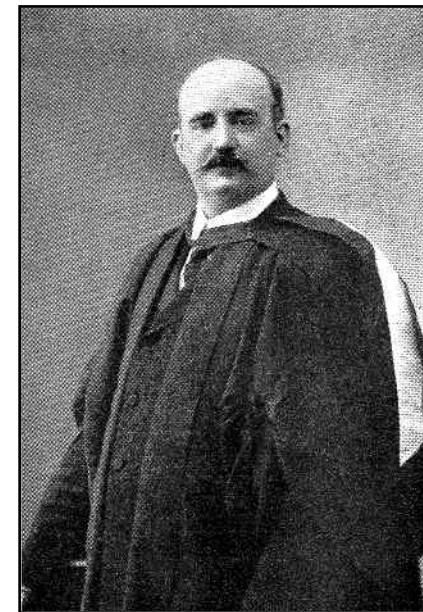
Outside of the home, domestic service was the single most important job for Irish women, described variously as 'charwoman', 'laundress', 'maid', 'domestic servant', 'female servant' or 'children's nurse'. The fate of a woman was, of course, strongly linked to the occupation of her father or her husband. Even women who were married to men in skilled work and with a reliable income could suffer a drastic change in lifestyle on the death of the husband. Dublin-born Mary Granville (1836-1909) was married to Fredrick (1831-1886), an 'engraver and steel & iron letter cuter', obviously a highly skilled occupation. In 1871 they lived at 19 Crown Street with their one-year-old son, also called Frederick (1870-1904). In 1881 the family were living at 3 Crown Court and Frederick's occupation was described as 'steel engraver artist'. Frederick died five years later and the family fell on hard times. Mary then had to work as a 'charwoman' and lived at 3 Alms House Court with her unemployed son. Ten years later they both still lived in Alms Court but this record reveals that they are 'living on parish' and that young Frederick had an 'infirmity from birth'. Some Irish women described themselves as 'living on own means', suggesting the presence of a better-off social class. Of the few professions open to women at the time, teaching and nursing have a small representation. Drapery and various forms of tailoring were the next most important occupations.

There was a relatively high level of intermarriage in Reading and Irish women were more likely than Irish men to take an English spouse. The figure was generally above 40%, the lowest being in 1841, with only 20% of Irish men marrying English; the highest figure was in 1861 when over 80% of Irish-born women in Reading were married to English men. These findings are similar to other studies done in Bristol, York and Salford. All showed relatively high rates of intermarriage and demonstrated that marriage between Irish and English was quite common. In Bristol in 1851 around 50% of Irish-born had married non-Irish. A similar pattern was seen in York before the Famine when intermarriage rates varied between 30% and 40%. This trend declined in subsequent decades with the arrival of destitute Irish following the Famine, a pattern also noted in Salford. In Bristol and York it was Irish males who were more likely to marry non-Irish. The opposite was true in Reading where Irish females were more likely to marry non-Irish.

Irish children attended fee-paying residential schools in Reading. Both Reading Boys' School and Leighton Park School provided temporary homes for a small number of Irish boys. Several small private schools existed in Reading and from time to time included both Irish staff and pupils. They

catered mostly for boys but there were also a few girls' establishments. In London Street in 1901 there were three brothers from Limerick resident at a school run by Ben Sharp. The same year, six out of the 67 boarders at Reading Boys' School were Irish-born.

For 14 years, beginning in 1887, the Broad Street Independent Chapel was served by the Derry-born Independent minister, Robert Herbert Sewell. He was a graduate of Oxford and had been a theological student at Cheshunt, the college founded by the Methodist religious revivalist, the Countess of Huntingdon. An energetic campaigner for numerous causes, he instigated a variety of activities, including the first Industrial Exhibition at Easter 1893 and the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Society in 1890. Another of his endeavours was the Working Men's Evening College, opened in 1895 in connection with the church. Within two years, classes were being taught in arithmetic, shorthand, book-keeping,



*Rev. Robert Herbert Sewell*

composition, geography and 'the Science of Common Things'. There were close links with Reading Industrial College and Reading University Extension College. In the years between 1837 and 1840, the first Roman Catholic Church in the town, St James's, was built. In the nineteenth century there was one Irish-born priest, Fr Pierce W. Green of Waterford.

Apart from labouring, the most important occupation for Reading Irish was the Army. Intermarriage was particularly noted amongst military families. As the British Army was an important source of employment for Irish men, so it was also an important source of husbands for Irish women. One such example was Annie Brooke, born in Ireland in 1867. Nothing else is known of her Irish background but she married an English soldier, Mark Brooke, who was described as a 'drummer in the Infantry'. They had eight children, several of whom went into the Army. At least one of them, Henry John Brooke, saw service in Ireland.

The involvement of Irishmen in the Army has been well documented. According to one estimate, in the mid-Victorian period, 30% of the Army

was Irish. Later in the century around 40,000 were recorded in the Army and the Merchant Navy. Goldwin Smith once remarked, rather patronisingly perhaps, but he probably intended it as a compliment, ‘... the Irishman seems to be fond of government service and faithful to its uniform ...’. He was referring to the Irish Constabulary, which was in effect a paramilitary force, almost an auxiliary Army. Many Irish soldiers took up permanent residence in Britain following their discharge from military duties. This is borne out in Reading, where Irish ex-soldiers were amongst the workforce. There were several military bases in the region, including the Regimental Depot on Oxford Road, later known as Brock Barracks.

Soldiers are particularly noticeable in the Census because they often elaborated in the occupation column, sometimes giving not only their current job but also entering their former military role. But many ex-soldiers chose to give further information about their former rank and regiment, suggesting that they would be quite pleased to have all this written down, even though the Census did not require information about past careers. The Army was by no means a comfortable life but it seems that, in general, men were reasonably proud of their military past, and Irish men, too, were happy to proclaim their past association with the Army. Irish servicemen were not confined to the Irish Regiments and could be found throughout the Army, including the local regiment. One rather young recruit was Athlone-born George Lewis, who joined the Berkshire Regiment at the age of 14. He was living at the Depot in 1901. In the occupation column of the Census Returns, Reading Irishmen described their regiments or occupations as follows: ‘49th Regiment’, ‘Infantry’, ‘66th Regiment’, ‘Royal Artillery’, ‘87th Regiment’, ‘Royal Militia’, ‘Army Medical Corps’, ‘Army Pay Corps’, ‘Royal Navy’ and ‘India Staff Corps’. Some had seen service in Barbados, Bermuda, Canada, Ceylon, Channel Islands, East Indies, Gibraltar, West Indies and India, before finally settling in Reading for a period of time.

Take the example of Robert and Mary Cushion from Tipperary who remained in Reading over four decades. In 1871 they lived in Sussex Place and Robert was described as a ‘pensioner’ and ‘sergeant in the militia’. Their eight children had been born in India, Kent, Berkshire and Ireland, diversity of children’s places of birth being another indicator of an army or civil service background. Ten years later the family had moved to 9 Oxford Road and Robert was then a tobacconist and nightwatchman. The association with the Army continued into the next generation.

#### IV. Conclusion

In Reading the Irish stereotype was represented in all its great diversity. There were the vagrants, those who made their living in the marginal street

economies, or the sweated industries such as tailoring, domestic service and labouring. Sometimes the Irish were to be feared, especially if encountered in large groups, vagrants, navvies, Fenians. Although Reading undoubtedly had to contend with its share of Irish paupers, especially in the early part of the century, it did not have to bear witness to the horrendous consequences of the multitudes of starving refugees in the wake of the Great Famine. In this sense, the Irish experience here was different from that of the large centres of settlement. Reading Irish came from all parts of Ireland and included both urban and rural dwellers. Typically, they came from the southern half of Ireland, particularly the counties of Cork and Tipperary. They probably sailed from Cork and landed at Bristol, after which they took a meandering route through neighbouring English counties. It could have taken several years to reach Reading, sometimes acquiring Gloucestershire- or Hampshire-born spouses and children on the way. There was a strong association with the Army, both for men and women. Some military men stayed in the area following discharge from the Army and arrived in Reading via a colonial route. The high degree of intermarriage suggests a good level of integration. This was probably helped by the fact that the Irish never comprised more than 1.2% of the local population. They were represented in all social and religious circles. Occupations showed a surprising degree of diversity and covered the entire spectrum of middle class professional and business, working class skilled and unskilled.

Other stereotypical qualities did not escape our Berkshire observers. The Irish were conveniently available during periods of high demand and were willing to undertake a whole range of occupations, many of which were not familiar to them. They were regarded as hardworking. They endured personal discomfort in order to save as much money as possible for their families. If we are to read between the Mitford lines, they were not all entirely displeasing to the eye and the young men provided more than a passing interest for young Berkshire ladies. Remember, intermarriage rates were exceptionally high in Reading! They were sometimes helpful, witty and entertaining. The majority did not conform to the dominant religious culture of Britain but, even when they were away from the social constraints of their own small communities and out of the glare of the proverbial Irish priest, many remained faithful to the Mass. They had their idiosyncrasies – perhaps a tendency to ‘jabber’ and preference to be located not too far from a good inn. However, the evidence from Reading suggests that when the Irish were encountered as individuals or in small numbers they seemed to have been accepted and even assimilated.

The historian Michael Gandy has pointed out that there is no reason why we should expect the Irish to be poorer, less educated or less law-abiding

than the equivalent English social group. He also suggests that much of the prejudice against the Irish was on account of their predominantly rural background. The story of migration, he argues, is frequently the story of the country person moving into the town. Country folk, regardless of their origins, could be on the receiving end of snobbish attitudes. Because they spoke with strange accents and had different customs they were often treated as outsiders. By the middle of the nineteenth century the majority of the population of England were town dwellers, a condition that did not apply in Ireland until the mid-twentieth century. Most Irish emigrants, therefore, were country folk. Although Reading Irish could not have been impervious to anti-Irish prejudices of Victorian society, they were not socially segregated, or at least did not seem to be residentially segregated, nor were they excluded from the main industries of the town. They lived near to their work, rather than near to other Irish, but with Irish and English who were engaged in similar trades and who were from the same social class. Class, therefore, was at least as important – if not more important – than nationality or religion.

It would be good to conclude with a summary of the fate of all the Reading Irish mentioned above but, regrettably, many of these individuals have left little archival trace. Of all the Irish drapers' assistants from West Street who worked for McIlroys, few can be reliably located amongst surviving records. It is likely some went to America. The tailors of Minster Street have left no further trace, likewise the Coley Street labourers and the Brunswick Place excavators. The same could almost be said of the Driscoll family of Coley Street, except perhaps for one small entry in the Minutes of the Board of Guardians on 3 May, 1851, when a Margaret Driscoll was admitted to the Workhouse in St Mary's Parish. It was also reported that a baby, also Margaret Driscoll, was 'born in house'. They were discharged five days later. It seems likely this is the same Margaret Driscoll recorded on Census night, 30 March, as living at 22 Coley Street, St Mary's Parish. In later decades, two members of the family, Mary and Cornelius, appear on the Census for Stepney in London, employed sometimes as servants and sometimes as hawkers.

Rev. Sewell of the Independent Chapel came to Reading via Birkenhead in 1888. In 1901 he returned to that town to take up a more senior post in a Congregationalist chapel. Young George Lewis reached the rank of Corporal in the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Of the Cushion family, only Mary remained in 1891. She still lived on Oxford Road but was widowed and lived alone. A decade later she was in Weldale Street and described as 'living on her own means'. As for Annie Brooke, no further details were found. All her sons went into the services and one of them, Mark Louis, was killed in WWI.

There is strong circumstantial evidence that the Barry family came from Cork, possibly from a place called Boherbue, a small village in rural west Cork. John Senior died in Reading in 1853 at the age of 49. It has not been possible to trace his daughter, Mary. As mentioned above, John Junior died at age four. Mary Senior lived in Bird Court in 1861; she was then aged 60 and described as a hawker of cotton. The youngest son, Michael, then 17, was employed at the biscuit factory. Michael is the one who was born in Coley Street in 1844. It appears he went to America in 1870 when he would have been 26. He married into another Irish family and settled in Massachusetts. The American Census of 1900 shows that he lived with his wife and two daughters and two sons. All three males were carpenters. The oldest daughter was described as a sales girl of dry goods. The youngest daughter, aged 18, was described as 'at school'. What a different world to that of his parents. To be able to support an 18-year-old in education, especially a girl, suggests some degree of both affluence and enlightenment. For the Barrys, it was a long road from Boherbue in west Cork in the 1830s to Milton, Mass., in the 1870s. It took generations to complete the journey and not every member of the family made it. Coley Street and Bird Court in Reading were important steps in that journey. To fully appreciate the Irish experience of migration to Britain, it is important to consider this wider context and to include local histories of smaller regional centres. Many emigrants lived away from the large ports of entry, the industrial heartlands and London-centric politics. The story of the Barry family illustrates how important it is to have a long view of Irish migration, taking into account the local and personal histories, as well as the wider national or international context.

## Appendix A 1851: Residents of 6 Brunswick Place, Reading

<i>Name</i>	<i>Relationship to Head of House</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Where Born</i>
Timothy Fogarty	Head	M	40	Excavator	Ireland
Johanna Fogarty	Wife	M	39		Ireland
Johanna Fogarty	Dau	U	16		London
Daniel Fogarty	Bro	U	56	Excavator	Ireland
William Dunn	Lodger	U	30	Excavator	Ireland
Bartholomew Mullins	Lodger	U	25	Excavator	Ireland
James David	Lodger	U	28	Excavator	Ireland
Jeremiah McCarthy	Lodger	U	26	Excavator	Ireland
Daniel Keogh	Lodger	U	30	Excavator	Ireland
Michael Burke	Lodger	U	28	Excavator	Ireland
Thomas Keane	Lodger	U	24	Excavator	Ireland
Henry Smith	Lodger	U	29	Excavator	Banbury, Oxon
David Barry	Lodger	U	22	Excavator	Ireland
Thomas Smith	Lodger	U	18	Porter/Driver	Buckingham, Bucks

## Appendix B 1841-1901: Statistics for Irish in Britain showing breakdown for England and Reading

<i>Year</i>	<i>Great Britain</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>%</i>
1841	415,725	2.3	281,236	1.8	108	1.2
1851	727,326	3.6	499,229	2.98	157	0.71
1861	805,717	3.6	573,545	3.06	188	0.75
1871	774,310	3.0	544,533	2.56	174	0.5
1881	781,119	2.7	539,502	2.21	214	0.49
1891	653,122	2.0	438,702	1.61	400	1.07
1901	631,629	1.8	407,604	0.92	448	0.62

## Appendix C 1841: Occupants of 2a Coley Street

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Where Born</i>
John Barry	30	Labourer	Ireland
Mary Barry	25		Ireland
Mary Barry	3		Berkshire
John Barry	1 month		Berkshire
Dennis Murphy	30	Labourer	Ireland
John Hayes	25	Dealer	Ireland
David Barry	30	Labourer	Ireland
John Williams	50	Labourer	England
Ann Williams	20		Berkshire
Charles McCarthy	40	?	Ireland
John Kelly	30	Hawker	Ireland
Mary Hefers	30		England
Sarah Hefers	12		Berkshire
James Fisher	30	Labourer	Berkshire
Rebecca Plister	25		England
Mary Plister	5		England
Henry Cleveland	30	Labourer	England
Jane Cleveland	2		England
John Elliot	30	Labourer	England
Joseph D Elliott	7		England
Mary Galling	20		England
William Drew	25	Labourer	England
Ann Drew	20	Labourer	England
Mary Kelly	20		England
John Forsberry	55		England



## Appendix D Residents of 2a Coley Street, Reading, 1851

(Source: Census Returns)

Name	Relationship	M/S/W	Age	Occupation	Place of Birth
John Barry	Head	M	45	Ag Lab	Ireland
Mary Barry	Wife	M	41		Ireland
Mary Barry	Daughter	S	15	Scholar	Berks, Reading
Michael Barry	Son	S	7	Scholar	Berks, Reading
John Hayes	Lodger	S	40	Hawker	Ireland
Maurice Driscoll	Husband	M	32	Ag Lab	Ireland
Margaret Driscoll	Wife	M	32		Ireland
Cornelius Driscoll	Son	S	7		Ireland
Mary Driscoll	Sister	S	19	Fruit Hawker	Ireland
William Crawley	Lodger	S	19	Fruit Hawker	Ireland
Thomas Dugin (? Duggan)	Lodger	S	49	Hawker	Ireland
Michael Goddard	Lodger	S	53	Costermonger	Berks, Reading
Elizabeth House	Lodger	S	30	Charwoman	Berks, Ruscombe
Tholmas Saunders	Lodger	S	60	Fisherman	Berks, Fawley

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## David Cliffe

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