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Cover illustrations
Front. Engraved view of Culham Court by John Farrington, 1796
Back. Top: The Broad Street entrance to Reading's market arcade; Bottom: Print of Market Place showing the Corn Exchange, drawn and engraved by William Frederick Austin, 1856
Front: Berkshire Record Office; Back: Reading Central Library

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How old is Old Windsor?

David Lewis

A thought-provoking sign has recently appeared on the A308 at Old Windsor, informing motorists that the town was once the 'Home of Saxon Kings'. At first, this statement might seem quite reasonable; certainly the place was occasionally used by at least the last Saxon king, and likely the Confessor had some affection for the place, as in 1066 it formed part of the foundation endowment for his mausoleum, Westminster Abbey.[1] On reflection, however, the claim might seem a little less clear cut.

Firstly, the idea that anywhere could, in a modern sense, be called 'home' to these peripatetic monarchs suggests that more than a little gloss has been applied to the facts. If anywhere might be thought of as 'home' to the west Saxon kings, Winchester, their capital, would surely have the strongest claim. Indeed, there is no evidence that the Confessor or his forebears regarded the place we call Old Windsor as 'home', any more than the many other places they visited. Documentary material relating to the place is not extensive, however. Nothing survives from before the mid-eleventh century, and the site's archaeological record is largely incomplete. With these gaps in our knowledge, a degree of overstatement about its past might perhaps be excused. Particularly so, because today the place is dominated by modern housing and it is almost impossible to imagine that it is in any way linked with Windsor Castle, a mere three miles distant. In fact, although not obvious, Old Windsor is a classic example of a deserted medieval town, with its parish church detached from the focus of the modern settlement, set in fields adjoining the river Thames. The people of Old Windsor moved to the castle site in the early twelfth century, leaving the old town to revert to the plough, and this is mostly how it has remained ever since.[2] The prefix *Old* Windsor was added to its name in the late twelfth century, by which time little of the *Saxon* settlement could have survived; the place had simply been called 'Windsor' up to this point. Old Windsor is therefore considerably older than both the castle and its neighbouring (and more famous) settlement, the modern town of (New) Windsor. For which reason the second point made by the sign, its connection to Saxon monarchy, might be thought an understatement. It is highly likely that the place had a history before the coming of the crown, as it attracted royal use for a reason and typically this was because it was already well known. Saxon kings selected sites that were special for some reason, and there is no reason to think Windsor would have been any different. In this light, could Windsor have pre-Saxon origins,[3] perhaps being a royal estate of long standing? Indeed, there are several other early sites in the locality, such as the Neolithic house recently excavated at Horton, a village only two miles away, and conceivably Windsor could have similar very early origins. But if this was the case, then what was it about this seemingly unremarkable suburb which made it the place of elite settlement, and why? Should the modern road sign correctly claim some yet earlier distinction for the place? Questions such as these are difficult to answer when documentary information, the usual source of 'history', is not available, and the inclination might be to think that its past cannot be recovered. But with the use of wider, non-documentary sources – and there are several of these – and by comparing the place with better understood sites, it might be feasible to suggest at least some possibilities, albeit that the picture produced is tentative and only just visible. Old Windsor may well be an example of a place where a few strands of history, while seemingly insignificant in themselves, when collected together, make a persuasive case.

Despite saying that there are no documentary sources for pre-eleventh century Windsor, this is not entirely true. One of the most important early documentary sources in western Europe, the 1086 Domesday survey, provides not only a 'snap-shot' of the settlement in the late eleventh century but also, almost incidentally, a kaleidoscope of its earlier history. Reference is made in the survey, for example, to names, people and their titles, which were inherited from its Saxon past. These, perhaps unwittingly, provide a window on its earlier history and certainly suggest it was a site of importance. Most graphically of course, Domesday tells us that Windsor was an extensive settlement in 1086, set out with 95 urban plots or enclosures (*hagae*), which probably implies it had a population of about 500.[4] The place was home to royal officials, such as the steward, and there was also a clerk called Albert, who presumably came complete with a church, although this building is not specifically recorded. Windsor was a manor owned directly by the crown and numbered as one of the three major settlements in Berkshire next to Reading and Wallingford. Its value, however, at only £15 per annum, suggests it formed a poor comparison with these other Berkshire 'towns', valued at £48 and £80 respectively. The recent tendency in reviewing such information is to point to the signs of Windsor's urban development: its rank within the county and its large number of *hagae*, justifying the conclusion that it should be considered an early 'town'.[5] The classification of Windsor as a town is of some significance, because we now know that urbanisation became a major theme of national history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and it bolsters Windsor's significance to think that it was in the vanguard of such a development. The difficulty with this analysis, however, is that Domesday does not say Windsor was a town (*burh*), but rather a villa [*Regis*] – literally, to use Bede's eighth-century use, a royal village.[6] But could Windsor really have been a village in 1086, given its royal associations and known extent? Perhaps the scribes had made a mistake, incorrectly classifying the settlement, as it is well known that the survey's technical classifications were inconsistently applied.[7] This might be a possibility, but surely it is one that must be discounted, as it is inconceivable that the scribes would have been careless in classifying a royal possession. What is of note here is that the classification is not merely between town or village, but should also include a third type of settlement, known as a *villa*. At the time a settlement's importance was not defined merely by its urban credentials, as in the pre-manorial world settlements could be significant for other reasons. They could, for example, be estate centres, places of administration or regional gathering points.[8] Early estates often covered an extensive area and for this reason they might have several centres or *villas*, each used for a different purpose, and some perhaps being quite 'small' places. To bend the information provided by Domesday into a more contemporary 'town centric' interpretation is likely to miss the point.

The term *villa* is significant because it was applied to seats of authority and control.[9] The actions taken at these places were given additional legitimacy because of the history of the setting; a contemporary parallel might be the royal use of Westminster Abbey. A perfect but more everyday eleventh-century example of this is provided in the chronicles. Windsor was the location for the story of Spellcorn the woodman, a royal servant who was said to have been cured of blindness by the miraculous touch of the Confessor.[10] Edward's saintly repute and canonisation rested on accounts such as this, and the story's Windsor setting was of no little significance in lending credibility to the account. It was presumably this same rationale which prompted Windsor to be selected for the assembly of the entire English church with the Pope's representatives in 1070.[11] This highly influential meeting concluded the post-Conquest reform of the English church, cleansing it of Saxon influence, and no doubt its setting added weight to the proceedings. The site's special status might also explain its more intensive use by the Normans post 1066, as it helped bolster the dynasty's claim to the throne, continuing, as it might seem, in a line of rightful government. In the eleventh century estate centres, and particularly royal estate centres, or *villa Regia*, had a special significance of their own, and this had probably been so for a considerable time.

The passage of time is an important point to bear in mind in considering what Domesday says about settlements, however. Just because Domesday suggests a place was not very important, it does not follow that it had always been in this category. Cookham (Berkshire) provides a case in point.

According to Domesday, this settlement was not one of exceptional note: in common with Windsor it was owned by the crown, it had a church with a priest, a 'new' market and accounted for 32 villagers and 21 cottagers. It was rural, contained 18 hides (c. 1,000 acres), and had a population numbering possibly 150, but was of no great estate.[12] In the late eighth century, however, a Saxon charter provides a very different picture. Cookham was called an *urbs* (a minster site, equivalent to a *burh*) and was exchanged by King Offa for 110 hides (c. 5,500 acres) in Kent.[13] This evidently was a major centre, characterised by its minster church, which may well have managed a large part of what became east Berkshire. The fort at nearby Sashes is also noted in Alfred's ninth-century Burghal Hidage; the place was clearly also of military importance.[14] This is not to suppose that Windsor could be compared with eighth-century Cookham – there is no evidence for this. The point here is that other for the chance survival of early documents, little of Cookham's past could be guessed from Domesday. Care therefore needs to be exercised in supposing what the survey says about a settlement is the final word on its history. Although there are no Saxon charters relating to Windsor, and its Domesday entry is incomplete, it does not mean that its past can necessarily be judged of little significance.

Importantly, we now think that Windsor has a significant link with Cookham: both places were likely the location of a minster church, despite Domesday's omission of this detail at Windsor. The significance of this is that Anglo-Saxon minsters – an early form of sponsored monastery – were important in setting out and managing landed estates, in much the same way as the better known Cistercians became skilled farmers in the later Middle Ages.[15] As the early missionary church extended its influence across the country from the seventh century, so these minsters came to be located at important sites. Indeed, Thames-side minsters were perhaps some of the earliest in Berkshire, owing to the possibility of river communications, and several came to have a particular link to the Crown. There were minsters at Kingston (Surrey), Staines (Surrey), Cookham, Reading, Lambourn and Thatcham – Kingston clearly having a special prominence, as it was the place where Saxon kings were crowned from the tenth century.[16] The early church required protection and this was most effectively provided by locally powerful magnates, if not the king. It was a natural development therefore to co-locate a minster church at the places controlled by such important people. The arrangement clearly had benefits for both: the church provided spiritual protection for the sponsor, in both this world and the next, while the patron provided physical protection for the church and its clergy in their missionary work.

Minsters combined the functions of a religious centre, eventually evolving into the parish church network, and an estate centre. Income generated from agricultural production was used to fund their religious activities, or the produce itself – either meat or grain/flour – was used to pay rent-in-kind, known as 'food renders'. To facilitate this activity, minsters used local markets which in turn stimulated local urban development; the minster over time, in some cases, becoming the focus of an associated 'town'. The abbey at Abingdon (now Oxfordshire) provides a well-known local example of this arrangement, its market place set at the abbey gates. No doubt Windsor's minster was also influential in developing its urban community, possibly being more important in this regard than the high-spending royal court, which only intermittently visited the site. Indeed, it is quite possible that the size of Windsor in 1086 was the result of 'minster development', rather than its more celebrated royal connections.

What is known about Windsor before the eleventh century comes from its archaeological record, although this is by no means either complete or fully documented. A series of archaeological excavations was undertaken on the site in the mid-1950s, but a final report was never produced.[17] Nonetheless, the site would seem to have been in royal use by the ninth century, and one possibility is that the church came to the place at about the same time. This date is of no little significance, as it also coincides with several other developments, and particularly the joint action of the Saxon and Mercian kings, facing the threat of Viking invasion. Windsor's riverside site had formerly been in warred-over border land between the two kingdoms, as the Thames formed their theoretical boundary, and presumably the site had not been considered safe for royal use. With the realities of foreign invasion, the site must have acquired a new significance because it demonstrated kingly co-operation. Added to which, the Wessex kings started to establish fixed places of kingship at abut this date, replacing the peripatetic arrangements which had been the norm hitherto. Previously, kings had typically travelled to the source of their food rents, rather than the food rents being brought to the king. But in a parallel development to the Carolingian court, these arrangements were modified in the ninth century, to establish special 'fixed' centres, of which Windsor may well be an example.[18]

In establishing a royal centre, the king would not simply have acquired a bare land, but a place which already had some special significance. The parallel here is Cheddar (Somerset), a well-studied Saxon and early Norman royal site which has many similarities to the Windsor estate.[19] In this case, however, it was Cheddar's famous gorge which underlined its elite status, being a remarkable physical feature. Windsor must also have been distinctive, but probably not in terms of its topographical features, as there are none. Rather, the archaeological record might suggest it was Windsor's longstanding connection with 'authority' which distinguished it from other possible places. One of the most remarkable discoveries made in Hope-Taylor's excavations was the existence of an early stone building, with a tiled roof and glazed windows, associated with the operation of a horizontal watermill of the ninth century.[20] Buildings of this type and in this period are extremely rare and underline the importance of the place. The mill itself, again tentatively, and based on dendrochronology, is thought to be of still earlier origin, possibly dating from the seventh century.[21] If this information is correct, then it might add weight to the possibility that Windsor's minster was not of equal date to the site's royal use, but pre-dated it. If this was the case, then its minster, as at Cookham, could have been at the centre of an early east Berkshire estate, its mill associated with the payment of food-renders. It would be wholly logical for the crown to adopt the site in the ninth century, building a substantial new mill, as this re-emphasised the settlement's traditional function. Such deduction, however, hinges on very little firm archaeological evidence and probably in itself is no more than informed speculation. But this is not the only reason to think the site had an early importance.

It is well established that the middle Thames valley was exceptionally attractive to the very earliest settlers owing to its fine alluvial soil: the area offered exceptional conditions for cultivation. Extensive archaeological evidence has been recovered from Wraysbury through to Maidenhead of settlements spanning the so-called Dark Ages – suggesting the possibility that a significant-sized, but unidentified, Saxon settlement or *wic* once existed nearby.[22] The north bank of the middle Thames valley is possibly one of the best archaeologically understood areas of the country. Significantly, modern surface soil maps of the area reveal that the first point at which the influential alluvial soils occur is exactly at the location of the Windsor settlement. From this it would seem that the Windsor site was not mere chance location, but one which was carefully selected. Quite possibly, it might be imagined that the place had some original function in controlling access to a valuable area of cultivation further upstream. For this reason, it would have been the obvious place at which to locate a local market, and consequently the natural site for an estate centre, minster and mill. Moreover, the site also had convenient access to the valuable raw materials of Windsor forest, which could be used for building, fuel or export by river. With these natural advantages the Windsor settlement was exceptionally well appointed. Land outside the fertile river valley, by contrast, was of much inferior quality, particularly the area of London clay to the west. There would have been good reason to regulate both the use of the river and the area's agricultural resources from the Windsor site. But if this was the reason that the minster came to the place in the seventh century, surely the same advantages might have attracted still earlier settlers? Of course, with the distance of time and the lack of any physical evidence of British tribes from any part of the country, it is difficult to know. But again very tentatively, some indication might be taken from place-name evidence.

The derivation of the name 'Windsor' has been the subject of many and varied explanations, complicated by the fact that there is almost no consistency in its early spelling – over two hundred variations have been identified.[23] Nonetheless, the most often quoted makes a connection between the observed (and different) nature of the river near the settlement's site and the supposed existence of a river-side winch. The name Windsor, it is thought, breaks down into two parts – Windles-ora, meaning winch (or winding – *windles*) by the river bank (*ora*).[24] It is suggested that because the river beyond the settlement's site becomes more tortuous and possibly shallower, cargos intended for destinations further upstream had to be transhipped on to smaller craft at this point. For this, or possibly for the haulage of boats, a large and distinctive riverside winch was constructed on the site, which led to the settlement's name. The difficulty with this explanation is that it is almost entirely without supporting evidence. There is no reference to goods being transhipped at Windsor, New or Old, in the Middle Ages, nor at any other place in the locality. Added to which, if the nature of the river required goods to be transhipped, then surely occupations associated with this activity would have found their way into local people's surnames, as was the case with other medieval local occupations pre c.1300. Yet the extensive collection of local medieval property deeds provides no evidence of this.

Probably the reason that the 'Windsor winch' derivation has had any currency is that it was posed by Ekwall in his 1960 dictionary of place-names – since when, by repetition, it has become a hard fact.[25] More recent research, however, would cast doubt on Ekwall's suggestion, as the name *Windlesore* is in the genitive, and, topographically, similar use of the word 'Wendles' at other sites appears incorrect.[26] In other words, it seems likely that the name Windsor denotes ownership rather than being a description of the settlement's setting, features or function. If this is correct, then the name describes a place by the riverbank owned or controlled by people – the 'Wendles' – conceivably being an ancient British tribe who once lived in the area. The fact that the name 'Windles' also occurs in the Surrey place name Windlesham, a settlement about nine miles from Windsor, might add support for this possibility. Windlesham may have once been a further 'central place' on the same 'Windles' estate. Although it is impossible to know, Windsor may have been a gathering place by the river for the Windles tribe, and the site of an early market – one of the very few in east Berkshire. If it was a place of ancient authority and control, then this might explain why it was later attacked and burned, possibly by the Vikings, as the archaeological record appears to indicate.[27] The site may therefore have had a history passing from the Britons, to the early church and then to the crown in the ninth century. Some support that the site had undergone at least two phases of renewal in this sequence can be taken from its layout. The parish church, for example, is peripheral to the presumed site of the royal enclosure rather than being at its focus, as would normally be the case if the site had only been developed by the church.

So how old is Old Windsor? If we were to take merely the documentary evidence, the conclusion might be that it dates from the mid-eleventh century. Such a conclusion, however, ignores the historiography of kingship in the Saxon and probably the British periods. Tentative though it is, a link can be made between the topographical characteristics of the site, the settlement's name and more recent archaeological work, which it would be wrong to discount. Perhaps on the basis of this we should dare to suggest that Old Windsor was not merely a place of Saxon kingship, but a seat of ancient authority dating back before the country's northern European invasion. These pagan times would certainly have been very different to our own – and perhaps, therefore, the sign should refer to the possibility that ancient British kings once came to this place. East Berkshire is more 'historic' and royal than many suppose.

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The Hundreds of Berkshire

Joan A. Dils

Berkshire was established as a shire in Ethelwulf's Wessex after his victory over the Danes in 851;[1] soon after the county was divided into hundreds. Throughout the Middle Ages the hundred, as the basic division of the shire or county, was one of the main units of local government, the others being the shire, the borough and the vill (township).[2] By the tenth century it had become the basis of judicial and financial administration in most of southern and midland England and continued in use after the Norman Conquest. However, its origins are 'one of the most difficult problems of Anglo-Saxon history'. In Berkshire, as in other shires of southern England, the hundreds varied greatly in size, from as few as twenty to more than five hundred hides, whereas in the Midlands the hundreds were mostly of a uniform size, about a hundred hides. The hide itself presents problems of interpretation.

Originally the hide was the unit of land sufficient to support a peasant household. It varied in acreage according to the quality of the soil, being far bigger in the East Midlands than in Kent; even the measurement of an acre varied in different regions.[3] Stenton suggests the hundreds were not imposed by the state as a taxation unit based on the number of hides but arose from more obscure origins.[4] Perhaps they began as ancient groupings of a hundred heads of families responsible for law and order, or as units for organising the costs of defence during the Danish attacks. However, the Burghal Hidage of c.911-919 imposed the costs of defending each fortified place, a *burh*, on a number of hides, one man to be supplied from each, no mention of the hundred being made.[5]

However, by the mid-tenth century it was the hundred which was the 'fiscal, police and judicial unit'.[6] In 951 the Danegeld (a tax used to 'buy off' the raiding Norsemen) was levied for the first time. Each shire was assessed on a round number of hides and then the amount due divided among the hundreds. The usefulness of using the hundred and the hide as the unit of assessment was that the tax rate could be varied according to need.[7] The hundred continued to be used for taxation purposes even after the early twelfth century when the hide was abandoned as the assessment unit. Until the twelfth century the hundred reeve, a local official, was responsible for tax collection; thereafter he was replaced by the Crown's choice of tax collector, but the hundred survived.[8] The returns of the 1334 subsidy record the tax paid by each community with no reference to hides; two chief tax collectors assessed what each borough or vill should pay. The total paid, based on a fifteenth of taxable wealth (for vills, both rural and urban) and a tenth (for taxation boroughs), was recorded for each community, then as a total for the hundred and finally for the county. For example, Earley paid £7 6s 8d, Charlton, the hundred to which it belonged £27 10s $10^{1}/_{2}$d, and Berkshire £1036 3s $6^{3}/_{4}$d.[9]

The records of the poll taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381 were also organised by hundreds. For Berkshire, details of only the 1381 tax survive, apart from a fragment from 1379. The total collected from the county and in most cases the sum from each hundred is recorded, making it possible to assess the taxed population of Berkshire and for some hundreds, even where the returns for individual vills are missing. Everyone over the age of 15 was ordered to pay a poll tax (tax per head) of one shilling, though each community could assess the wealthy at a higher rate and the poor at a lower rate, provided that the overall figure was equal to as many shillings as there were adults. On this evidence Berkshire had a population of 15,696 over the age of 15, the Lambourn Hundred 575.[10] In the early sixteenth century the organisation and collection of the county's payment of the subsidy (tax) was in the hands of the county elite, with lesser gentry and townsmen responsible for taxing the hundreds into which towns and villages were grouped. Again the total for each hundred was recorded in the returns in addition to those for each constituent community. For example, the 158 taxpayers of the Hundred of Compton, consisting of the parishes or townships of East and West Ilsley, Aldworth, Chilton, Compton and Farnborough, contributed a total of £42 3s 8d in 1524 towards Berkshire's £1650 7s 7d.

The judicial functions of the hundred took place in the hundred court, the lowest competent court to which Anglo-Saxons had access; above it was the shire court and later the royal courts. It probably began as a public assembly, called in early law codes a folk moot (moot being a term used in this period for a court or meeting), and became such an essential part of the judicial system that it was retained by the Normans.[11] While both courts remained significant throughout the Middle Ages, that of the shire gradually became the more important, though in the twelfth century both became inferior to the itinerant royal courts. In the tenth century the hundred courts met every four weeks, later increased to every three weeks. They dealt with Anglo-Saxon folk law concerning both private pleas and criminal offences; they also dealt with ecclesiastical matters, but this function was reduced by the Normans.[12] The hundred reeve, a royal official later called a bailiff, presided, while a jury of freemen presented cases and made accusations. By the twelfth century, criminal cases were mainly dealt with in the shire tourn or view of frankpledge sessions which were held twice a year. At these courts the sheriff presided and juries of twelve men from the hundreds presented cases. When the king's travelling (itinerant) justices came to hold royal courts in the county, juries from the hundreds were summoned both to present breaches of the peace or to answer on oath certain questions concerning the administration and maintenance of justice.[13] Royal officials also used hundred juries to elicit information on royal rights in each county in the reign of Edward I, resulting in documents called the Hundred Rolls. The best known are those of 1279-80 which for some counties include details about land holding, farming and land use.[14] Unfortunately very little of the returns for Berkshire survives.

Domesday Book (1086) records twenty-two hundreds in the county. In general they were compact areas of varying size, some large like Reading and Charlton, others small like Shrivenham and Eagle. By the time of the lay subsidy of 1334 the number had increased to twenty-four. Wargrave and Sonning were formed from part of Charlton Hundred, and Cookham from Beynhurst Hundred. Other new hundreds included Ock which took in parts of Wantage and Ganfield, and Theale, a new name for Thatcham Hundred, enlarged to take in part of Reading. Reading Hundred had expanded to include six detached vills: Cholsey, Blewbury, Bucklebury and Thatcham (belonging to Reading Abbey), part of East Hendred, and Windsor Underore. Faringdon Hundred was the remnant of Wyfold. Other important boundary changes included the enlarging of Shrivenham Hundred which absorbed Hillslow (centred on Ashbury), and the shrinkage of Slotesford Hundred to just the four villages of Basildon, Streatley, Moulsford and Sotwell.

Records of the Tudor lay subsidies show the number of hundreds reduced to fifteen. Three had merged: Cookham and Bray; Kintbury and Eagle; Reading and Theale. Others had been absorbed into larger neighbours: Beynhurst and Ripplesmere into Cookham and Bray; Bucklebury and Rothbury into Faircross; Slotesford into Moreton; Sutton into Ock. Some hundred boundaries were now confusing, with many outlying parishes separated from the consolidated area, especially in Reading and Theale, and Cookham and Bray.

In many early nineteenth-century reports, including those on the old poor law and census abstracts, parishes are grouped into hundreds. In Berkshire they had increased in number to twenty and were consolidated areas with no outlying parishes. Some 'lost' in the early modern period reappeared: Beynhurst, five parishes from Remenham to White Waltham; Ripplemere including Clewer and Easthampstead; and Charlton, composed of several chapelries and liberties south and east of Reading. Two hundreds had been divided to make four: Bray and Cookham, Reading and Theale.

In the early Anglo-Saxon period the shire court and that of the hundred met in the open air, and while the former had moved to the county town by the twelfth century, the latter remained in the open. Several meeting places gave their names to the hundred, though with the passage of time some of the distinctive topography from which the name was derived has changed. There is no record of the cross marking the place where the court met which gave Faircross Hundred its name, though there is (or was in the 1970s) a Faircross Plantation in Chieveley.[15] Other hundreds have similar locative names: Eagle, *Ecga's wood or clearing*; Ripplesmere, *the pool of the 'ripel'* (a strip of land between pools); Beynhurst, *a bean field*; Charlton, *the hill of the peasants*; Wargrave, *the grove by the weirs*; Kintbury, *a fortified site* (*burh*) on the Kennet; Ock, *eoccenforda*, *a ford* (near Abingdon); Moreton, *a farm in marshy land*, Hormer, *pool of the dwellers in the horn of land*, a reference to a great loop of the Thames enclosing the hundred. One name which makes the hundred court seem as much a social as a judicial occasion is Ganfield, *the open land of games*, possibly indicating sports associated with the meeting. Other hundreds took their names from royal manors such as *Cocham* (Cookham), Wantage, Lambourn and Compton. Yet others were named from the leaders of the most important settlement in the hundred such as Reading (*Reada's* people) and Sonning (*Sunna's* people).[16]

Given their confusing history, the local historian might question the need to acknowledge the existence of the hundred, yet it was one of the earliest and most local of all the institutions of England. It became an important part of the legal and financial administration of the county in the distant past and was later used by successive governments as a convenient way to group important data. Practically, it is useful to know where to find a given parish in an early tax roll or in a return printed (and now on line) in a parliamentary paper. A few hundred courts enjoyed a long and useful existence; well into the seventeenth century the court at Shrivenham was appointing the constable of the hundred, and the tithing men of constituent parishes who were the agents of law and order in the district. It also acted as a small claims court, providing a valuable data source for the study of rural debt at this period.[17] At a time when politicians believe they are inventing localism, it is no bad thing to remember how very local Berkshire once was.

Appendix: Berkshire Hundreds[18]

1086	**1524-5**	**1801**
Beynhurst	Compton	Beynhurst
Bray	Cookham and Bray	Bray
Bucklebury	Faircross	Charlton
Charlton	Faringdon	Compton
Compton	Ganfield	Faircross
Eagle	Hormer	Faringdon
Ganfield	Kintbury and Eagle	Ganfield
Hillslow	Lambourn	Hormer
Hormer	Moreton	Kintbury Eagle
Kintbury	Ock	Lambourn
Lambourn	Reading and Theale	Moreton
Marcham	Shrivenham	Ock
Reading	Sonning	Reading
Ripplesmere	Wantage	Ripplesmere
Rowbury	Wargrave	Shrivenham
Shrivenham		Sonning
Slotisford		Theale
Sutton		Wantage
Thatcham		Wargrave
Wantage		
Wyfold		

References

1 Helen M. Jewell, *English Local Administration in the Middle Ages* (1973) p. 42

2 F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (2nd edn, 1947) pp. 242-3.

3 Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (1952) p. 97; H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest* (paperback edn, 1970) pp. 159-60.

4 Stenton, p. 295.

5 Loyn, p. 135; Wallingford was allotted 2,400 hides. Judy and Stuart Dewey, *The Book of Wallingford* (1977) p. 20.

6 Jewell, p. 47.

7 Jewell, pp. 103-4.

8 The term ‘reeve’ is best known from its use in the term ‘shire-reeve’ or sheriff, the chief royal official there.

9 R. Glasscock, ed. *The Lay Subsidy of 1334* (1975) pp.6-7.

10 C. C. Fenwick ed., *The Poll taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381. Part 1 Bedfordshire to Lincolnshire* (1998) pp. 4, 16.

11 Whitelock, p. 137. In addition to folk moots there were shire moots, later called shire courts. London had ward moots.

12 Folk or customary law covered many situations – the use of witnesses to a transaction, penalties for crimes (especially theft) and civil cases (especially claims to land). In addition law-codes were compiled which applied throughout a kingdom, e.g. Ine’s law-code in Wessex or those of Ethelbert in Kent. Defence in all courts was normally by support of ‘oath-helpers’ who vouched for the accused’s good name, or by ordeal.

13 Jewell, pp. 125, 50-51. The more familiar name for ‘tourn’ is ‘view of frankpledge’, the twice-yearly manorial or borough court leet. Frankpledge was a system in which all men were grouped into tithings, the members bound to stand security for the good behaviour of all. The borough of Nottingham called its court leet the Great Tourn.

14 W. B. Stephens, *Sources for English Local History* (1973) pp. 107-8.

15 This paragraph is based on Margaret Gelling, *The Place-names of Berkshire* (English Place-name Society vols 49-51, 1973-6) *passim*.

16 Doris Mary Stenton, *English Society in the Early Middle Ages* (1951) p. 133; Margaret Gelling, *Place-names of Berkshire, passim*.

17 Joan Dils, ‘The Hundred Books and Rural Debt: Shrivenham Hundred, Berkshire in the seventeenth century’, *Oxoniensia* vol. LXXII (2007) pp. 9-18.

18 For maps of the hundreds in 1086 and 1801 see Joan Dils, ed., *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire* (1998) pp. x, 19; TNA E 179/73 Lay Subsidy 1524-5, Berkshire.

The Culham Court Estate, Wargrave, Berkshire: Part One[1]

Phillada Ballard

Introduction

Fuller in his *History of Berkshire* observed 'many neat houses and pleasant seats there be in this county both on the Kennet and the Thames'.

This article is concerned with the history of one Thames-side estate, Culham Court, in Berkshire, and the families who owned and occupied it from medieval times to the early twenty-first century. Culham in the north of the parish of Wargrave, near Henley on Thames, is in an area with many 'neat houses' but few enjoy such striking views of the Thames or provide such an unspoilt example of a late-eighteenth century villa in spacious grounds. From the late seventeenth century Culham was owned by several families whose principal residence was in London and for whom Culham, less than a day's journey from the capital, was a country retreat. Other families owning or leasing Culham made it their permanent home, making changes that enhanced its setting, but did not detract from its architectural qualities.

I The early history of the estate from the medieval period to the mid-eighteenth century

There is no mention of the manor of Culham prior to the thirteenth century when it was described as part of the manor of Wargrave. Wargrave had belonged to the Crown before the Norman Conquest and formed part of the Crown demesne after it was seized by William I. In the late twelfth century it was sold to the bishopric of Winchester. Wargrave lay within the Forest of Windsor and the bishops acquired extensive hunting rights. The manor remained in that ownership until the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century when it was surrendered to the Crown.

Edward VI granted the manor to Henry Neville, a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, in 1552, and, after being restored to the bishopric of Winchester during the reign of Queen Mary, it was again granted to the Nevilles. In 1616 the manor and estate of Culham was sold by the third Sir Henry Neville to Margaret White, who settled it on her daughter, Margaret, wife of Sir Richard Lovelace of Hurley.[2]

The Lovelaces had owned the manor of Hurley from 1545 and had built Ladye Place, a mansion by the Thames, with remnants from a priory destroyed in 1536. Richard Lovelace was the third generation to own Hurley and had been knighted in 1599 for services in the Irish wars. He was created Baron Lovelace of Hurley in 1627. [3]

In 1612 the manor and estate of Remenham had been bought by Lovelace, so, by acquiring Culham, the Lovelaces had an estate that extended across the three parishes of Remenham, Wargrave and Hurley. However, Dame Elizabeth Periam, whose second husband was Sir Henry Neville, had been left a life interest in the Culham estate and in 1619 she leased Culham to Richard Lovelace.[4] The indenture drawn up between them on 16 December 1619 gives some indication of the estate. She let him the following:

> The manor lordship and farm of Culham, also Kilham, Berks, and one capital messuage, orchard and garden with divers other edifices enclosures arable groundes meadows pasture or feedings woods underwoodes.

The rent for the estate was £200 per annum. The capital messuage was Culham Court, the manor house of the estate.

There is no evidence to suggest that Elizabeth Periam ever lived at Culham. Her residence was at Greenlands in Buckinghamshire. She was a great benefactress and in 1609 had founded the Blue Coat School in Henley to educate and apprentice twenty poor 'boys of the said town'.[5]

Lord Lovelace died in 1634 and Culham passed with the other estates to his son John.

Some evidence for the value of Culham survives from 1664 where, in the 'Rent Roll of Kilham', the majority of the estate was held by Richard Soutlate. He 'holdeth Kilham Court or Kilham Farm with divers messuages and lands as tenant at will' for £160 a year. 'The rent of the Copyholds of inhabitants of Kilham amounts yearly to £5.12.06'. The copyhold land was that which was transferred through the manorial court.[6]

John Lord Lovelace was a Royalist and a follower of William of Orange and supported his accession to the English throne. He sold the manor and estate of Culham to Richard Stevens in 1679. Culham then entered into a new phase in its history as the Stevens family were resident owners, Culham being their country retreat for visits from their London homes. The estate remained in the ownership of this family for nearly one hundred years.

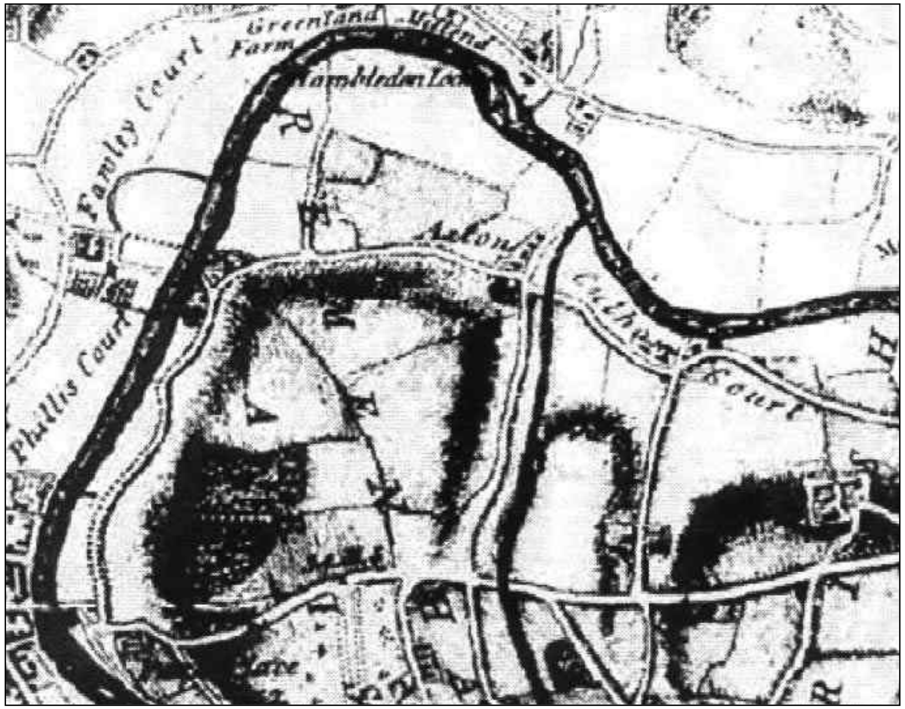
The Stevens were of yeoman stock long settled in the Thames valley and the family fortunes were founded by Henry Stevens of Easington who was Wagon-Master General to Charles I. Henry's son Richard, and several of the succeeding generations of the family then entered the law. Richard Stevens, barrister of the Inner Temple, who had married Mary Enstone, died in 1690 and was succeeded at Culham by his son Henry, a serjeant at law, also of the Inner Temple. He married Mary Adey, daughter and heir of John Adey of Baeksburn (now Bekesbourne), Kent, and was granted a coat of arms in 1694. Henry was succeeded by his son, Henry Stuart Stevens, in 1738. Henry Stuart Stevens was a mathematician and an FRS, and on his death in 1760 he left the Culham estate to his only surviving brother, John. He was a captain of an East Indiaman. John Stevens sold the estate in the same year to Richard Michell.[7]

The Stevens family also purchased another estate. Thomas, younger brother of Henry 'Serjeant' Stevens of Culham, was an attorney at Henley and his eldest son Henry, a proctor of Doctor's Commons, purchased the Bradfield estate in Berkshire where his great grandson founded the well-known public school.[8]

Some idea of the appearance of the estate shortly after it was purchased by the Stevenses can be found in a painting by Jan Siberechts (1627-1703) entitled 'View of the Thames Valley with Henley in the distance' executed in 1697. This shows a landscape of enclosed pastures sloping down to the Thames, with Dean's Wood on Aston Hill. The extensive group of buildings by the three eyots was not then part of the estate. The scene of haymaking and the animals being herded indicates that the rearing of livestock was the predominant type of farming then being practised.

The picture does not extend far enough south to include the manor house of Culham Court, but its position and layout are shown on a section of John Rocque's Map of Berkshire of 1761. The house was close to the road from Henley to Marlow near White Hill Wood, later called Rose Hill Wood. The entrance drive went first to the stable block and then to the house, which commanded extensive views over meadows to the Thames and to the remains of St Mary's Abbey at Medmenham. A long drive ran westwards from the house to give access to the fields of the Home Farm, and a second access lane ran below it from an entrance in Hurley. The estate was also transected by a lower lane nearer the Thames that ran from Hurley to the buildings by the eyots and then to Aston.

The extent of the manor house and the quality of some of its furnishings when owned by the Stevenses can be obtained from a document of 1739 regarding furniture at Culham.[9] Although Henry Stuart Stevens had inherited the Culham estate in 1738, his younger brother, Richard, had been left some of the furniture which Henry bought from him for £178 6s 9d. The rooms mentioned on the ground floor were the hall and drawing room together with kitchen, scullery, storeroom, brewhouse and cellars. In the garden there was a summer house. Among the furniture was a cherry tree table and six walnut tree chairs in the drawing room, and a reading desk on

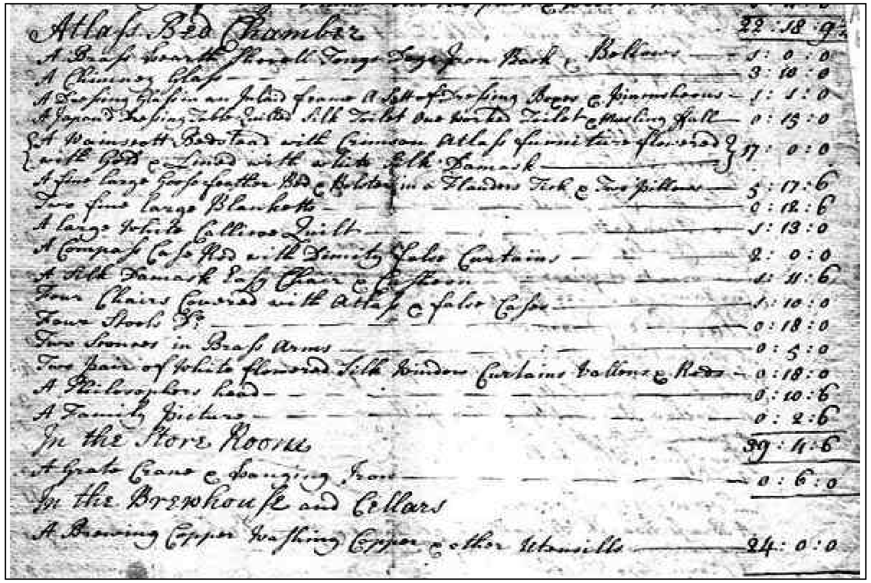


John Rocque's Map of Berkshire, 1761, shows Culham in the bend of the River Thames

a pedestal and a mahogany pedestal table in the hall. He was also left furniture in three principal bedrooms which were named after the bed hangings: the Wrought bedchamber, the Plad bedchamber and the Atlas bedchamber. The Wrought bedchamber had 'a sarking bedstead with fine Dimity Wrought furniture lined with India satin'. Dimity was a cotton cloth and this had been embellished or wrought with needlework and then lined with silk. The room also had 'four elbow chairs covered with flowered silk', 'a silk easy chair and cushion', 'a walnut tree close stool and pewter pan', 'a glass in a walnut tree frame and dressing box', 'a dressing table with a silk toilet and work'd toilet and washing pail'. The Plad bedchamber had a panelled bed hung with scotch plaid lined with white satin, whilst the most splendid bed hangings were in the Atlas bedchamber. The panelled bed had hangings of a crimson silk with gold flowers made in the East called atlas silk, and lined with white silk damask; four chairs were also covered in atlas silk; and there were two pairs of curtains of white flowered silk. The eastern theme was continued in the dressing table which was lacquered or 'jappaned'

An idea of some of the servants employed by the Stevenses at Culham comes from accounts of 1731 and 1734.[10] In 1731 there was a coachman and a footman, together with a cook, kitchen maid and three other women servants. The footman hired in 1734 also acted as the butler and was paid £6 a year. The family also employed a ploughman at £7 5s a year and two other farmworkers for the Home Farm, later known as Culham Farm, the part of the estate they farmed directly.

Home Farm was one of the four farms of the Culham Court Estate, and lay in the northern part of the property adjoining the river. It comprised the Home Grounds, the Lawn and Aston Hill and House leys. The farm buildings were mostly in the parish of Remenham. When Henry Stuart Stevens was the owner of Culham he reduced the amount he farmed directly as he feared he would lose money, and added some of his acres to Lower Culham Farm, one of the three other farms of the estate. This farm had been added to by the Stevenses who had purchased part of the land and complex of buildings that were near the river opposite the three eyots. These were described as 'messuage, tenement and two barns stables and outhouses, also orchard garden and part of the tanyard called one acre' and four closes of land amounting to 26 acres which had been purchased by 1718 from a Mr Biggs. The rest of Lower Culham Farm consisted of NW, NE, SW and SE Cowfields, Court Meadow and Lower Round Hill.



Atlass Bed Chamber	22:18:9
A Brass hearth Shovell Tongs Dogs Iron Back & Bellows	1:0:0
A Chimney Glass	3:10:0
A Dressing Glass in an Inlaid frame A Sett of Dressing Boxes & Pincushions	1:1:0
A Japan'd Dressing Table Quilted Silk Toilet One worked Toilet & Marking [illegible]	0:15:0
A Wainscott Bedstead with Crimson Atlass furniture flowered with Gold & Lined with white Silk Damask	17:0:0
A fine large Goose feather Bed & Bolster in a Flanders Tick & Two pillows	5:17:6
Two fine large Blanketts	0:12:6
A large white Callicoe Quilt	1:13:0
A Compass Case Bed with Dimity false Curtains	2:0:0
A Silk Damask Easy Chair & Cushion	1:11:6
Four Chairs Covered with Atlass & false Cases	1:10:0
Four Stools Do	0:18:0
Two Sconces in Brass Arms	0:5:0
Two pair of white flowered Silk Window Curtains Vallens & Rods	0:18:0
A Philosophers head	0:10:6
A Family Picture	0:2:6
In the Store Roome	39:4:6
A Grate Crane & hanging Iron	0:6:0
In the Brewhouse and Cellars	
A Brewing Copper Washing Copper & other Utensills	24:0:0

Extract from an account of Goods left at Culham

The third farm on the land of the Culham Estate lying to the north of the turnpike road was Middle Culham Farm, which in 1730 comprised fields called South Sheepcote Hill, Fishers, South Coopers, North Coopers, Middle Heath field, North Heath field, South Heath field, North Stevelys, Freezes, the Lee and North Sheepcote hill, South Dean and Cow Leeze, and was 174 acres.

The fourth farm, Upper Culham Farm, was on land south of the turnpike road, and in 1729 comprised 241 acres. Its fields were called Lower and Middle Cooks, Herberts, Great and Little East Land, Great and Little Lee, Chalk Hill Close, Groves Cill and Gayers.

Sometimes Lower and Upper Culham farms were held by the same tenant, such as John Smith, who held both from 1729 until 1751.

The estate also included some woodland which was usually kept in hand. This comprised two areas of woodland near the manor house, White Hill Wood and Lord's Coppice of 40 acres. From 1751 the woods were let to Mr Hart who at the same time became the tenant of Lower Culham Farm. By 1755 he had carried out considerable improvements to Lower Culham Farm, including extending the woodland, which Henry Stuart Stevens thought amounted to three thousand pounds of investment.

The estate also included several cottages which were let and the fshing rights which were let with the largest of the three eyots, Rodd Eyot, whilst Mead and Little Eyot were also let.[11]

Henry Stuart Stevens appears to have been in financial difficulties by the 1740s. An undated manuscript describes him as having 'no ready money' and in 1744 he mortgaged the Culham Estate for £7,400.[12]

John Stevens sold the Culham Estate in 1760, the year he inherited it. The lawyer's expenses 'relating to the sale of your estate to Mr Michell' amounted to £43 13s 0d.[13] He continued to live in the area, his house being at Badgemore in Oxfordshire, near Henley on Thames, but after his death in 1777 a memorial to him was erected in Wargrave Church.[14] The Latin inscription translates as:

> Next to the remains of his most beloved wife
> This man wished to be laid to rest
> John Stevens esquire
> Seventh child of Henry Stevens servant to the law
> An inhabitant of Culham Court in this parish
> And of Mary, daughter and heir of John Adey of Baeksburn
> Finally his surviving son
> Grandson of the same Richard Stevens
> Of Henley on Thames arm bearer

Who was the grandfather of his dearest wife Mary
Reared under the tutelage of the East India Company
From that ship Fitulus Godolphin
He was twice made Captain
Praised by all with whom he had dealings
Born in London 23 January 1729
His life ceased at Badgemore 28 April 1777[15]

II The Michell and West Families and the building of the new Culham Court, mid-18th century to mid-19th century

Richard Michell (1704-1789) purchased the Culham estate in 1760 with 925 acres, and he was the builder of the present Culham Court. The estate remained in his family for the next hundred years over three generations.

Michell came from a London family, several members of whom, like the Stevenses, were engaged in the law. His father was Simon Michell of St Andrews, London, and his mother was Charity Hutton of St John's Clerkenwell. She was the sister and heir of Richard Hutton of Lincoln's Inn. Simon Michell was also a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn and an MP.

Richard Michell was educated at Oxford University, entering Christchurch College on 27 April 1720, aged 16.[16] He then became a lawyer, was called to the Bar in the late 1720s and acted as a solicitor in Chancery. He then acted as a solicitor 'in any respect' but continued to act as counsel on occasion, but not in court. These details of his career are contained in a letter of 1741 from Michell to Philip Yorke, first Earl of Hardwicke, the Lord Chancellor, who had intervened to free Michell from a short period of imprisonment for contempt of court in consenting to the marriage of an infant who was a ward of court.[17]

Richard Michell's younger brother, John Michell (1710-66) was educated at Charterhouse and King's College, Cambridge, and Lincoln's Inn. He subsequently entered the wine trade in Boston, Lincolnshire, and became an alderman and mayor and Member of Parliament.[18] Some years after his death his widow, Frances, purchased the three thousand acre Forcet Park estate near Darlington in Yorkshire, which remained in the family for several generations.

The purchase of the Culham Court estate in 1760 was not Michell's only incursion into country properties. At about the same date he bought Dorton House at Dorton in Buckinghamshire. This was an Elizabethan house which was modernized in the eighteenth century and he owned it until the late 1770s when it was purchased by Sir John Aubrey.

Richard Michell had married Charlotte Dunbar of Antigua and the couple had two daughters, Charlotte and Louisa. Mrs Michell died in 1767, before the new house at Culham was completed.

It would appear that when Richard Michell purchased Culham he had not intended to build a new house and initially he spent money on updating the existing Culham Court. However, as described in *The Seats and Mansions of Berkshire* published in 1880, the rebuilding was due to the fact that Michell having 'altered and repaired the old mansion, then called Manor House, when, from the carelessness of the workmen, it caught fire and burnt down'. A section of John Rocque's Map of 1761 shows the old house near the turnpike road, whilst the cottages, tanyard and barns either side of the lane leading from Middle Culham Farm are near the old road from Marlow to Henley.

The destruction of the first Culham Court provided an opportunity to choose a completely new site for the house, and to create a Thames-side villa by building near the river and away from the turnpike road. The new house was on land that was easily available as part of the acreage of the Home Farm and was on sloping land with good views to and from the Thames. The site of the new house was marked on 'A Rough Plan of Culham Estate, and Cock-Pole Grounds, lying in the County of Berks Belonging to Richd Michelle esq 1768',[19] with the house in a field of 40 acres called the Lawn.

The first description of the new house is in July 1771 when it was unfinished. It was written by Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys, whose eldest son, Philip, was later to marry Louisa Michell. Mrs Lybbe Powys was the wife of the owner of the Harwicke House estate, near Newbury, then in Berkshire; she mixed in London and county society and was a meticulous recorder of the social scene:

> My brother Powys took us to Mr Michell's new house, which makes so pretty an object from his own place. The house was not finish'd, stands in a paddock, rises from the river on a fine knoll commanding a view which must charm every eye. The hall, and below-stairs, if we could then judge, seem too minute, the plan of the bed-chambers exceedingly convenient and pleasing, kitchen offices are all very clever.[20]

The architect, or architects, of Culham has not been proved with any certainty. In *Seats and Mansions of Berkshire* of 1880 it was ascribed to Sir Thomas (*sic*) Taylor. Robert Taylor designed a number of villas such as the nearby Harleyford in Buckinghamshire, and Barlaston in Staffordshire.[21]

Another possibility is Stiff Leadbetter, a builder and architect based at Eton, whose name appears, in another hand, on the cover of the manuscript of the detailed specifications for the new house. Leadbetter died in 1766 and this might have caused a delay in completing the house, requiring the employment of another architect to supply the interior detailing. Certainly the principal rooms have more elaborate plasterwork than that in the house specifications, and the windows of the north front are treated differently. Leadbetter undertook a number of commissions for villas in the area including Nuneham Park in Oxfordshire, Langley Park in Buckinghamshire and Hatchlands in Surrey.[22]

The second architect may have been Sir William Chambers (1723-1796), who had plans of 'Mr Michell's house' dated 1770 among his architectural drawings sold at Christies in 1811.[23] These plans have not been traced and there is no evidence in his papers of involvement with Culham. There is no doubt that Richard Michell was interested in Chambers' architecture, as he subscribed to both *Designs for Chinese Buildings* published in 1757 and *Treatise on Civil Architecture* published two years later.

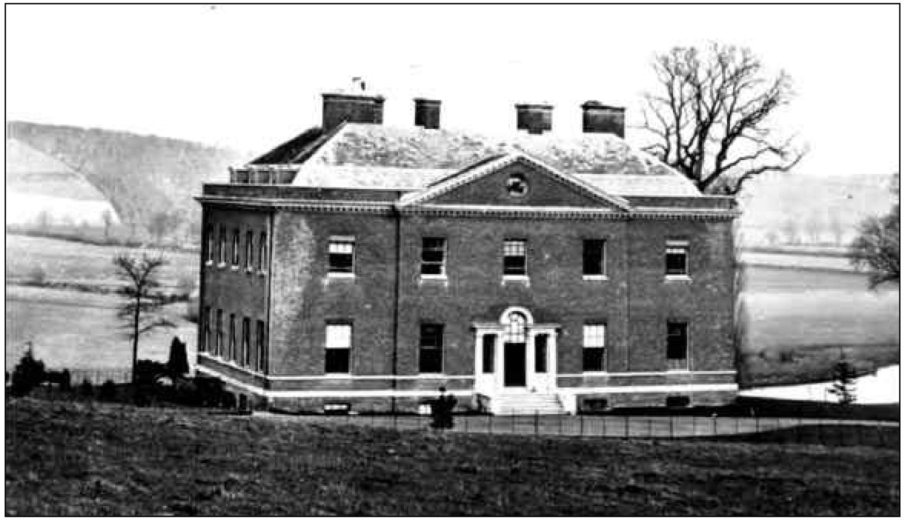
The remarkable survival of the building schedule for Culham Court provides a detailed description of the construction of the house.[24] The manuscript is undated, but is probably c.1765 and describes the house as it was designed by the first architect. These specifications were to cost £3,976 excluding the cost of bricks, lime and sand. The document concludes as follows:

> Memorandum. In case Mr Mitchell should at any time before the said Building is Complet'd think proper to omit any part of the works before mention'd (provid'd he gives an order in writing) the value of such works so omitted are to be deduct'd from the sum of £3976 or in case the said Mr Mitchell think proper to make any alterations or additions to the Works propos'd (providing he gives an order in writing for the same) the value of such alterations or additions, will be an additional expence to the sum of Three Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty Six Pounds
> NB All ornament'd Ceilings and Carvings in Woodwork (except to Chimney pieces) are excepted in this Proposal

The four-storey house is built of brick with Portland stone used for the string course, window sills and steps and pilasters of the front entrance. The windows are sashes, with an eau de boeuf window in the pediments on the north and south fronts, and the windows of the attic storey were in the Westmorland slate roof on the west and east fronts.

The semi-concealed basement, sunk into the hillside, had all the domestic offices as noted by Mrs Powys and included wine and beer vaults, the latter extending beyond the east front. The rooms on the principal floor, entered from a central entrance door in Diocletian style reached by a short flight of steps, led to a cross-vaulted hall with a screen of Ionic columns at the rear and described as a vestibule. A 'lesser parlour' was on the east and 'Mr Mitchell's dressing room' on the west. The interconnecting suite of 'dining parlour, drawing room and library' was on the north front overlooking the Thames. The drawing room was distinguished by its plasterwork ceiling and the library had plasterwork panels, one of which was intended for a major portrait, and a circular motif above the fireplace, as did the dining room. The 'best staircase' was a hanging staircase and had Portland stone steps and rails of 'neat iron work with panels on one step and perpendicular iron barrs on the other, & the rail to be cased in mahogany.'

The first floor had six principal bedrooms and four dressing rooms and a groined passage lit by two octagon skylights, whilst the garret had a further eight bedrooms for servants.



The South front of Culham Court, c.1870

Concurrent with the building of the house, a new stable block was constructed, and the architect of this building is also unknown. This too is of brick and included stables for thirteen horses, carriage houses, harness room, man's room and laundry.

Richard Michell's interest in Chinese architecture can be seen in a building he erected, or adapted, near the site of the old manor house to enjoy the spectacular views, also described by Mrs Lybbe Powys in 1771:

> About a mile from the house, through a sweet wood, you mount a vast eminence which brings you to an exact Chinese house call'd Rose Hill, from being built in the centre of a shrubbery of roses, honeysuckles, &c. The situation this commands what some call a finer prospect than the other house, but the variety of each is pleasing. A poor woman lives here, and 'tis a sweet summer tea-drinking place inside and out, in the true Chinese taste.[25]

White Hill Wood and Lord's Coppice were henceforth called Rose Hill Wood.

The positioning of the new house further into the estate required the construction of new entrance drives, and the existing lane leading from the turnpike road in Hurley was lengthened to run to the north of the house and then to the stables and then linked into a remaining section of the lower road from Marlow to Henley which went through Aston. A lodge was built at the Hurley entrance, consisting of two identical single-storey brick cottages with tri-partite windows on their main facades. A second entrance to the estate was made from Aston village. To achieve a long entrance, a drive was made from Remenham Lane on a portion of the land of Aston Hall, and the drive curved eastwards for one and a half miles crossing Aston Lane via a wooden bridge. The bridge had revetments of brick and flint work.

The new mansion needed a new kitchen garden, and the site for this was near to the house but out of sight because of the configuration of the land. The semicircular walled garden with an orchard beyond was constructed in the area of the former barns, tanyard and cottages near the Eyots which had been purchased by Henry Stevens in the early eighteenth century. The kitchen garden walls were of brick with panels of flint work. Only one cottage, for the gardener, was retained from this complex of buildings and this was remodelled as a cottage orneé in Gothick style, with its most decorated façade as an eye-catcher from the Thames.[26]

An ice-house, another building considered a necessity in the late eighteenth century, was also erected by Richard Michell. It was built in the chalk quarry.

The landscaping around the new Culham Court consisted of planting broadleaved trees on the slopes leading to the river and in the parkland to the south of the house. The trees were elms, chestnuts, flowering thorns and beeches. An extensive shrubbery was also planted around Rose Hill Cottage, as already described.

Richard Michell was probably the last owner of Culham to hold manor courts to admit copyholders to their land. Several copies of court rolls recording the surrender and admission of certain property within the manor have survived for the period 1760-79. The parcels of land for which these copyhold properties survive were quite small and consisted of a wood called Hellyars Grove of three acres, Round Coppice of two and a half acres, and half an acre in a field called Gayers, part of Cockpole Farm. In 1766 the transfer of the latter was recorded thus:

> Manor of Culham in the County of Berkshire
> The Court Baron of Richard Michelle esq Lord of the said manor held at the house of the said Richard Michell situate within the said manor on Friday 21 November 1766 before Thomas Newell Gentleman steward there.
>
> At this court came Ralph Day Gentleman one of the customary tenants of this manor and surrendered by the Rod into the hands of the Lord of the Lord of the said Manor by the hands and acceptance of his steward aforesaid all that half acre of arable land at the south east corner of a certain field called Gayers within the said Manor to the use and behoof of William Prince of Henley on Thames in the country of Oxford Gentleman his heirs and assigns for ever by and under the rents and services therefore due and of right accustomed and a heriott when it shall happen and afterwards came the said William Prince and prayed to be admitted tenant[27]

Richard Michell died in May 1789 without leaving a will and the Court of Chancery declared his daughters co-heiresses in the same year.[28] Both daughters married in the years immediately following their father's death. Louisa, the younger daughter, became engaged to Philip Lybbe Powys in December 1789 and was married in February 1790, whilst Charlotte married the Hon Frederick West in April 1792. He was the younger son of John, second Earl of Delaware. As Charlotte and Louisa were co-heirs of their father's estate, his assets were divided between them; whilst Charlotte received the Culham Estate, Louisa had £15,000 as her share. This money was raised by selling extensive property holdings in London belonging to Richard Michell.[29]

Both daughters' weddings took place in London at St George's Hanover Square and the wedding breakfast was given at the Miss Michells' London house in North Audley Street. After Philip and Louisa's wedding, 'about one o'clock the new married pair set off in their post-chaise to Culham Court for a week'.[30]

After the first wedding, Mr and Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys and Miss Michell lived at Culham Court until May 1792, when the Lybbe Powyses went to live at Hardwicke, his father's estate in Oxfordshire. After Charlotte married Frederick West, the Wests lived for a short time at Culham Court. They then moved into Rose Hill Cottage which was adapted from being 'a sweet tea drinking place' into a residence, and Culham Court was then let to a Mr Law for four years.

Whether at this time the Chinese elements of Rose Hill were retained or the single-storey building was wholly enlarged in a gothick style, parts of which still remain, is unclear. A description of Rose Hill in 1811 indicates that by then it had indeed lost its Chinese style:

> Rose Hill, a very pleasant but singular villa, which belongs to the proprietor of Culham, and, in its original state, appeared to be an ornamental building in the grounds of the former. It was fancifully built in the precise form and arrangement of a Chinese habitation. It had its bells, its dragons, and spiral turrets, with all the gawdy colourings of that species of oriental architecture. These decorations it no longer possess: it retains, however, its primaeval distribution of apartment, and its single floor.[31]

Mrs Lybbe Powys's journals give a detailed picture of the social lives of the families living near Henley on Thames, including that of the Miss Michells before and after their marriages. She considered it an 'excellent and agreeable neighbourhood'. Their social circle included the Freemans of Fawley Court, General Conway and his wife, Lady Malmesbury, of Park Place, the Lockwoods of Hambleden, the Williams of The Temple, the Winfords of Thames Bank and the Vansittarts of Bisham Abbey. Entertainments consisted of dinner parties and visits to public venues such as the Assemblies at Caversham, Reading, and Henley, and the autumn races at Oxford and Reading. For a short time they also attended a social event of a semi-public character when Lord Barrymore built a theatre, ballroom and supper rooms at Barrymore, his Wargrave residence near the Thames. On September 28 1790 she noted:

> All of us were at Lord Barrymore's masqued ball: for our neighbours, finding last year's had been conducted with such propriety, had all agreed to go, if we did. Our party consisted of the Henley Park, Fawley Court, Culham Court, the Winfords and our own families. I may say we were very highly entertained. The whole beautiful theatre was laid into a ball-room. The rotunda, supper-room, and two others all decorated with festoons of flowers in the most elegant taste, and everything on the tables that could, I believe, be thought of.[32]

The elder and younger Lybbe Powyses and Miss Michell also visited Bath together, spending a month to take the waters, generally in March. Other social activities whilst at Culham included water parties on board barges with dancing whilst they travelled down the Thames to places such as Cliveden Spring. Supper was taken on board or a picnic on the bank. There were also fishing parties to catch gudgeon.

Mrs Charlotte West died on 13 June 1795 after three years of marriage, having given birth to a baby girl, Charlotte Louisa.

> Poor Mrs West died at Rose Hill, to the great grief of all who knew her. 'Twas a sad task upon us to break the event to our Louisa, who was then very near lying-in. Mrs West was buried on Wednesday 17th, at Walgrave Church, by my brother Powys, who half-christened the child, who was vastly well, and a lovely baby.[33]

By the autumn of 1796 Frederick West was again living at Culham Court and on 23 January 1797 he gave a ball:

> At a very elegant ball at Mr West's Culham Court. About fifty of us were met about eight, and came home by six. His sister, Lady Matilda Wynyard, and the Colonel were there to stay. Little Miss West came into the ball-room just before she went to bed, and seemed quite pleased with the music and the dancing.[34]

In June 1798 Frederick West married again, his second wife being Maria Myddelton of Chirk Castle. They had two sons, Frederick and William. The Wests moved in court circles and in November 1804 George III paid a visit to Culham, riding over from Windsor. Mrs Lybbe Powys provides a description of the visit:

> Louisa, and myself went to Mr West's, and they gave us a full account of the late royal visit – the King, Queen, some of the princesses, five gentlemen, thirty two horses, and numbers of servants: but they were prepared for all by Lady Matilda Wynyard who was staying at Culham Court: indeed they had fix'd the week before, but it was put off, which was rather inconvenient; but they had a dinner ready at one, at which hour his Majesty generally dines. They seemed much pleased with the place and their reception; would have all the children in the room with them the whole time; and when they went over the apartments, the King who always goes into every room, popped into one where the maid was dressing out the flowers &c. She started up and was greatly alarmed, but

> his Majesty laughed, and said to her, 'don't be frightened; I won't steal any one thing.' Mr West had hot rolls brought from Gunter, wrapped in flannel, by relays of horsemen! The King said, 'Ah! Gunter, Gunter! I am glad you deal with Gunter, West: nobody like Gunter!' The king wiped his shoes carefully on entering, and on Mr West telling him not to mind, said, 'No West, I am not going to carry dirt into any man's house.'[35]

Miss West recalled much later that the good-natured King, sitting on the door steps, played with her half-brothers, lending them his riding-whip. The royal visit was commemorated by the placing of several full-sized cannon on the top of Dean Wood, or Tent Hill as it was also called, reached by a long grass walk from the house.

As Mrs Lybbe Powys noted, Lady Matilda Wynyard, Mr West's sister, had prepared the household for the visit. She held a position at Court, being a Lady of the Bedchamber to the daughters of George III from 1799 to 1809. In 1809 the Hon Frederick West received a court appointment himself as one of the thirteen Grooms of His Majesty's Bedchamber in Ordinary, which he held until 1816, at a salary of £500 a year.[36]

West was involved with industrial enterprises such as ironworks, colleries, slate quarries and lime works on the land around Ruthin Castle inherited by his wife. She was one of the three co-heiresses to the Myddelton estates after the deaths of her father in 1795 and brother in 1796.[37]

On his first wife's death in 1795, Frederick West had inherited a life interest in the Culham Estate which after his death was to go to their daughter, Charlotte. The majority of the land holding was in Wargrave and a valuation of the rateable property in that parish in 1803 recorded the Hon Frederick West as owning 931 acres in that parish, which was mostly divided into three farms, not four as had been the case during the Stevenses' ownership. The remainder of the land was woodland. The Home Farm, which was in hand, was 230 acres whilst Thomas Kibble held a farm of 276 acres and William Sundy a farm of 352 acres.[38]

At the time of the Wargrave Enclosure in 1816, when landowners with grazing rights on Upper Kilham Common, which was then being enclosed, received land in lieu of these rights, Frederick West received an allotment of 21 acres adjoining his land at Cockpole Farm. This was in return for 15 acres in Upper Culham Common which Henry Stevens recorded as being in his ownership. The enclosure did not affect the majority of the estate which had long been enclosed.[39]

The Tithe Apportionments which record the properties liable to pay tithes, both as maps showing individual properties and schedules giving details of the acreage and land use, survive for Remenham in 1843, Wargrave in 1839 and Hurley in 1843, and taken together provide a detailed picture of the Culham Court estate at that point in time. Frederick West owned a total of 976 acres in the three parishes, of which he had 357 acres in hand. Of this land 68 acres was woodland comprising the beech woods of Rose Hill and Primrose Woods of 39 acres, Dean Wood to the south of the mansion of 12 acres, and Shaw Wood near Aston Lane of two acres. The recent two-acre plantation along the western entrance drive was planted with firs. There were two areas of coppice, one along Aston Lane of two acres and another of four acres near the road to Upper Culham Farm. West had the Home Farm in hand, which was mostly land in arable use, between Dean Wood and Aston Lane, with the farm buildings comprising a farmhouse, yard, wagon house and stables near Aston village. He also had some arable land up to and within Rose Hill Wood and a 50-acre detached parcel at Cockpole farm. The mansion was set in 84 acres of park which was grazing land, the kitchen garden, orchard and gardener's house were in two acres, and the eyots, now called Magpie Islands, were three acres.

Middle Culham Farm, by then called Culham Court Farm, was let to George Kimble who farmed 272 acres of land which was entirely arable. The majority of the farm buildings were grouped near the farmhouse of Culham Court Farm, but a new barn had been built by Michell in the field formerly known as the Fourteen Acres Lower Field below Rose Hill Wood. This would have been necessitated by the loss of the barns when the kitchen garden was made. The names of the fields of this farm in 1839 indicate their previous usage for pasture, and included Further, Middle and Hither Heath Field, Great and Little Ley, Shepherd's Hill and Pasture Piece.

The third farm, then called Culham Farm but also known as Upper Culham Farm, was 340 acres and was let to Joseph Maynard. He used the farm buildings, but the farmhouse was divided into four tenements for farm workers. The farm was mostly arable, but included one detached meadow by the Thames near the kitchen garden, probably a water meadow.

In the 1840s West made several additions to the cottages on the estate and at the western driveway a single storey lodge cottage was built. A pair of brick labourers' cottages was built on the Henley to Marlow road for Middle Culham Farm. These had latticed windows similar to the west entrance lodge. At this time a further pair of cottages, West and East Cottages, built of brick and flint, were added to Culham Farm.

Some alterations were made to the gardens by Frederick and Charlotte West. On the garden front a narrow terrace was created with a broader grass terrace below it. There was also a flower garden. These gardens were enclosed by estate railings.

Some evidence of Frederick West's plant purchases for Culham survive in the records of Suttons' Seeds Ltd of Reading from whom he had a twice-yearly order in the period 1844-7. This comprised items for the pleasure grounds, such as climbing plants, shrubs, roses and herbaceous plants, flowering shrubs including fuchsias in pots for the house, and bulbs. Vegetable seeds for the kitchen garden, meadow grass seeds for the park and agricultural seeds, mainly turnips, were also supplied.[40]

The 1851 census gives details of the Wests' household. Frederick West and his daughter had a housekeeper, a lady's maid, a housemaid, a kitchen maid, two footmen and a coachman. The coachman lived in rooms at the stables. There was also a gardener living at the Bothy and a gardener and agricultural labourer living at Rose Hill Lodges. Other gardeners and labourers for the Home Farm lived in cottages in Aston Lane.

Charlotte West became the sole owner of the Culham Court Estate in 1852 on the death of her father, her stepmother having died in 1843, but she increasingly had financial problems. In 1868 she sold the estate to two local men, William Vidler, a miller of Remenham, and Henry Micklem, a farmer of Rose Hill, for £54,200, but with the proviso that she could occupy a portion of the estate until her death. The whole of the purchase money went to pay off mortgages. She kept the house, stables, kitchen garden and 24 acres of gardens and park. Her death occurred a year later, and a modest memorial stone in the graveyard of Wargrave Church has the inscription:

> Charlotte Louisa West of Culham Court in the parish of Wargrave daughter of the Honorable Frederick West and Charlotte his wife born 1795 died 1869

Part Two of the history of Culham Court will appear in the next issue.

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1 The author is grateful to Paddy and Annabel Nicoll for their support in the writing of the history of the Culham Court estate. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Berkshire Record Office and the Berkshire Local History Library and to the late Tim Baker-Jones, archivist of the W H Smith Archive at Swindon. The late Sir Howard Colvin and the late Dr Giles Worsley kindly commented on the architect of Culham Court.

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22 Giles Worsley, 'Stiff but not dull', *Country Life*, v. 185, no. 30, 25 July 1991, pp. 90-93.

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31 William Bernard Cooke and Samuel Owen, *The Thames or Graphic Illustrations of Seats, Villas, Public Buildings, and Picturesque Scenery on the banks of that noble river* (1811) p. 103.
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34 *Ibid,* pp. 294-5.
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The covered market, the forgotten archway and the Arcade at Reading

Pat Smart

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was much development of facilities in market towns. Then, as now, there was competition between towns to create attractive shopping and market centres. Reading, which had a variety of markets and fairs, including a cornmarket and a cheese fair, was no exception to this trend. It built a new covered market, opened in 1800.

The building of a covered market and market house archway to accommodate the Collector of Tolls seems to have been prompted by the general movement in the late eighteenth century towards urban improvement. It was constructed shortly after the building of a town hall in Reading. There had been an earlier Yield Hall (the guildhall) which has not survived.

John Man describes how busy a market town Reading was. The number of farmers' wagons at about Michaelmas, a peak time, was reckoned to number nearly two hundred a day when the corn market was at its busiest and there were higglers' [market traders] carts, and these, with the farmers' market carts, frequently exceeded the number of wagons. The higglers took supplies to the village shops outside the town. Some of the farmers' wagons returned empty, but others carried back stable dung, ashes, chalk, coals and various retail articles from the shops.[1]

The building of the Arcade by a private developer at the end of the nineteenth century was a further development in the town in order to make it even more attractive to shoppers of that era.

The New Market at Reading

The 1800 covered market, with its entrances from the Market Place and Fisher Row, was intended for the sale of meat, fish, vegetables and dairy produce. It was announced as the New Market in a notice published in November 1800. (Fisher Row was on the north side of Broad Street.)

> Saturday 13 December 1800, this morning our new Market was opened, and exhibited a plentiful supply of Butcher's Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Butter and Garden Stuff. If proof were wanting of the utility expected from the Market it would be found in the satisfaction expressed by the great numbers of people who resorted to it this day. We think that no

> doubt can be entertained that the public will derive much benefit from its establishment.[2]

The Piazza

Before the new market, Blagrave's piazza faced on to the market place. It had been built during a prosperous period in the seventeenth century along the west half of the south wall of St Lawrence's church in Reading. Market women brought their baskets of wares there.

Mary Russell Mitford in her 1835 *Belford Regis* gives a thinly disguised description of Reading based on her personal memories of an earlier period in the first part of the nineteenth century. The picturesque Piazza was used by long-established 'old women' selling fruit and vegetables, who seem to have been loud and raucous with their remarks and insults at fellow sellers and customers alike. The Butter-market 'at the back of the Market Place proper' (now a short pedestrianised street) was where 'the more respectable basket women' sold eggs, butter and poultry on Wednesdays and Saturdays. There were also a few stalls selling straw hats, caps and ribbons, and the occasional young entrepreneurs: the boys with baskets of tame rabbits, or cages of linnets or thrushes, and little girls with nosegays.[3]

Purpose of the market

Alan Dyer is of the opinion that the strength of the market towns and the open market had been under threat in the eighteenth century, from private dealing under cover in inns, sale by sample, and dealing at the farms, which meant a loss of control by the authorities.[4]

This seems to be echoed by the *Reading Mercury*'s comment that the new market would be for the general good and 'not be liable to those advantages which an individual might think himself justified in taking.'[5]

Perhaps it was only an editorial opinion that:

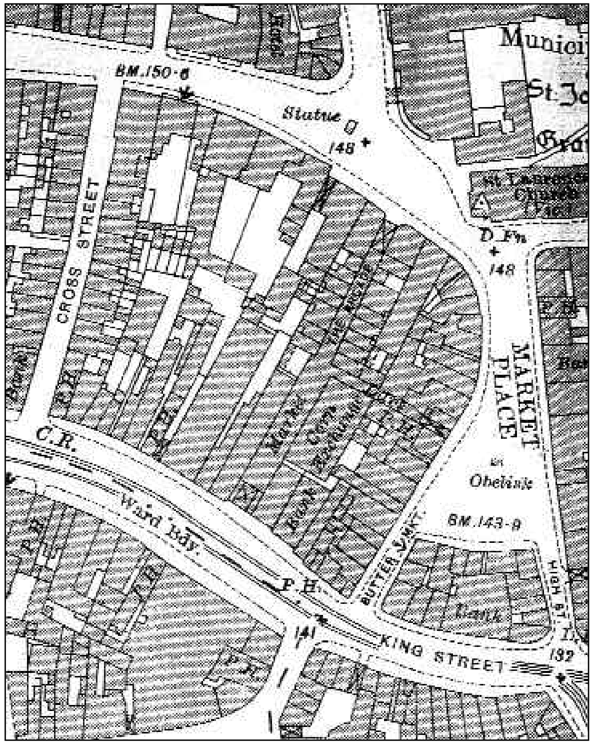
> The Magistrates will certainly feel it their duty to exert themselves in forming such regulations as may be most conducive to answer the purpose of an open market, and prevent, if possible, the growing evil of ingrossing and regrating; therefore every information to detect and bring to justice persons of such character ought to be laid before a Magistrate, and a public examination made of them to deter others.

This would seem to indicate profiteering from shortages and scarcity, sometimes made worse by stockpiling by producers and middlemen to obtain higher prices for their products being in short supply. Seasonal shortages would present very real difficulties.

The market site

The choice of site may have been influenced by its accessibility to the outdoor markets in the Market Place and close to the fairs held near the Forbury, together with entry to and from the Broad Street area. Two passage ways forming an L-shape are shown on various plans and maps before 1800. This distinctive shape, meeting at a right angle, can be identified as early as Speed's map of Redding of 1611. It is shown on the John Man plan in 1798, two years before the opening of the covered market arcade. The provision of shopping opportunities protected from the weather would benefit both sellers and buyers.[6]

The passage ways continue to appear on the Map of the Borough of Reading as determined by the Commissioners appointed by The Honourable the Commons House of Parliament, published 3 December 1834, on the Weller/Snare New Plan of the Borough of Reading 1840, and on the General Board of Health Survey of December 1853.



An extract from the 1931 Ordnance Survey map

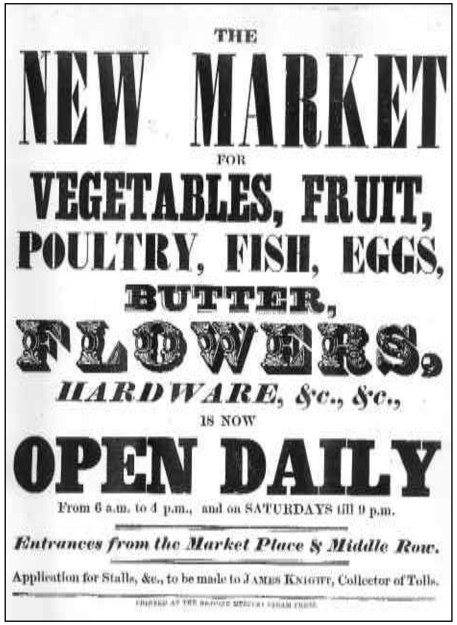
Building of the New Market

The Minutes of the Corporation of Reading for March 1800 record a transaction to be made for the purpose of making an entrance to the ‘new intended Market’; two freehold messuages in Fisher Row were to be purchased from Mr John Hooper for three hundred guineas.[7]

The meeting was of the opinion that a public market for all marketable commodities, excepting corn, should be built in the Feathers Yard as it would be ‘advantageous to the publick’. A Committee was formed with full power to proceed and make contracts, except for voting money.

By Good Friday the Committee for Building the Market were able to report that they had ‘procured a plan and estimate from Mr Billing’ and agreed to it at the sum of £1388 10s 0d. This was to be paid in monthly instalments, commencing on the fifth day of May next until finished, and at Christmas 1800 three hundred pounds, and the remainder at Lady Day [25 March] following, provided that the whole business relating to the Market had been completed. The money was to be raised immediately and secured by a Bond of the Corporation. That money was to be laid out by the Receiver in India Bonds.

The meetings of the Corporation were not reported in the local newspaper, but an item appeared in the *Reading Mercury*, in a column dated Saturday August 25, stating that the first stone of the intended new Market was laid last Monday, and that the paper hoped that it would be completed by Michaelmas.[8] However, it was not until November that a notice appeared that ‘The NEW MARKET will be opened on Saturday, the 13th of December next, therefore all Persons wishing for Shops in the same, are desired to make their applications on and before Saturday 29 instant, in writing to Edward Layton, the Town Serjeant, with whom the particulars will be left.’[9]



THE

NEW MARKET

FOR

VEGETABLES, FRUIT,

POULTRY, FISH, EGGS,

BUTTER,

FLOWERS,

HARDWARE, &c., &c.,

IS NOW

OPEN DAILY

From 6 a.m. to 4 p.m., and on SATURDAYS till 9 p.m.

Entrances from the Market Place & Middle Row.

Application for Stalls, &c., to be made to JAMES KNIGHT, Collector of Tolls.

Poster advertising the new market

The Corporation of Reading at that time was an oligarchy, so its minutes do not include discussion of the whys and wherefores of having a covered market, nor the details of the plan and estimate, only the financial decisions and to whom the building contract should be given. There are no newspaper reports of its meetings, but there are occasional official notices. The Reading Corporation intended that the setting up of stalls in the streets would cease with the opening of a covered market, but how successful this intention was is unclear. Probably a practical result may have been that it would then become easier to exact market tolls from those on official pitches.

The butchers

Meat was an important commodity in the New Market. The Market was to be open on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The mayor announced that ‘The sale of Butcher’s Meat to commence at 8 o’clock in the morning from Michaelmas to Lady Day, and at 7 o’clock from Lady Day to Michaelmas.’ The Poultry Market was to open as usual at nine o’clock.[10] The Market was to be closed at six o’clock in the evening, except on Saturdays, when it would remain open until nine.

In one issue of the local newspaper there is, unusually, a letter to the editor, which provides relevant information and gives life to the scene at its first opening; it shows that butchers travelled to Reading to sell their meat from some distance, the most successful being a Newbury butcher, who had realised that an attractive display was as important as good quality produce in order to attract shoppers. All was not harmony, as is shown by a letter printed in the 22 December 1800 issue from A FRIEND. It is evident from this letter that the stall of the Newbury butcher Mr John Wildey must have attracted more customers because it was ‘so finely decorated with laurel and rosemary’. A Friend pointed out that other butchers there had meat of just as fine quality. Those stalls of Mr George Reader, butcher of Hamstead Norris, Mr Edward Taylor, butcher of Chieveley, Mr John Bedford, butcher of Sonning, and Mr Wm Harding, butcher of Iffley, were all allowed to be as fine stalls of meat as any in the Market. The ‘Printers’, careful not to cause offence, added a comment in italic to the effect that ‘although they do not profess themselves connoisseurs in meat, they do not lament having inserted the paragraph that has occasioned this difference in opinion, as they have thereby created a competition, which must ultimately tend to THE GOOD OF THE PUBLIC’. However, the paper had reported on that first day that Mr John Wilder, butcher of Newbury, exhibited the best stall of meat in the Market. (Wilder is the more consistent spelling than Wildey.) This same judgement was repeated in the next issue, in a report that he had also bought a heifer that was grazed by Mr Wilkins of Warmborough in Wiltshire and which was allowed by the best judges to be the finest meat exhibited in

Newbury Market on Thursday last, and likewise in our Market that day. Mr John Maynard of Wargrave was allowed to be the next best.[11]

The butchers seemed to have been keen to attend, as on the opening day several butchers were permitted to make use of temporary standings in the area, besides those that had taken the shops allotted for their use; and, also, on 27 December there were 'numerous stalls of excellent meat'. On that occasion 'the palm of victory was declared by the best judges to be in favour of Mr Palmer, butcher of Whitchurch, Oxon'.[12] The newspaper did not continue mentioning these adjudications in later issues, for whatever reason.

In a farming community there would be interest in the quality of beasts, and Doran in his 1835 account thought it worth mentioning that on Mondays there was a large show of fine cattle on their way to Smithfield from the West.[13]

The Market Place

Man in 1816 describes the triangular market place as being surrounded by 'elegant shops for the accommodation of people attending the market'. He goes on to boast that there are supplies of colonial or manufactured articles, cheaper than in any other town in the county.[14] The counter-attraction of the urban shop was only slowly developing at this time.

A competition was held in January 1853 for the building of a new Corn Exchange and markets. The clock in the Corn Exchange Gateway was illuminated from the funds of the Simeon charity.

An 1856 view of the Reading Market Place by W. F. Austin shows clearly the entrance with the clock and CORN EXCHANGE, between No 38 Chessall and Smith to the south and the London Hat Warehouse to the north.

The Feathers Inn, Reading

H. Jones placed an advertisement in two issues of the local newspaper for the period of the Market's opening.[15] 'Respectfully informing his Friends and the Public that his house is fitted up in a manner perfectly convenient to their accommodation, and he assures them that every attention will be paid to all orders they may be pleased to confer on him, by which he hopes to merit their future favours, which will be most gratefully acknowledged.' So although he has sold his yard, he evidently hopes to get business from his proximity to the site of the New Market. He asterisked 'A good Ordinary every Saturday - The house is situate very near the New Market, from which there is a covered way.' [An Ordinary is a meal at a fixed charge.] He adds a note that there is a carrier to and from Portsmouth every Wednesday.

By January 1856 Mr Millard was the tenant of the Feathers Inn. He applied for remuneration for winding the illuminated clock. However, the Council refused because of 'the negligence with which the clock has been treated'.[16]

The Feathers survived and was listed in Smiths' 1895 Reading Street Key as being next to the Corn Exchange and Covered Market entrance, run by Florence Beverley, licensed victualler. It was on the south side of the passageway.

The covered market arcade

Descriptions of the covered arcade are to be found in early nineteenth century writings about Reading. The date of its construction, 1800, seems to have been recorded on a plaque on the archway, and that is confirmed by the written evidence.

Man, in his *History of Reading* published in 1816, describes the provision market held in a building lately erected, with two entrances: one opening into the Market Place, the other into Fisher Row. The building formed 'a long square', being two ranges of butchers' shops facing each other, with a passage between, 'covered with a roof, or rather awning, raised on pillars, sufficiently high above the shops to admit the light' whilst protecting customers from the rain. 'These shops take up one half of the building lengthways; the other half is, in the same manner, defended from the rain, and has seats for market women, who bring butter, eggs, poultry, &c., for sale. At the south end of the building is an open area for fishmongers' and hucksters' stalls, and next to this, and fronting Fisher row is a large portico, enclosed with iron gates; and over it supported on stone columns, is the clerk of the market's house, who is generally one of the sergeants at mace.' Doran in his *History of Reading* in 1835 gives much the same information. The Corporation received the tolls for the use of the stalls and the rents of the butchers' shops.[17]

Apart from roof repairs, no major rebuilding is noted by its owners, the Corporation of Reading, during the nineteenth century, although the roof of the General Market had to be stripped, reslated and painted in 1858, and the roof of the Market House, 'the General Markets Collector's House', needed extensive roof repairs in 1874 when parts of the woodwork had become quite rotten 'and the rain water could not be kept out', the Borough Surveyor reported.[18] The few photographs taken in the early twentieth century of the lock-up shops and stalls are very similar to its later appearance. Towards the end of its life, booths were allowed in what had been the stalls area on the east side. It was not a listed building and so could be demolished and the site re-used as part of a modern Sainsbury's shop.

The Arcade was destroyed in a bombing raid during the Second World

War on 10 February 1943, and as yet has not recovered its former glory. Apart from blast damage, the old covered market arcade was able to reopen quickly and the archway in Broad Street and its heavy iron gates survived until its demolition in the phase of post-war redevelopment of the 1960s onwards.

Market House

By December 1856 the Collector of the Market Tolls was living in the Market Keeper's House, which became known as Market House. Having been referred to as Fisher Row, its address was then given as Middle Row, which later became 8 Broad Street. This was the southern entrance to the Covered Market and part of the archway before its demolition.

The eastern entrance from the Market Place still stands, with its clock face. It arches the Corn Exchange Passage, whose further end marked the transition between the covered market arcade and The Arcade, one of Mr J. C. Fidler's developments in the town.

Before the bombing raid in the Second World War, the shops nearer to Friar Street were more substantial retail premises. The lower half of the 'business thoroughfare' as it sloped towards Broad Street comprised the covered market arcade, belonging to Reading Corporation, with lock-up shops on the west side, and spaces for stalls on the east side including fish slabs nearest to Broad Street. Two slated slabs were the suggestion of the Collector of Tolls and are minuted in June 1857.[19] The rented lock-up shops provided opportunities for modest businesses to start, and also some were second outlets for those shops whose main enterprise was not in the centre of the town. They were called 'lock-up' shops because they had shutters to pull down at the end of the day and could be padlocked. Further security was given by iron gates swung into position at closing time and locked into place, preventing entry. The Broad Street gates were usually the last to be shut, when all the shopkeepers and stallholders had left.

The Market Archway accommodation (Broad Street)

When it had ceased to be domestic accommodation for the Market Keeper and his wife, it was still possible to see how it may have been used. From my personal recollection, a front door opened into a small hallway with access to a cupboard at the far end. Under the stairs was a door, which may have led to a small cellar. Stairs went up to higher floors. The first room had a window in the wall of the arch, as did the second small room above it. The staircase wound its way up to the top of the building. A room, which may have been a sitting room, was in the span of the arch, and at one time is remembered as having a window looking into the covered market arcade. Beyond this room and in the other 'wing' was a small kitchen. Returning to the 'west wing', one ascended again to other rooms. At the uppermost level was a bathroom, next to a large room (possibly a bedroom) with a big window looking towards the town hall, and a narrower bedroom next to it which may have been built in part of the east wing. More curious was a wooden construction, containing a washbasin and w.c., perched at the top of the back of the building This had been added because the Collector found that the bathroom could not be efficiently ventilated, probably because it abutted the neighbouring building too closely.[20]

The Reading Corporation used the bottom level of the archway on its eastern side as a lost property office and parcel delivery depot.

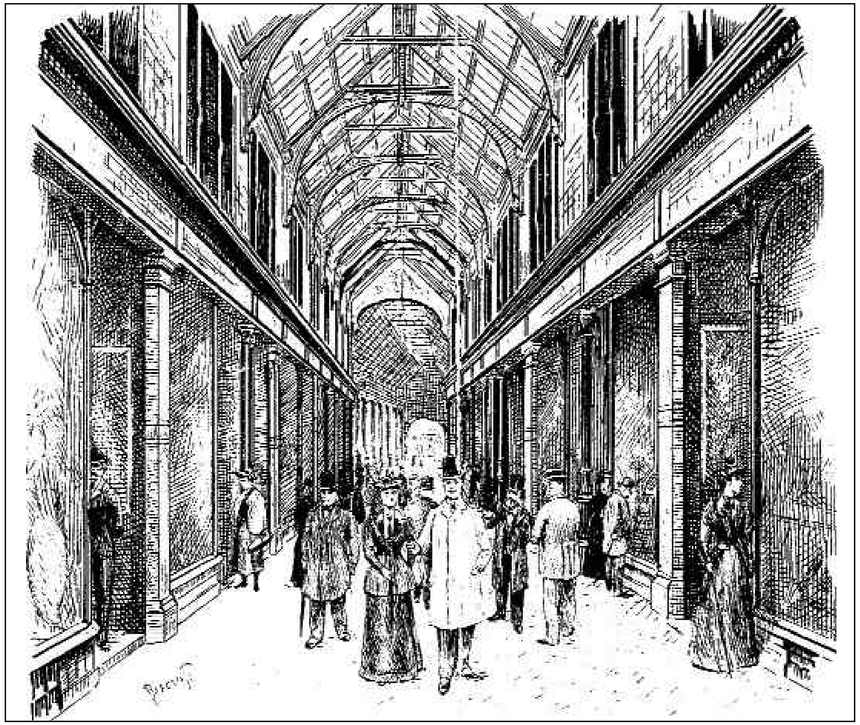
Mr Fidler's Arcade

The further extension to the north was an arcade of grander shops, a late nineteenth century development by Mr Fidler during another period of building in the town centre. J. C. Fidler was a seed merchant and property developer. He was also to be responsible for building Queen Victoria Street.

The new Arcade was a complete contrast to the covered market. The style of the late nineteenth century development had a consistency of appearance, whereas the modest market shops and stalls were more diverse. 'The Arcade' demonstrated how far retailing had expanded by 1894 to cater for the tastes of prosperous shoppers. Today a vestige of the Cornmarket passage remains as a passage way from the market place, but the other arm, which was the covered market, only exists anonymously as part of the west side of Sainsbury's shop (adjacent to the checkout desks). The north-south arcade is now a shadow of Mr Fidler's Arcade of shops which was cut through in the late nineteenth century and opened in 1894. It was referred to as The Arcade and at its opening a full column of advertisements was placed in the *Reading Mercury* detailing the eighteen new shops, eager to attract customers, some of which were taking advantage of a central location to open another branch of their businesses that were further out in the town. The newspaper described it as a pleasant promenade for the town's inhabitants and an elegant and well-proportioned corridor thronged almost daily.

A firm of solicitors and the County Court offices, together with other office suites, had Friar Street frontages. The ground storeys were in red and grey polished granite from Aberdeen and Cornwall; the upper portions had red terracotta dressings supplied from Stourbridge. The building was intended to accord with the new Town Hall and Municipal Buildings opposite. (The marble statue of Queen Victoria had already been unveiled by the Duke of Cambridge.)[21]

Mr Fidler was responsible for major new schemes in Reading, and perhaps there was some resentment at what might have been thought of as high-handedness when a case was brought over an alleged breach of building bye-laws, a minor planning infringement in The Arcade, which was disputed at the hearing by the architect who argued that it involved a rule not applicable to retail premises. The proceedings were reported in the local newspaper.[22] Perhaps it was intended to cause embarrassment, or more likely to make the point about the strictness of the planning regulations. The dispute was about a small adjustment to the original plan which had been requested by a shopkeeper to make his premises more convenient. This dispute was settled in a civilised manner.



Drawing of the interior of Mr Fidler's Arcade

At the 1894 opening the premises included a branch retail outlet for Messrs Fidler, 'a fruit and seed depôt on the corner nearest the Corn Market'.

Older Reading residents may remember the old arcade, which ran between Broad Street and Friar Street, from roughly where Sainsbury's is now. The Harris Arcade between Station Road and Friar Street still exists; this was built later, but it is the nearest equivalent to give younger people some idea of the feel of the earlier type of arcade, although its details are quite different as it was built in the twentieth century. Undertaking this project was a reminder of the ups and downs of retailing and the pleasure of serving friendly customers on the days when everything went well.

Acknowledgements

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2 *Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette*, 15 December 1800. The weekly newspaper was issued on a Monday, but contained Reading news dated for the previous Saturday.
3 Mary Russell Mitford, *Belford Regis* (1835); extracts quoted by Pamela Horn in *Life in a Country Town: Reading and Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855)* (1984)
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5 *Reading Mercury* 15 December 1800.
6 John Man, *The History and Antiquities of Reading* (1816).
7 Berkshire Record Office R/AC1/24, Unreformed Corporation Minutes Volume 1786-1809.
8 *Reading Mercury* 29 September 1800.
9 *Reading Mercury* November 1800.
10 The 1840 New Plan indicates 'Poultry Market' in the area of land behind properties in Cross Street, Friar Street, Market Place and Broad Street. This would seem quite practical as it was a more enclosed space than the Forbury or the Market Place would provide.
11 *Reading Mercury* 22 December 1800.
12 *Reading Mercury* 29 December 1800.
13 J Doran, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and Borough of Reading in Berkshire* (1835) pp. 241-242.

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15 *Reading Mercury* 8 and 15 December 1800.

16 BRO R/AC 2/6/1, Reading Borough Records, Administration/Town Clerk's Records. Market Committee, 16 January 1865.

17 There is a possibility that Tarras Talfourd Cumming (1882-1963) may have sketched or drawn the archway in Broad Street. Many of his architectural drawings and sketches of buildings in the town survive [S. M. Gold, *Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading* (1999) p. 51]. Certainly some of these exist in private hands as gifts from Cumming, and so are not catalogued.

18 BRO R/A, Survey Committee Minutes 2 October 1874 p. 398, Borough Surveyor's Report.

19 BRO R/AC 2/6/1, Market Committee Minutes 23 June 1857 p. 64. It was suggested that the fish stalls should be 10 feet long, 5 feet wide, of slate with water laid on and be properly drained into the existing sewer.

20 BRO R/A, Survey Committee Minutes 2 October 1874 p. 398, Borough Surveyor's Report.

21 *Reading Mercury* 22 October 1894.

22 *Reading Mercury* 27 October 1894. The case was heard at the Borough Magistrates' Office and reported by the *Reading Mercury* 10 November 1894.

The illustrations for this article have been sourced from Reading Local Studies Library, whose expertise in tracing them is gratefully acknowledged.

The Frith photograph on display in a local supermarket does not fit the known details of The Arcade and seems to have been mistakenly catalogued by Frith as being The Arcade in Reading.

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David Cliffe

Dates of publication are 2010, unless otherwise stated.

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