

# Berkshire Old and New

*Journal of the Berkshire Local History Association*

**No.29**

**2012**

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## Berkshire Local History Association

registered charity number 1097355

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The Association would like to express their thanks to all those who helped by assisting with the various stages of producing this issue of the journal.

### *Cover illustrations*

Front. The bathing pavilion at Culham Court. Watercolour by Edward Ardizzone, c1962. Private collection.

Back. Portrait of Lady Barber in the grounds of Culham Court. Crayon drawing by Nestor Gambier. Courtesy of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

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## Bucklebury Common

### Pat Preece

Bucklebury Common is a remarkably large area of heathland. The lower Common stretches for over a mile from east to west and the upper Common nearly a mile. It is largely wooded, mainly with birch nowadays, although there are some stands of oak. The Common has a long history dating from the days when Reading Abbey owned Bucklebury manor.

The manor of Bucklebury had been crown property from Saxon times. Henry I gave it to Reading Abbey in 1125 and the manor was assigned by the abbey to the support of the sartrinarium or vestment keeper.<sup>1</sup> There are references to Bucklebury in the Account Roll of Brother John London, vestment keeper in the fifteenth century, but none to the Common.<sup>2</sup>

Although there is no documentation from the time of Reading Abbey, some of its works are visible on the Common. The fishponds are thought to date from that period, two of which are found in Fishpond Gully. They must have supplied the monks and later the lords of the manor with fish, possibly carp, particularly on Fridays and during Lent. There is a sluice connecting the two ponds and it seems probable that they were supplied by springs. There is another fishpond near the manor house. In the Reading Cartulary there is a grant by the pope in the thirteenth century which mentions 'Burghildebury' along with several other places as having 'piscariis' or fisheries/fishponds.<sup>3</sup>

The monks had several sources of food in the same area. On the other side of the road from the fishponds are two pillow mounds; these are an artificial form of rabbit warren. It is possible that there were more, as the ground in the undergrowth is bumpy and the mounds are covered with thick vegetation. Apparently, when they were dug, it was customary for them to have gorse or brambles planted on top. These pillow mounds are roughly forty feet by twelve. The rabbit is not native to this country; it was a Mediterranean animal that was first brought over in the twelfth century and at first had to be cosseted. Rabbits were valued both for their flesh and fur and often the warrens would be fenced so that they could not escape. It is believed that the pillow mounds would have had holes ready dug for the animals. Apparently by the end of the thirteenth century these warrens were becoming common and lodges were often built to provide accommodation for the warreners looking after the rabbits.<sup>4</sup> One wonders whether the area called Lodge Coppice next to the pillow mounds and the fishponds was the site of a lodge for the warrener.

The dissolution of the monasteries meant that the Common changed

hands. John Winchcombe, son of the famous Jack of Newbury, purchased the manor of Bucklebury with the Common in 1540. After that, the first mention of the Common found is in 1564 when the first manor court held by the Winchcombes appeared in the literature on Bucklebury. At this court John Goddard, son of John Goddard, a free tenant, encroached on the Common with a hedge. John's land probably adjoined the Common and he put up a boundary hedge which overlapped the common land, hoping nobody would notice; he had to take it down by order of the court. Richard Symones was also in trouble because he put cattle on the Common without any right to do so. The Common was an important source of grazing for beasts, but there were strict rules and rights to it. John Pattenson allowed eleven pigs to feed there without rings, and John Burges did the same with five pigs. They were both fined by the court.<sup>5</sup> Rings are used to stop pigs rooting, thereby breaking the surface of the ground and destroying the grassy surface and the grazing.

It was not only pig owners that were in trouble; in 1582 several people were fined for putting cattle on the Common when they had no right and others because they put too many cattle on it and over 'stinted' it. 'Stint' in this sense meant the allotment to each commoner for feeding animals. There were also people from other parishes, such as Streatley and 'Stanstead' (Stanford) Dingley who had put their cattle on the Common with no right to do so. At the Court Baron in 1593 it was ordained that anyone making 'chase and rechase with their cattle from any other manor and liberty shall be fined twenty shillings', which was a hefty fine.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to find that the Common was fenced and the way in was through gates. In fact the boundaries of the parish on the roads were gated. There is mention in several courts about the gates and their posts being kept in repair.

In the Civil War it seems that there were camps of Cromwellian soldiers on the Common. In a letter read out in the House of Commons from 'Bucklebery Heath' on 25 October 1644 it was stated that 'this morning about 10 of the clocke the Horse and Foot are all drawne out upon Bucklebury Heath (it is about 5 miles from the site of The Parliamentary Camp) great bodies of the enemyes Horse are in view but whether to face or engage we know not'. It is probable that there was a skirmish between the Royalists and the army under Cromwell when the 'Royalists were cleared off the Heath'.<sup>7</sup> In the parish register:

1644 Wm Basset being slain by a souldier was buried April 29th.

1644 Richard Buxie a souldier of the King was slaine by a Parliament souldier at Chappell Rowe and buried April 29th.

1644 Mr Richard Warde a Lieutenant for the Parliament was slain and buried Oct 29th.<sup>7</sup>

These must have been alarming times for a normally remote part of the country.

The Common reverted to its peaceful ways. There must have been a great deal of bracken on it which was used chiefly for litter for animals. In 1663 John Goddard was not to cut ferns (bracken) on Burghulbury Common. At a court in 1685 it was stated that 'By the custom of the manor freeholders cannot cut more fern or broom than they can carry away on their own backs'.<sup>9</sup> Broom was used as kindling mainly. The Goddards were obviously commoners.

In the late eighteenth century many oaks were felled on the Common as the prices for oak were high. William Bedding measured the timber for W.H. Hartley, the lord of the manor.<sup>10</sup> On the Common in 1783 there were 3960 cubic feet of oak growing on the Common that were suitable for felling, and the trees were marked, probably with paint. Later in 1785 Bedding measured 111 oaks on the Common which produced 72 loads 39 feet of felled timber – a load was 50 cubic feet.<sup>11</sup> The Hartleys were selling quite a lot of oak from the Common: for example, John Bailey, a timber merchant from Thatcham, bought 80 oaks from the Common for £715 in 1795.<sup>12</sup> Oak at this period was fetching high prices because ships were being built as there was a threat of war with France. In 1806 102 ash were sold from the Common.<sup>13</sup> Much of the timber was sold at the King's Head at Thatcham – sales of wood usually took place at inns.

One recurring problem after the felling of timber was the digging of sawpits on the Common and in 1621 Richard Cripps dug sawpits on the Common 'so people could not pass without great risk'.<sup>14</sup> Over a century later, in 1749, holes cut in the Common by the felling of timber were to be levelled by the order of the court.<sup>15</sup>

Rumours were going round in 1835 that the Common was to be enclosed and the Hartleys were going to build on it. A champion for the commoners' rights, John Morton, came forward. He farmed Holly Farm in the Slade and was a lay preacher who had been known to pray for the cottagers who lived near the Common. (He was later ordained minister of his own independent chapel in Bucklebury.) As the threat to the Common and the commoners came with the Bill of Enclosure, he became convinced that he should fight it. John engaged counsel at his own expense and appealed for help, and 55 people responded. Donations were given to John and he got £100 18 shillings. This was not enough, but he made up the deficit. Luckily Mr Walter, MP for Reading, came to his aid and the Bill for enclosure of the Common was defeated. The Reverend William Legg, minister of Broad Street Independent Chapel in Reading, said of John Morton: 'That man's prayers stayed the hands of both Houses of Parliament'.<sup>16</sup>



The common in the 1920s. The sign by the car is advertising teas and refreshments.

After the first World War in 1929 it was proposed that the Bradfield Rural District should take over the management of the Common. On 7 February 1929 a meeting was held when the scheme for the permanent preservation and regulation of the Common by Bradfield Rural District Council was explained. There was a very lively meeting where even the gypsies had their champion who voiced their claims. As a result of the meeting, the rights of the commoners and the Lord of the Manor were protected and bye laws were made to protect the Common and ensure it remained a place of beauty. The gypsies were removed and the dumping of rubbish was forbidden.<sup>17</sup> In 1972 the Common passed from the care of the Bradfield Rural District Council to the new Newbury District Council.

A craft that had existed for a long time was bowl turning. Turners Green on the eastern side of the Upper Common was the home of a number of bowl turners finishing with the Laileys. The pole lathe and equipment of the Laileys is in the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading University.<sup>18</sup> The birch trees on the Common were cut as coppice and chiefly used for the jumps at Newbury racecourse.

A point of interest is a place on the Common called Zinzan, and this, strangely, is named after an Italian barber to Charles II. Presumably this land was given to the barber by the King.

When I first knew the Common it had areas of heather and gorse besides

birch and oak trees; one hazard in hot dry summers was fire, and it could be quite alarming. It was a lovely place to walk. Then came the 1939-45 War. At some time around 1940-41 the Common was taken over by the American army, possibly for manoeuvres because there were no huts. I can remember proposing to cross the Common for a walk and being stopped by an American who gave us a ticket with 'thru pass' on it. We cut across the Common not meeting any Americans, and never did give up our pass! I wonder whether they looked for us. Later on in the war it was used to park a great many army vehicles prior to D Day and a lot of the edges of the roads were concreted over.

Since the war a great deal has been done to restore the Common. Its use as grazing for cattle and sheep has ceased, and the Common is mainly used for recreation nowadays. A group called the Bucklebury Heathlands Conservation Group has done much voluntary work to bring about the rehabilitation of the Common. The concrete has been broken up and some heather and gorse has returned although there is still a great deal of birch. Happily the Common has returned in a certain degree to its former state and is a lovely place to walk with or without a dog.

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## A 'rejoicing which would reach all': how Abingdon celebrated Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee

**J. Dunleavy**

The Rev. G. Outhwaite stated that in his district he found an objection to a dinner for the men only, but when the women and children were mentioned those upon whom they called gave readily. The general feeling, therefore, seemed to him to be in favour of a rejoicing which would reach all.

20 June 1887 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. In London, and throughout the rest of the United Kingdom and the Empire, there were numerous events marking this landmark in British history. Public demonstrations, church services, bell-ringing, fetes, parades, bonfires and fireworks, all helped ensure the commemoration – as the Queen noted in her Journal – amounted to a 'never-to-be-forgotten-day'. The town of Abingdon was no exception. The one time principal town of Berkshire, still aching from its loss of county-town status, had initially displayed little interest in the impending celebration, though three initiatives helped prompt the town to do something. First in the autumn of 1886 came the circular from the Prince of Wales informing the mayor and council of the Queen's wish to invite subscriptions towards the projected Imperial Institute as a practical and permanent memorial of her reign. Next came the message from a former mayor, Edwin James Trendall, offering to present a statue of Queen Victoria to the town, provided the borough council was agreeable to placing the statue in the town centre. Then from another source appeared a committee convened by the mayoress pledged to support an appeal to the women of the country who promised to raise money towards an institution nominated by the Queen. There is no doubt these three projects helped get the Jubilee movement in Abingdon finally underway, albeit somewhat belatedly. What had seemed likely to be confined to a section of the local population, had by early summer developed into a municipally-led committee and several sub-committees charged with the task of devising a programme that would cater seemingly for every citizen of Abingdon.<sup>1</sup>

Although Queen Victoria had reigned for half a century, she had never



*Queen Victoria's statue, Abingdon, 1908*

visited Abingdon. The closest she came was in 1841 when she stayed briefly at nearby Nuneham Park. The house and the landscaped grounds of the mansion were outstanding, and although they were privately owned, they were opened on occasion to the general public. The young Queen's visit was strictly private and she seems not to have appreciated Nuneham greatly, since she was deprived of the company of her husband, Prince Albert, who was obliged to visit the University in Oxford to accept an honorary degree. Royalty at this period were less in the public eye than is the case these days. With the coming of steam power, travel became speedier, enabling the monarch to undertake longer journeys, frequently to parts of the country never previously visited by a reigning monarch.<sup>2</sup>

Victoria did much to reshape the institution of the monarchy. In this she was deeply influenced by her serious-minded husband, the Prince Consort. He proved to be an affectionate and loyal friend to Victoria, a wise counsellor, with a wide range of interests. He played a significant role in educating not only the Queen but the country generally. Prince Albert's death after a short illness in 1861 left the Queen bereft: for the rest of her life she wore what was termed widow's weeds, kept social engagements down to a minimum, and for considerable periods of time was rarely seen in public. Little wonder that there were some calls for her to abdicate, and even – on rare occasions – occasional upsurges of republican sentiment. She clearly had little interest in public manifestations; her silver jubilee occurring in 1862 (not long after the death of her consort) was not marked by any public celebration. The marriage of her oldest son in the following year was held at her insistence in the Chapel Royal at Windsor, a venue she knew would keep the guest list to a restricted number. The Queen witnessed the wedding ceremony from a gallery; the seat she occupied ensured that only a minimum number of the congregation were able to see her; and she chose to absent herself from the wedding breakfast.<sup>3</sup>

It is against this background that one must consider the upsurge of sympathy for the Queen and popular support for the institution of monarchy in 1887. This was demonstrated at the time of national celebrations, when what was termed 'a treat' was eagerly anticipated. Traditionally, those most likely to benefit at such times were the schoolchildren and the poor; the remainder of the community it was assumed were possessed of the means and ability to organise their own celebrations. At Abingdon, despite making a slow start with planning a suitable celebration, deliberations held over a period of time resulted in a demand for a fete, open to virtually all residents; at the same time a number of community projects were discussed and aroused some interest, though not to the extent of the priority to be given to a knife and fork celebration. Abingdonians were clear on that one: first a

feast; any surplus remaining might be devoted to community purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Public opinion found a vehicle of expression in the columns of the local press. By the 1880s newspapers had become affordable, and what is more, thanks to compulsory education, the population was becoming increasingly literate. Newspaper editors played a significant part in helping shape public opinion, the age of campaigning journalism was upon us. The editorials in the weekly *Abingdon Herald* were revealing. Like many residents, the paper initially seemed indifferent to any manifestation in respect of the Queen's jubilee. Yet reports from other places, even quite small villages, suggested there was a growing demand for public celebrations, and the *Abingdon Herald* put forward the idea of providing decent housing for the poor. If this became a reality, the editor explained, Trendall's statue of Queen Victoria could look down on a happier state of things. To give force to his argument, the editor drew approvingly on a poem compiled by a person signing himself 'A crusty Soul', who wrote:

We all agree – we all agree  
 That we shall relish heartily  
 The chance of acting loyally  
 On Queen Victoria's Jubilee.  
 But loyalty – like charity –  
 Begins at home with you and me;  
 So let us all take care that we  
 Gain something by this Jubilee.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately the task of interpreting public opinion and devising ways of ascertaining these ideas in the shape of the Jubilee celebrations fell on the mayor, councillors, town officials, and a number of prominent residents. One reason for the late start was due to the mayor (Alderman John Tomkins) being indisposed at a time when the Jubilee committee should have been at work. On resuming his duties the mayor consulted municipal records in the hope that they might throw some light on previous junkets. One item he looked for was any references to the custom of bun throwing, when along with council members the mayor was obliged to negotiate the many steps inside County Hall to reach the roof. Once there the civic dignitaries hurled buns to the populace who had gathered in the Market Place. Beyond this the mayor admitted he had found nothing likely to provide him with a blueprint for the jubilee. The one exception was the 1863 programme devised to celebrate the wedding of the Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra. On that occasion the main feature of the festivities had been a banquet held in the Market Place, and it was decided what had been

possible a generation previously was likely to serve in 1887.<sup>6</sup>

Abingdon's attachment to the modern monarchy had first been displayed in the 1860s when, in addition to setting up a statue of Prince Albert (apparently one of the first), it was decided to designate a new suburb of the town Albert Park. Work on the monument commenced in 1863, though because of delays it was not until two years later that the statue was unveiled. Designer for the monument was John Gibbs. The seven-foot image of the consort, carved from Portland stone, stands on a base of Box limestone and Mansfield sandstone. In total the monument stands forty-eight feet high, a dimension that seems appropriate given the number of trees that have since grown in the park.<sup>7</sup>

Mrs John Tomkins, the mayoress, convened her meeting for Abingdon ladies early in 1887. What was termed the Women's Jubilee Offering Fund was a nationwide movement formed to solicit donations, ranging from one penny to a pound, from women and girls. The Abingdon committee managed to raise just over £50, representing some 1,422 individual donations. This amount was transmitted in mid-March to the Berkshire County committee presided over by Lady Wantage, who forwarded the donations raised throughout the county to the central committee in London. The total gained was presented to the Queen, who was free to dispose of this as she thought fit. Part of it was earmarked for a statue of the Prince Consort, though the largest single amount went to the Queen's Jubilee Nursing Institute. Nationally the Jubilee Offering raised £75,000, subscribers numbering three million. Despite having a crowded schedule, the Queen found time to meet the leading promoters of the Women's Offering, who in addition to the proceeds presented Victoria with a document bearing the signatures of the three million subscribers.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile in Abingdon suggestions as to the nature of the celebration, how the money was to be raised and, vitally, how the proceeds of the appeal were to be expended began to be aired. It was clear from the deliberations of the Jubilee committee that opinions were divided, and ultimately it was decided that canvassers for the fund would be furnished with a document designed to ascertain the wishes of donors. This was a clever move on the part of the Jubilee committee: no portion of the funds collected would be allocated until the wishes of subscribers became known. The result was interesting: one of the first ideas emanating from London, that donations be given to the fund towards an Imperial Institute, attracted little support in Abingdon, where only £8 1s was subscribed. Hardly a ringing endorsement for those anxious to foster the imperial idea. The Institute (since restyled the Commonwealth Institute), had been suggested by the Prince of Wales as a permanent reminder of the Jubilee. While individual donations were

welcome, the Prince had envisaged the bulk of the subscriptions coming from the Indian and colonial governments: the poor response accounts for the slow progress of the Institute. Supporters of the plan for a public library in Abingdon fared little better, some £16 6s 6d being raised. Abingdonians were not noted for their commitment to cerebral pursuits, though they clearly had more sympathy for recreational facilities, designating £110 3s towards the bathing place on the Thames. Yet these amounts were dwarfed by the £223 13s 3d intended for what was termed 'public rejoicing'. The promotion of physical well-being as opposed to the cultivation of mental pursuits was how Abingdonians determined to mark the Queen's jubilee.<sup>9</sup>

With a viable fund to hand, it fell to the committee to implement the wishes of their fellow citizens. In effect Abingdon had two days of Jubilee celebrations. On Saturday, 18 June, the statue of Queen Victoria was unveiled by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Lord Wantage. This was the statue erected thanks to the generosity of a former chief citizen, Edwin James Trendall, who commissioned a Chelsea-based sculptor, W. White A.R.A., to produce a likeness of the Queen in Sicilian marble. The sculptor chose to depict Victoria attired in her robes of state seated on a throne, bearing in one hand a sceptre, while in the other instead of the orb she is holding a lotus flower, this being introduced as a reminder of the Queen's reign in India. The figure was seven feet six inches high, whereas in reality Victoria was less than five feet tall. Portland stone formed a pedestal giving additional stature to the Queen, some fifteen feet in all. An estimated 2000 people saw the ceremony in Market Place, many later placing flowers at the base of the statue. Having done honours to the statue, many chose to remain in the square to witness the bun throwing from the roof of County Hall. While those lucky enough to catch a bun consumed it there and then, others apparently seemed anxious to keep their 'prize' as a memento of a memorable day.<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary accounts described at great length and with some detail how public and many private buildings were lavishly decorated with flags and patriotic mottoes; there were few homes without a light in their front window, and as dusk fell the town was ablaze with illuminations. The day ended on a noisy note, with a display of fireworks in Albert Park. Abingdonians were clearly disposed to make the most of the Jubilee, and a poem appearing in the local journal gave vent to sentiment in the following lines:

Shout for her Majesty! Cheer her right lustily!  
 Make all the Market place ring with the sound!  
 Hearts in old Abingdon beat yet right trustily,  
 Subjects more loyal can nowhere be found!<sup>11</sup>

If there was general satisfaction with the way things had gone on the Saturday, the arrangements made for the public rejoicing set for Jubilee day exceeded all expectations. Blessed with beautiful summer weather – ‘Queen’s weather’ as it came to be known – most people were up early determined to mark the celebration. In the morning there was a Thanksgiving service in the parish church, attended by the mayor and corporation attired in full regalia and a large congregation. The service was choral, with a soloist and choir accompanied by a full orchestra. After the service a procession made up of civic dignitaries, members of Christ’s Hospital, friendly societies, the Fire Brigade and engines, and scholars from all the day and Sunday schools, and no fewer than three bands, was formed and made its way to the grounds of Fitzharris House, where the dinner and fete was to be held.<sup>12</sup>

Admission to the grounds was by ticket only issued by the committee. Tickets for the dinner were issued to those deemed to be bona fide workers. When pressed, the Mayor first defined these as ‘masons, carpenters, etc.’, as being suitable recipients for tickets, though in response to further probing he suggested ‘all artisans’. This was a term of much wider application, since masons and carpenters belonged to a recognised craft, while the word artisan was interchangeable with operative. The latter group frequently had acquired a skill after a basic training, and what is more included many women. The least fortunate members of society, the pauper population who were in the care of the Abingdon Poor Law Union, were excluded from the dinner.<sup>13</sup>

However, acting on advice issued by the Local Government Board, not only was the Jubilee day diet provided in the workhouse similar to that provided at Christmas, but discipline was to be relaxed. Inmates of the almshouses, on the other hand, were supplied with tickets for the dinner. Finally, to give the committee their due, in their efforts to ensure an all-embracing celebration, it was announced that what were described as ‘the halt and the lame’ were to receive any unconsumed food left over from Jubilee day. In all, the committee estimated they would be catering for 2,000 adults and an equal number of day and Sunday school scholars.<sup>14</sup>

Those admitted to the grounds of Fitzharris House had the choice of several types of meat along with warm potatoes, with one pint of beer or two bottles of ginger beer. Each person was also given two other tickets valid for more liquid refreshments. Leaving nothing to chance, the organisers had thoughtfully erected a number of tents to accommodate the diners. Even more welcome was the information given to nursing mothers to the effect that a ‘baby tent’ had been set aside to take care of their offspring. Staffed by well-meaning volunteers, noises emanating from the tent indicated the

would-be nurses were not always able to control their charges all that well. However, there were no complaints as to the quantity of food and drink available, and later in the day what was termed a fêete with sports and pastimes for children and adults was enjoyed. In the evening, after the grounds of Fitzharris had been cleared of guests, many of the crowd made their way to Albert Park. Strolling through the streets in the warm summer evening air, they were able to admire the decoration on public buildings, the shops, and private houses. Many residents had heeded the suggestion of the mayor that each home should display a light in the window; observers remarked on how this gave the town the effect of a blaze of light. On reaching the park the crowd were able to enjoy more music provided by the bands, and as dusk fell marvel at the firework display. The more adventurous made for high points in the surrounding country, where they were able to admire the night sky illuminated by the light put out by bonfires, part of a chain stretching from Land’s End to John o’ Groats. Publicans took advantage of the extension of the licensing regulations, drinks being served until midnight. Apparently most publicans observed the law, and as their clients left the premises, the local journal reported that after midnight ‘the town began to settle down into quietness’. In all, at the end of the day it was reckoned something like 6,000 people had participated in the festivities.<sup>15</sup>

There seem to have been few complaints at the way the celebration was observed in Abingdon. This was quite remarkable, since at the outset there had been gloomy forecasts and divided counsels: despite this, when it was all over, the mayor and the committee were assured that by general agreement the whole venture had been a huge success. One reason for this may have been an absence of similar community celebrations, some twenty-four years having elapsed since Abingdon had seen anything like this. There is no doubt the mayor played a key role in these events. He had experience as an officer of the committee that was formed to celebrate the end of the Crimean War, and he served as secretary of the Royal wedding committee in 1863. He was obviously so happy with the smooth running of operations in 1887 that Tomkins suggested the programme be written into Borough documents as a guide for future celebrations. The structure of the general committee and the functions of the various sub-committees were listed. According to the record compiled by the town council, the two men who acted as honorary secretaries of the general committee, Messrs E. M. Challenor and J. G. T. West, carried the main burden of co-ordinating the work of the various subcommittees, ensuring the success of the memorable day. A balance sheet was produced, which indicated the entire cost of the ‘public rejoicings’ amounted to £387 8s 9d, all of which had been realised by subscriptions.<sup>16</sup>



Another reason why Abingdonians welcomed the Jubilee celebration with such enthusiasm may have been a feeling that after a long period of decline, notably the loss of county town status and its consequences, prosperity seemed to be returning to the town once again. This was reflected in the changing townscape. In the Market Place for instance the London and County Bank had opened in 1884, followed a year later by the construction of the Corn Exchange, a building that was to serve a variety of functions and continued to be a vital feature of town life until the 1960s. Last but not least there was the cottage hospital, thanks largely to the generosity of a former MP and employer of labour, John Cremer Clarke, which opened in 1887. Well might the Queen, when reviewing that year in her journal, write:

Never, never can I forget this brilliant year, so full of the marvellous kindness, loyalty, and devotion of so many millions, which really I could hardly have expected.

The events of Jubilee year provided a prototype for future public celebrations, a format that is being followed in the third millennium.<sup>17</sup>

The statue of Queen Victoria continued to occupy a site in the middle of town until well into the twentieth century. When White's statue was first erected, there were some who doubted whether the Market Place with its weekly market and the occasional travelling fair was a suitable place to locate an image of the Sovereign. The Prince Consort's statue, by contrast, had seemingly always enjoyed its park-land setting without exciting any complaints: could not a more salubrious setting be found for the Queen? At length the council, pointing to an increase in traffic and business generally in the town centre, decided Victoria's statue should be moved to the grounds of Abbey House. By strange irony Abbey House had been the home of E. J. Trendall who had been the donor of Victoria's statue. There Queen Victoria can be found admiring the well-kept Abbey Gardens, looking out over a steadily growing Abingdon, a town that still observes royal occasions all of which include a feature of the 1887 celebration – that of bun throwing.<sup>18</sup>

If 6,000 participated, then Outhwaite's suggestion appears to have been almost realised. Apart from the public rejoicing, the other proposals for the Jubilee did not fare quite as well. The bathing place on the Thames, for instance, although improved in Jubilee year, was subject to extremes in the weather; maintenance proved to be a constant matter of concern to the authorities. The call for a public library was realised a few years later, thanks not so much to the appeal made in 1887 as largely to funds provided by Christ's Hospital. Finally, both Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, though gratified at the evident surge of sympathy for the monarchy both in

the United Kingdom and the colonies, were disappointed at the poor response to their appeal for funds towards the projected Imperial Institute. This it will be recalled had been the initial idea put forward by Prince Albert Edward for a permanent memorial to mark the Queen's jubilee. The poor response delayed that project for some years: it was not until 1893 that the Queen was able to go along to South Kensington and declare the Institute open.<sup>19</sup>

## References

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- 2 C. Hibbert (ed.), *Queen Victoria in her letters and journals* (1985) p. 67.
- 3 E. Longford, *Victoria RI* (1964), passim. H. Hobhouse, *Prince Albert. His life and work* (1983) ch. 10.
- 4 No documents recording the deliberations of the Jubilee Committee have come to light. Once under way, however, the local weekly carried reports of the committee's meetings. See, for instance, *Abingdon Herald*, 8, 29 January, 12, 26 February 1887, and so on.
- 5 *Oxford Times*, 1 January 1887, carried an interesting article discussing a whole range of projects for the consideration of local jubilee committees. Among these were a public institute for the poor, an order of merit for long-serving domestic servants, an extension to the hospital, a public library, a bridge over the Thames connecting Abingdon with the Iffley Road. The list hinted at many more of what were termed 'practical suggestions.' Over the next few months the same journal carried numerous accounts of events from towns and villages as they attempted to implement these ideas. *Abingdon Herald*, 26 February 1887.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 30 April, 7 May 1887.
- 7 N. Hammond, *Around Abingdon* (2002) p. 28.
- 8 Hibbert, *Queen Victoria*, p. 306. *Abingdon Herald*, 29 January, 5, 19 February, 12 March, 1887.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 21 May 1887.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 23 June 1887. *Berkshire Chronicle*, 11 June 1887. The origins of bun throwing at Abingdon are obscure. The custom has been observed usually at royal and civic landmarks since the time of King George III. The present Queen has the distinction of being the only reigning monarch to witness this event. The most recent bun throwing was for the Diamond Jubilee in June 2012.
- 11 'T.D.H.', *Abingdon Herald*, 18 June 1887.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, 28 May 1887. Minutes, Abingdon Poor Law Union, 23 May, 6 June, 1887. [Berks. Record Office, G/A 1/22, 1886-1888]. The Misses Morland clearly felt the town's paupers were being ignored and invited the inmates of the workhouse to tea

on the lawn of their house in Bath Street. *Abingdon Herald*, 25 June 1887.

14 *Abingdon Herald*, 25 June 1887.

15 Ibid. The census of 1881 gave Abingdon's population as 6,705.

16 N. Hammond, *The Book of Abingdon* (1979). B. Challenor, (comp.), *Selections from the Municipal Records of the Borough of Abingdon* (1898).

17 Ibid. J. G. Davis, *History of Abingdon* (1887) passim. J. Maas, *This brilliant year. Queen Victoria's Jubilee 1887* (1977) p. 9.

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19 Longford, *Victoria RI*.

## The Culham Court Estate, Wargrave, Berkshire: Part Two<sup>1</sup>

### Phillada Ballard

*Part One, published in Berkshire Old and New no. 28, covered the history of the Culham Court estate from medieval times up to the end of its ownership by the Michell and West families in the mid-nineteenth century.*

### III Culham Court in the second half of the nineteenth century

The next period of Culham's history was less settled and between 1869 and 1948 the estate was mainly in the hands of non-resident landlords, with the house being let to tenants.

In 1869 on Charlotte West's death Henry Micklem bought out William Vidler's share of the Culham estate and became the sole owner of its 995 acres.<sup>2</sup> He immediately put the major portion of the estate on the open market and it was advertised in *The Times* on 1 May 1869 as comprising 570 acres and with 'a spacious and very substantial family mansion, for many years in the occupation of a family of distinction, and once a favourite visiting place of George III'. Its attractions then were the scenery, its location and its potential for development; the railways having increased its accessibility to London:

The domain is surrounded by gentlemen's seats on all sides, and very panoramic views are obtained from different parts of it, including a rich portion of the Thames-valley, with a long winding reach of river, and well wooded residential properties on the Oxford side. Her Majesty's Staghounds, the Prince's Harriers, Lord Macclesfield's, Mr Garth's and the South Berks Foxhounds are all within available distances many of the favourite meets of some of these packs being close by. The combination of so many attractive features tends to render this estate almost unique as a nobleman's or gentleman's residence, and in addition to its attractions the neighbourhood is one of the most admired within a like distance of London, and being only two miles from the town and station of Henley, four from Twyford station, seven from Maidenhead, ten from Reading, and about 33 from London. There can be no doubt that a judiciously arranged scheme for dividing the property would be attended by great success to any capitalist who might purchase with a view to re-sale in lots.

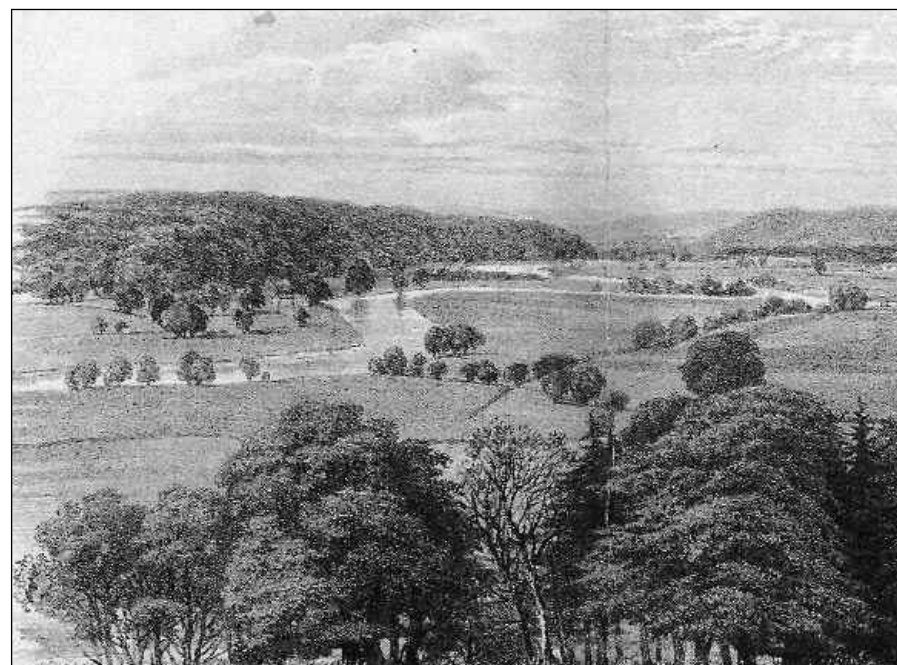
The Micklems did not include the part of the Culham Court Estate which lay to the south of the Henley to Marlow road in the sale, but added this to land they already held around their house, Rosehill near the Henley Road. Rosehill, too, had been carved out of the Culham Estate: Nathaniel Micklem, Henry Micklem's father, had rented 68 acres of land from Frederick West in 1803 which were later purchased. Nathaniel Micklem was a landowner and his sons were variously lawyers and in the army.<sup>3</sup>

No purchaser was found in 1869 and the Micklems retained the whole estate, but let Culham Court with its immediate grounds. The tenant was Mrs Margaret Egerton, and she took the house on a 21-year lease in 1870 at a rent of £423 per annum.<sup>4</sup>

Mrs Egerton's lease set the pattern that was followed for succeeding leases. She had the mansion and 25 acres of land including the gardens in the vicinity of the house together with the stables, the boat house, the orchard, kitchen gardens and cottages, and the hill to the south of the mansion. Her entrance to Culham Court was from the lodge and driveway at Aston which she also rented. In 1871 at the time of the census of population she had a household of eight living-in servants, the female servants being a housekeeper, a lady's maid, a housemaid and an under-housemaid, a kitchen maid, and a scullery maid, and the male servants a butler and a footman. The outdoor servants were a coachman and groom, and a gardener and under gardener. At the next census in 1881 Mrs Egerton was absent but Richard Southey, who had been the groom in 1871 and had occupied rooms at the stables, was now the coachman. A cowman was also employed. Mrs Egerton did not rent Rose Hill Cottage which henceforth was known as the Keeper's Cottage or China Cottage, the shooting and fishing rights at Culham being owned by the Micklems.<sup>5</sup>

During her tenancy additional cottages for servants were built in the 1880s. A single storey coachman's cottage was built near the stables and the gardener's cottage was built abutting the walls of the kitchen garden. The entrance façade of the house was transformed by the addition of a large conservatory and porch, and a French door to the terrace was made from a drawing room window. These alterations resulted in an increased rent to £440 per annum.

Mrs Egerton did much to embellish the pleasure grounds around the house. The main terrace became a parterre with beds shaped like the petals of a daisy and surrounded by festoons of climbing roses and a semi-circular path made on the boundary of the garden leading to a summer house. Trees were planted on the slope leading down to the river and a landing stage was constructed. The small shrubbery near the house was extensively planted with conifers and rhododendrons and a circular bed made in the carriage



Two illustrations from the sale catalogue produced by Debenham, Tewson, Farmer & Bridgewater in 1881: Culham Court, top, and the view of the Thames valley from the shooting box.

sweep. The pleasure grounds were extended southwards where an area was levelled to create a rose garden with pergolas and climbing roses. This had a pond and fountain in the centre and in the sale catalogue of 1881 was described as ‘an artistically disposed plateau’.<sup>6</sup>

In 1881 the Culham Court Estate was put on the market again and, as in 1869, was offered only with the land to the north of the turnpike road, this time with 591 acres.<sup>7</sup> The sale catalogue was illustrated with several lithographs of the extensive views towards the Thames from the mansion and from the site of the old mansion. The catalogue reiterated the estate’s potential for development:

The undulations and slopes of the land afford every opportunity for the erection of first class gentlemen’s residences to each of which might be allotted from 10 to 50 acres together with the portions of river frontage and most houses would be quite secluded and not within view the one of the other.<sup>8</sup>

Culham did not find a purchaser immediately but it was sold three years later in 1884, with slightly less land, to Wadham Neston Diggle, a retired army officer, who was already resident in the area, leasing Rosehill from the Micklems. Mr Diggle had married a daughter of John Noble of Park Place, the estate to the west of Culham which had been owned by General Conway in the eighteenth century. Diggle paid £46,000 for the 582-acre estate, an indication that it had risen considerably in value as amenity land compared with the £54,200 paid by the Micklems for Culham when it was almost twice the size, in 1867.<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear whether the Diggles ever resided at Culham as the estate had been purchased with Mrs Egerton as a tenant on a lease that did not expire until 1891. At the 1891 census Culham Court had only servants in residence but the Diggles may have been living there by then. Earlier Mr Diggle had written to the Hon. Frederick Smith, who owned the Remenham Estate, which included the Flower Pot Inn at Aston by the river, which he hoped ‘won’t be turned into a hotel as it would be like Remenham on Sundays in summer it is a perfect nuisance’, an indication that although in the eighteenth century boating and fishing parties on the Thames were fairly exclusive, a century later they had become a more popular pursuit.<sup>10</sup>

In 1895 the Culham Court estate was again on the market and was purchased by W. F. D. Smith (1868-1928), second Viscount Hambleden, and it became part of his substantial land holdings on the Buckinghamshire and Berkshire sides of the Thames. The Culham Estate remained in this family’s hands for the next fifty years.

Viscount Hambleden was the grandson of W. H. Smith, founder of the news agency business, and the son of Hon. W. H. Smith (1825-91), who had greatly expanded his father’s business by securing the railway bookstall monopoly and developing circulating libraries. He was also MP for Westminster. In 1871 he had purchased the Greenlands estate at Hambleden in Buckinghamshire, together with the Remenham estate on the opposite bank, and in 1886 Aston Farm was added to the portfolio.

Viscount Hambleden had likewise continued the development of the family business, and having added the Culham Estate to the landholdings in 1895 he subsequently purchased the manor of Hambleden in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

The purchase of Culham by Viscount Hambleden saved the estate from the potential redevelopment that had been hanging over it since its sale by Charlotte West. Living as they did on the opposite side of the river, initially at Greenlands and subsequently at Hambleden Manor, the Smiths wanted to ensure that no unsightly development marred their views. In 1944 covenants and restrictions at Culham in favour of the National Trust were put in place.

Viscount Hambleden’s purchase at Culham was the mansion, kitchen garden and cottage, the Bothy, the West Lodge, the Rose Hill Lodges, Keeper’s cottage, Aston Hall, eight cottages in Ferry Lane, Lower Culham Farm and Middle Culham Farm. As with the previous owner, Viscount Hambleden did not live in the mansion, but let it.

#### **IV Culham as a ‘House in the Country’**

Culham Court was let for the next fifty years, firstly to the Barbers who lived there for forty years and for whom it was their main home, whilst the second family, the Kings, used it for weekends.

The twenty-one year lease to Henry Barber was granted on 25 March 1896 as a full repairing lease at £500 a year. He rented the mansion with twenty-three acres. Included in the lease were the house, stables, coachman’s cottage, six acres of gardens, the Rose Hill Lodges and West Lodge, the kitchen garden with orchards and two cottages, the islands, the Keeper’s Cottage, ten acres of fields, and the two cottages and dairy outbuildings of Home Farm or Culham Farm as it was also called. They had no right of entry via Middle Culham Farm. Barber had rights of shooting, fishing and sporting over the whole of the Culham Court Estate. In 1897 Viscount Hambleden built an additional cottage for the estate and Butler’s Cottage became the third cottage near the kitchen garden. It was built of brick with stone dressings and had W. H. Smith’s initials and the date on a terracotta plaque. However, the Barbers required still further accommodation for their servants and in 1899 a lease was additionally

granted to Barber on Aston Hall together with the cottage facing it which 'was reserved for his servants' at a rent of £30.<sup>12</sup>

The remainder of the land of the Culham Estate was let as tenanted farms and additional cottages were built by Viscount Hambleden to accommodate agricultural labourers, including a pair of cottages for Lower Culham Farm together with a barn and shelter, and a further pair of cottages for Middle Culham in 1901 near the pair built by Frederick West in the 1840s on the Henley road.

Henry Barber (1860-1927) was born in Birmingham, the son of a jewellery manufacturer. He had qualified as a solicitor and became a property developer.<sup>13</sup> He retired at the age of 36 to pursue a life as a country gentleman. In Birmingham he had set up the Town Properties Investment Corporation Ltd and owned 5000 terrace houses, which were managed by an agent. In 1893 he married Martha Constance Onions (1869-1932), the daughter of a Birmingham businessman whose family had been bellows manufacturers for several generations. She had been educated at Cheltenham Ladies College and had studied drawing at the Birmingham School of Art, winning medals at South Kensington. Culham proved the perfect setting for them to pursue their country interests in riding, horse breeding and hunting without the encumbrance of 'broad acres'. Mr Barber was Master of the South Oxfordshire Hunt from 1902 to 1909, a member of the Hunters Improvement Society, for whom he acted as a judge at horse shows in England and Dublin, and a member of the Coaching Club. In spite of the ample stables at Culham, the Barbers added two ranges of loose boxes near the coachman's cottage, later termed the chauffeur's bungalow, and a galvanized iron range of trap houses on the south side of the stable block.

The Barbers had a large household staff and lived in considerable style. In 1901 there were ten living-in servants in the house of whom three were male, comprising two footmen and a hall boy. The coachman lived in the cottage near the stables, and the rooms above the stables provided accommodation for a second coachman and nine grooms, an indication of the extent of the Barbers' equine interests. The butler lived in Butler's cottage, the head gardener lived in the gardener's cottage, and the Bothy was occupied by four gardeners. Two gamekeepers lived in China Cottage and a studman in a cottage at Culham Farm.<sup>14</sup>

Henry Barber made a number of significant charitable donations to Birmingham, including donations to the University Appeal and endowing a Chair of Law, and in 1924 was created a baronet 'for political services to Birmingham'.

Mrs Barber's artistic interests were considerable and she collected antique furniture, tapestries and embroideries which were displayed in the

principal rooms at Culham. The Drawing Room, subsequently the Library, had a fireplace with bolection mouldings installed by Mrs Barber and the walls were lined with dark green velvet against which were hung seventeenth century English embroidery hangings and an Aubusson tapestry of the Founding of Moses; the furniture was in gilt Louis XVI style and there were two Charles II walnut armchairs. The Dining Room had a set of Queen Anne chairs and there were English embroidered hangings in the music room. The hall had a late-sixteenth-century Flemish tapestry of three scenes from the life of Abraham and a Portrait of a Man by Cornelius Jonson.

Increasingly dominating the decor at Culham were the portraits of Mrs Barber which she presented to her husband on his birthday. In 1908 and 1912 she was painted by Sir James Shannon, but from 1914 onwards she sat to a Belgian artist, Nestor Cambier (1879-1957). He did eighteen portraits of her. Dominating the drawing room was a portrait of her seated in that room whilst in the dining room there was a portrait of her in the grounds at Culham.

In 1975 Patricia, Lady Hambleden, recalled that when she was first married she was taken to see Lady Barber at Culham: 'it was rather amazing to see portraits of the hostess on every wall in every room! (not very good ones at that!).'

Mrs Barber very much wished her house to be featured in *Country Life* but a letter to the editor, Edward Hudson, in April 1925 elicited the response that 'the photographers are very much engaged just now'.

Mrs Barber made significant changes to the gardens at Culham of which the most notable was the large rock garden to the south of the house replacing the sunken rose garden. This, which had massive boulders of millstone grit, was said to have been designed by Mrs Barber herself but is more likely to have been designed by the contractors. The firm is not documented but could have been one such as Waterer Sons and Crisp or possibly Backhouse and Sons of York, who were the main specialists of the period, and whose rock garden at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens she would have been familiar with. On the garden front she also was responsible for remodelling the beds of the first terrace, creating a second extensive terrace below the first one, and introducing many pieces of yew topiary, several of them shaped as duchess pieces, together with battlemented yew hedging and borders for alpines. The bed in the carriage sweep was replaced by a circular basin and pool. By the river new steps and a landing stage were constructed centred on the house.

Sir Henry Barber died in 1927 leaving his whole estate to his wife. She continued her husband's interest in the Law Faculty at Birmingham

University and annually invited its staff and students to spend a day in June at Culham Court; 'she provided lunch and boats, and it was generally regarded as a good outing'.<sup>15</sup> Lady Barber died in April 1933 and the Barbers' final act of generosity to the University was to leave their entire assets, valued at a million pounds, to promote the study of the fine arts and music by endowing the Barber Institute.

Culham Court was advertised in *Country Life* on 9 March 1935, rather misleadingly as 'a fine Queen Anne residence in a Park' which was to be let unfurnished to include sporting rights over 570 acres or to be sold with 520 acres. In the event it was not sold, but the house was again let. The lessor was Cecil Harmsworth King (1901-1987), the newspaper magnate. Mr King may have already had a country residence in the vicinity as his address was Park Style, Langley, in Buckinghamshire. Cecil King's lease was for twenty-one and a half years at a yearly rent of £380. He had the house and twenty-five acres of grounds, and the lower rent reflected the fact that the landlord reserved the right to the game birds. Prior to the Kings' occupying Culham the landlord agreed to do some improvements, which included demolishing the loose boxes and trap houses added by the Barbers, repairing the roof and installing a new bathroom, water system and central heating. During the period of the Kings' lease the conservatory on the entrance front was removed and the house regained its original appearance. His lease stipulated that he had to 'maintain and keep the rock gardens, pleasure grounds, yew topiary and lawns in good order'.<sup>16</sup>

Cecil King leased almost the same land with Culham that Henry Barber had done, although he did not lease Aston Hall and cottage, the cottages and dairy buildings at Aston and the Keeper's Cottage. He had a greater area of garden to the north and south of Culham Court. He was not interested in Culham for the sporting facilities. At some point he ceased to rent the Bothy which was then let to the writer and literary editor of the *New Statesman*, Raymond Mortimer, and to the architect Geddes Hyslop. The Bothy was described in 1948 as having been 'most tastefully and carefully modernized by two well-known architects for their own occupation'.<sup>17</sup> During the Second World War Culham Court was used by the Kings for evacuee children from London.

The fourth Viscount Hambleden died in 1948 and the Culham Court Estate of 1351 acres was put on the market, when it was described as a 'well-known residential, agricultural and sporting property'. The detailed sale catalogue indicates that this sale included much property which had never historically been part of the Culham Estate but which had been acquired by the Smiths. This included the Remenham Estate, to the west of Culham, bought by the Smith family in 1871. The auction was to be held on 25

November 1948, but prior to the auction the entire estate was sold by private treaty to Nathan Duce of Remenham Place, Hurley, for £70,000.<sup>18</sup>

## V The Behrens Period

Nathan Duce had bought the Culham estate as a speculation and immediately resold portions of it. In March 1949 Culham Court and its immediate grounds were sold to the merchant banker Michael Behrens and his wife Felicity.<sup>19</sup>

After purchasing Culham Court the Behrens carried out considerable repairs. On the principal floor of the house a kitchen was installed in the left hand front reception room and later the central reception room was altered to create an octagonal library with shelves and mirrored glazed cupboards. An upstairs bedroom was redecorated with a Chinese theme.<sup>20</sup> The circular pond and fountain in front of the house was rebuilt. Improvements were also carried out to many of the cottages, such as the addition of a bathroom to Butler's Cottage.

In the 1950s and 60s the Behrens employed the architect Raymond Erith to carry out major alterations to the gardens. Erith was a deeply committed classicist and his designs for Culham were in keeping with the elegant classical simplicity of the house's architecture. In 1957-8 the existing terraces on the garden front were replaced by a formal layout of new terracing and flights of steps leading down the slope to the river. Much of the existing topiary and yew hedging was retained. A broad stone-flagged terrace went around three sides of the house from which a pair of steps led at right angles to the large second lawned terrace. This was retained by low semi-circular walls topped with ball finials. A second right-angled flight of steps led to the third terrace with a fountain at its base with a sarcophagus pool. A third flight of steps descended to the fourth terrace with a central flight of steps that echoed the lower flight to the landing stage. For the entrance front garden Erith designed a cobbled forecourt and a simpler treatment of the circular pool and fountain. In 1962-3 he again worked at Culham, designing a swimming pool and pavilion; the latter Erith described as 'rather like an ice-house. It consists of a façade in front of a grass bank which covers the vaulted interior.' At this date he also made alterations to the east entrance gates and added a bathroom to one of the lodge cottages.<sup>21</sup>

Mrs Behrens lived at Culham while her husband was in London during the week. The Behrens entertained frequently, especially having guests for the weekend. Writers and artists, politicians and scientists were among those who visited Culham at this time, including Hugh and Rita Casson, Nigel and Vanessa Lawson, Laurie and Kathy Lee, Prof Sir Zolly Zuckerman, and Edward Ardizzone and his wife Catherine. Ardizzone did many sketches

whilst staying at Culham (see front cover). Michael Behrens was very interested in art and had a large collection of contemporary works hanging at Culham. In the grounds a walk to the west of the house had sculptures by Elisabeth Frink.

Subsequently in the 1960s the Behrens bought other portions of the Culham estate, including Aston Farm, Culham Farm and Lower Culham Farm. At Lower Culham Farm a new single-storey cottage was built, designed by Leonard Manasseh, and the two semi-detached cottages built by Viscount Hambleden were made into one as the farmhouse. The Behrens also bought Middle Culham Farm from Mr Fleming, who had been the Hambledens' tenant and had bought the farm from Nathan Duce. They also purchased land which had not historically been part of the Culham estate, including 600 acres on the Henley side of the river and Frogmill Farm in Hurley, which was the farm to the east of Lower Culham Farm. Their agricultural acres were run by a farm manager, David Cripps, who lived at Frogmill. Although shooting was still an important amenity of the estate, they did not own China Cottage, which for a long time had been the gamekeeper's cottage. Considerable investment was made to their farms. Lower Culham Farm had a new set of farm buildings, including a grain store, dairy, cattle sheds and silage stores. At Frogmill Farm pig-rearing buildings were erected in the 1960s, and these were subsequently altered to form a livery yard. In the 1990s some of the older farm buildings at Frogmill were converted into residential units and sold.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1980s the farmhouse, farm buildings and agricultural workers' cottages of Middle Culham Farm, together with Culham House, were sold, Culham Farm and Aston Farm having been sold earlier. After Michael Behrens' death in 1989 the land on the Henley side was also sold. In 1997, after nearly 50 years of ownership by the Behrens family, the Culham Court estate was put on the market. Described as 'one of the finest estates on the river Thames', it was offered for sale in three lots comprising Culham Court and its immediate grounds, the land around Middle Culham Farm and the land and buildings of Lower Culham Farm, and Frogmill Stables, altogether comprising 689 acres. The sale did not include the walled kitchen garden and associated cottages known as Culham Court Gardens, which were retained by the Behrens family.

## VI The Nicoll Family 1997-2006

The Culham Court estate was bought in its entirety by Paddy and Annabel Nicoll in 1997 to be a home for them and their three children. Prior to their moving in, a major programme of repairs and renovation was carried out to Culham Court.

A significant change to the house was the bringing back into use of the lower ground floor. It was decided to refurbish the original kitchen and the other domestic offices on the ground floor to provide the space for family living. The kitchen had a vaulted ceiling and a floor that was lower than the other basement rooms and this had to be raised. Other rooms were to be used as a pantry, laundry, office, family room and study. To the west of the house the ground has been opened out to create a paved courtyard leading to the service entrance. On the principal floor the former kitchen became a lobby and servery, and the library was restored to its former proportions, an eighteenth-century fireplace by William Chambers in Carrara marble being installed in place of Lady Barber's fireplace. Upstairs, bathrooms were installed and refurbished. The architect for this work was Robin Moore Ede and the building firm was Boshers.

The interior decorating of the house was the work of Chester Jones and was inspired by the Nicolls' knowledge and collection of mid-to-late-twentieth century art.<sup>23</sup> Large colourful modern canvasses and an eclectic collection of furniture set off the graceful classical interiors. The mood was set immediately in the entrance hall with a bright red abstract by Maurice Cockerill over the fireplace and a pair of Roman *stelae* placed between a painted Italian console table. The central salon had a pair of painted-pine Corinthian bookcases and a dramatic forties mirror glass table by Serge Roche, with a glass electrolier of the same period by Bagues hanging above it.

The fine eighteenth-century brick stable block, contemporary with the house, was restored and more recent additions of garages in its vicinity removed. The chauffeur's cottage was refurbished as the gardener's cottage and near it were new glasshouses and an area for growing vegetables.

A major programme of landscape improvements was undertaken on the estate designed by John Sales, former Historic Gardens Advisor to the National Trust. The half-acre rock garden was restored and replanted not with the alpine favoured in the 1920s when it was created, but with ferns and hostas that suit the now shady conditions. The terraces were relaid and the borders replanted with low-growing plants so that the spectacular views were unimpeded. The area of parkland around the house was extended and the views to the Thames opened up. A herd of two species of deer, White Fallow from Eastern Europe and Axis from India, was established in the park. Further specimen trees were planted in the park including ash, beech, horse chestnut, London plane and oak. Screening planting was undertaken on the estate's boundaries and around properties no longer within the curtilage.

## Postscript

In 2006 the Culham Court estate was put on the market with 650 acres. In an article in *The Times* of 2 June 2006, Marcus Binney said: 'for a house just 38 miles from the centre of London, Culham Court enjoys as glorious and unspoilt a setting as can be imagined ... from this sylvan paradise you are barely ten minutes to the A404 fast link to both the M4 and the M40 and a sprint to Mayfair.'

Knight Frank sought offers above £25 million. The proximity to London, the setting by the Thames, Mr Michell's elegant house and the careful husbanding of the estate by its various owners made Culham Court a very desirable Thames-side property.

## References

- 1 The author is grateful to Paddy and Annabel Nicholl, Jonna Behrens and Nick Austen for information on the recent history of Culham. Thanks are also due to the staff of the Barber Institute, the University of Birmingham and the Archivist of Special Collections, the University of Reading.
- 2 University of Reading, Special Collections, W. H. Smith Archive SEP BER7/1-2, conveyance of the moiety of the Culham Court Estate William Vidler to Henry Micklem 24 June 1869. Details of the owners of Culham Court are from Berkshire Record Office (BRO) PS/FT 22/14/14 Land Tax Assessments, Wargrave, 1877-94.
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- 4 The terms of Mrs Egerton's lease are outlined in W. H. Smith Archive, SEP BER/1/21, conveyance E. Micklem and others to W. N. Diggle, 29 September 1884.
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- 10 W. H. Smith Archive SEP BER/6/1, letter from W. N. Diggle, Rosehill to W. H. Smith, 17 February 1885.
- 11 W. H. Smith Archive, introduction to Estate Papers. *Concise Dictionary of National Biography Part 1* (second ed. 1906) p. 1217.
- 12 W. H. Smith Archive SEP BER/10/5, lease of a portion of Culham Court Estate to W. H. Barber 25 March 1896; SEP BER/10/8, counterpart lease Hon W. F. D. Smith to W. H. Barber of Aston Hall 19 December 1899; SEP BER/10/9 lease by Viscount Hambleden to W. H. Barber of Aston Hall July 1917 and additional lease to Lady Barber May 1931.

13 Information on the Barbers comes from the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham, and includes biographical material and correspondence; photographs of the interior and exterior of Culham Court c.1895, photographs of the gardens at Culham c.1925; paintings of Lady Barber and the interior and exteriors of Culham Court by Nestor Cambier 1914-27.

14 BRO, Census Enumerators' Returns 1901.

15 Maurice Cheesewright, *Mirror to a Mermaid, Pictorial Reminiscences of Mason College and the University of Birmingham 1875-1975* (1975) p. 95.

16 W. H. Smith Archive, SEP BER/10/6, lease by Rt Hon William Henry Viscount Hambleden to Cecil H. King esq. 29 November 1935. Photographs of Culham Court by W. H. Godfrey dated 1935 in the NMR Collections at Swindon, indicate that the gardens had been well maintained since the death of Lady Barber and the lease to Cecil King.

17 Private Collection, Lofts and Warner Sale Catalogue of the Culham Court Estate, 25 November 1948, Lot 5.

18 Information added to a copy of Lofts and Warner Sale Catalogue of the Culham Court Estate, 25 November 1948 in a private collection.

19 W. H. Smith Archive SEP BER/2/7, conveyance of Culham Court to Helen Felicity Behrens 18 March 1949.

20 Photographs of interiors from the Knight Frank International Sale Catalogue of the Culham Court Estate, 1997.

21 Lucy Archer, *Raymond Erith Architect* (1985) pp.150-1.

22 Ex inf. Jonna Behrens.

23 The redesigned interiors were described by Chester Jones in an article in *House and Garden*, December 2004.



# The Establishment and Organisation of Civil Defence Operations in Berkshire 1936–1945

## Natalie Burton

The build up to and eventual outbreak of World War Two presented the British Government with many new challenges, mainly due to the rapid development of military technology since the bombing raids of the First World War. Amongst these was how best to protect the population from their effects. This led to the greatest damage limitation exercise that the nation has ever known and it was local authorities that were right at the forefront of delivering and managing an effective structure that would keep their residents as safe from harm as possible.

Surprisingly, Air Raid Precautions work had been carried out in secret at the very top levels of government since 1924.<sup>1</sup> It was not until spring 1935 that this was openly admitted; the Home Office Air Raid Precautions Department was formally established on 13 May as a distinct branch of government to advise local authorities in the development of ARP schemes.

Despite the years of secret discussions, it took two further months before the Cabinet approved the issue of 'Air Raid Precautions Memo No 1' to local authorities and private employers. The memo, issued 9 July 1935, invited recipients to establish an organisation to coordinate efforts against air attacks, including recruitment of the public for ARP duties and their education in basic protective measures. This 'invitation' was formalised under the ARP Act 1937, which clarified financial support available to local authorities and compelled local authorities to submit their schemes to the Home Office for approval.

Although the impetus for this move was the growing severity of diplomatic tensions with Germany, it was also to have lasting effects, heralding a new era in civil emergency planning at all levels of administration.<sup>2</sup>

The inaugural meeting of Berkshire County Council's (BCC) Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Committee was held at Shire Hall on Saturday 28 March 1936, having been appointed at the County Council meeting of 16 November 1935. Their next meeting was not held until 2 February 1937.<sup>3</sup> This is in stark contrast to the ARP committee of Manchester City Council who by the time of the second BCC ARP committee meeting had already made great

advances in their planning for an enemy attack.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the Manchester committee was instrumental in the bringing about of the Air Raid Precautions Act 1937.<sup>5</sup>

The reason for the contrast perhaps lies in the obviousness of Manchester as a key target for enemy action rather than any complacency on the part of BCC. Manchester was of national economic importance due to its industrial output. Berkshire, which administratively excluded both Reading Borough and Slough during this period, was still largely an agricultural county and therefore the 'invitation' was probably not considered to be an urgent undertaking, rather something else that needed to be done at some point.<sup>6</sup>

The contrast between the two authorities could also in part be a reflection of the initial flurry of interest at top levels subsiding; there is a lack of urgency about the matter in Cabinet papers and Hansard records until 1937, and certainly perceived progress made in diplomatic relations with Germany had a part to play in this.

The role of planning committees was outlined in ARP Memo No 1: 'to provide first aid and hospital treatment for air raid casualties and the means of decontaminating persons who have been contaminated with gas, whether or not they are also casualties requiring medical treatment.'<sup>7</sup> Local authorities were to submit their plans to the Home Office for direction and advice, who would then supply medical and anti-gas equipment.

Initial discussions of the BCC ARP committee were concerned with how to manage Berkshire's geographical spread effectively. The solution was the division of duties between 'County' and 'Area' committees. County duties were to coordinate Area committees and that of other concerned authorities e.g. Red Cross, St John's Ambulance. The Areas were to 'set up and perfect' organisations within that area to deal with transport, first aid, fire brigades, decontamination, liaison with Medical Officers and neighbouring areas, as well as training of personnel.<sup>8</sup>

The division of the county into workable areas was to prove problematic throughout the pre-war period and there is evidence of several disagreements throughout the lifetime of the ARP Committee. The Committee's first attempt was to divide the county into eight areas.<sup>9</sup> However by early 1938 this had become thirteen, with a headquarters, or 'Report Centre', established in each one.<sup>10</sup>

It took Home Office intervention to resolve the issue of increasing localism in BCC's ARP scheme. Under the 1937 Act, local authorities now had to submit their schemes for approval, rather than advice, in order to receive funding for them. In BCC's draft scheme, provision was made for seven areas each with a responsible Assistant ARP Officer; this was felt to be

enough of a compromise with their local councils. After considering BCC's proposals, the Home Office only made allowance for four. In May 1938, as a result of this directive, the county was divided into four areas: Faringdon, Abingdon, Wallingford and Wantage; Newbury, Hungerford and Bradfield; Maidenhead, Cookham and Wokingham; Windsor and Easthampstead. Reading Borough was not administratively a part of BCC and managed its own Civil Defence affairs. The dissatisfaction of local councils convinced of their special and unique needs was still apparent; Windsor Borough applied to the Home Office for the right to manage its own ARP scheme and receive its own funding from central government.

This is the most notable example of tensions between the County and its districts. The ARP committee was unhappy about Windsor's proposal, submitting to the Home Office that they did not feel that there was sufficient reason for the request to be granted, and that a separate Windsor would create more problems than it solved.<sup>11</sup>

That Windsor's application was successful is perhaps somewhat surprising. The status of Windsor as the home of a royal residence and therefore a credible target for potential enemy action cannot be held in any doubt and seems to be the only reason for this separation. Yet there is no evidence of similar claims to ARP independence having been made by other district councils whose area housed several military targets. For example, both Abingdon and Faringdon districts were home to and in close proximity to several RAF facilities and Army barracks, and therefore arguably of greater strategic importance. Yet county records do not show any discussion of these districts needing or wanting to be managed independently.

The minutes contain many examples of how, right up to the outbreak of war, many of Berkshire's local councils were trying to retain some control over their own ARP affairs.<sup>12</sup> Some wished to be managed for Civil Defence purposes in their own right rather than in areas with other councils; some complained about the locations of headquarters and civil defence boundaries and, more frequently, proposed distribution of resources and personnel. It seems that local councils wished to exercise some local autonomy without actually having the extra burden of responsibility that a fully independent ARP scheme would bring.

For example, at the committee meeting on 13 April 1939, two letters that had been received from local councils were discussed. Cookham Rural District had written, 'suggesting certain changes in the control and coordination of ARP services and expressing the view that separate areas be formed for ARP purposes'. Easthampstead Rural District had passed a resolution that 'the County ARP Committee should be advised in the same way as the County Highways Committee, by Area Advisory Committees

consisting of representatives of the Districts concerned'. This was something supported by Bradfield Rural District. Both suggestions were dismissed by the County Committee; there is a sense that the committee felt obliged to have cursory discussions of these proposals, rather than having any real desire to take them seriously.

The desire of BCC to strategically manage the county in its entirety was held in tension throughout this period with the recognition that the knowledge of local district councils was in some cases superior to their own. The reality of war meant that the efforts of district councils turned to trying to influence the distribution of civil defence amenities rather than its administration. For example there was considerable pressure applied by Wokingham Rural District in 1942 for the opening of a First Aid Post for Woodley, due to its proximity to Woodley Aerodrome.<sup>13</sup> This, however, was rejected as Woodley's relatively small population was considered to be adequately served by the First Aid Post at St Peter's CE School, Earley.<sup>14</sup> Woodley and Earley residents also campaigned hard for a greater distribution of air raid shelters on the same basis.<sup>15</sup>

The most important impetus behind BCC ARP planning was the appointment in 1937 of a full-time ARP Officer to manage progress. This was some months after such advice had been issued by the Home Office. Committee frustration with the slow progress of the development of an ARP strategy, due to the fractious relationships between the local councils combined with the increasing number of communications coming from Whitehall, led to this decision being made. The committee's hitherto infrequent meetings do not seem to have been considered as a contributing factor for the slow start. Compared with Manchester ARP Committee, who had been actively making plans since August 1935 and were proactive in the national development of ARP, BCC had been demonstrably quite lazy.

On 19 April 1937 Major Leo Berkeley Paget was appointed to the post of ARP Officer. In the committee minutes Paget, who was from a military family and lived in Marlow with his wife Elizabeth Frances Vansittart-Neale, co-heiress to the Bisham Abbey estate, is described as being '47½, Served throughout the War, Various staff appointments ... Recommended as a good organiser and administrator.' It was clearly these attributes that made him stand out, as it was obvious that ARP operations in the county were in desperate need of taking in hand.

Managing ARP planning at Area level was the most onerous task faced by Major Paget. In order to address the issue of the uneasy relationships between local councils in each area, he set about encouraging committees to focus on their planning and consider the issue under five headings; Administration, Medical, Surveyors, Fire and Transport. This was to have

limited success however; disagreements between local councils and the county continued well into the Second World War.

By the committee meeting of 29 October 1937, Government had given clear instructions that areas needed to establish a plan ready to be put into action at the time of war. Paget stated that Area ARP committees were to have executive command of all ARP services in their area at wartime, including dealing with casualties, rescue and decontamination squads and fire-fighting, further necessitating a resolution of local tensions.

It was Paget who first suggested that the Reading ARP Officer, Lieutenant Commander K. N. Hoare, be invited to attend BCC committee meetings, which he continued to do long after Paget had resigned the post. Both administrations later made a promise of mutual assistance with South Oxfordshire: BCC did in July 1938, Reading in 1939.<sup>16</sup>

Major Paget resigned his post due to ill health in April 1938. He can be credited with doing a great deal to develop BCC's pre-war ARP, particularly in the thorny issue of encouraging local authorities to work together. His successor, Sir Archibald Campbell, was appointed in May 1938. Campbell did a great deal of work with parish councils to encourage greater acceptance of larger administrative areas; proposals for four were well on their way to being accepted, until Windsor was granted rights to manage its own affairs.

The push by central government in early 1938 to develop ARP, caused by the Sudetenland crisis, fell to Campbell's lot. War was felt to be increasingly imminent; Hitler was making moves to annex Austria and the Sudetenland (western Czechoslovakia).<sup>17</sup> In the wake of a tidal wave of instruction from the Home Office, Campbell oversaw the push for recruitment and training of volunteers and the development of BCC's first aid structure. It was at this time that disappointing recruitment levels for ARP tasks led the committee to take the decision 'that wherever practicable women shall be enrolled for air raid services rather than men', a move that reflected a national picture.<sup>18</sup>

Campbell resigned in January 1939 for personal reasons. His role in the development of BCC's ARP strategy and infrastructure was recognised by the committee, who were clearly disappointed to see him go. He was replaced by Major General R. J. Collins.

Collins had the task of ensuring that the quotas for ARP personnel were met; now that counties had their infrastructure more or less established, government priorities had moved on to determining how many volunteers should manage services and the continued training of volunteers and the public at large. The first air raid and blackout exercises in Berkshire were held during late spring and summer of 1939.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that Major Collins felt great frustration with the volume of instruction coming from central government and the scope and bureaucracy

of county ARP operations. A report written after four Area Officers were not considered suitable for the post of Sub-Controllers, a post suggested by a Home Office 'War Plans Instruction' communication, demonstrates his annoyance. After outlining his reasons for disquiet regarding the County administrative structure and its ineffectiveness, he wrote: '... it is [therefore] a matter of some urgency to evolve an organisation which will work in War.'<sup>20</sup>

Collins suggested the abolition of the four areas, instead concentrating ARP operational staff in BCC Shire Hall in Reading, and advocated the establishment of three areas responsible to the County Controller should war break out. This scheme was adopted in principle by the committee to take effect from 1 September 1939. However, Collins was selected to command a Territorial Army division and tendered his resignation on 8 July 1939. The reorganisation as proposed by Collins therefore could not and did not happen to its full extent, although the decision to operate three ARP areas was the ultimate solution to BCC's ARP geographical organisation woes. This move highlights the pivotal influence that the ARP Officer had over County administration.

Another impetus behind BCC planning was the resolution of the financing of ARP activities. Under the Air Raid Precautions Act 1937, as a response to pressure from local authorities nationally, a wider range of ARP activities were to be centrally directed and funded. The logistical planning of establishing First Aid Posts, decontamination centres, equipment stores, training personnel and, seemingly to a lesser extent, air raid shelters, had begun at the inception of the committee. Notably borough and urban districts were now required to prepare fire prevention schemes, something that the ARP committee had initially seen as being of importance, but had not developed due to lack of funding. Now that funding was not an issue, BCC preparations began to be more formally arranged. The first Area Offices, Wardens' Posts and First Aid Posts were operational by 1938.

Despite the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938 and the perceived reduction in threat, ARP preparations continued at a pace.<sup>21</sup> Logistical planning was certainly very advanced by February 1939. In a directive issued after discussions between the Home Office and War Office, the committee was now to coordinate schemes with the other civilian authorities that were in the area neighbouring Aldershot Command, the centre of British Army training and deployment; despite Aldershot being in Hampshire, neighbouring counties were covered by the Air Raid Warning area and took part in practice drills.<sup>22</sup> The committee were dealing with an increasing tide of paperwork from Government and other interested parties, as well as fixing the numbers and recruiting the vast numbers of volunteers needed to

deliver ARP services. By April 1939, thirteen Report Centres were operational. ARP County Control was located at Shire Hall in Reading; the Old Laundry in Faringdon was leased as the County Equipment Store.

The first Civil Defence facilities for public use, particularly First Aid Posts and air raid shelters, became operational across the county during 1939, with a flurry of activity between January and July. The Home Office established the Regional system for Civil Defence coordination, outlined in a letter to local authorities dated 28 April 1939. BCC was now under the Southern Region of the Home Office, headed by a government-appointed Regional Commissioner. The issuing of ARP Circular 86/1 'Acceleration of Civil Defence Resources' instructing local authorities 'to arrange business so that Civil Defence matters be given priority (for the next 3 months)' on 9 May 1939 could well have been what caused the momentum. Perhaps this was to pre-empt the Civil Defence Act 1939, passed into law in July, and certainly there were few civil defence centres operational before then. Two out of the three open by the end of 1938 were in Faringdon, possibly due to its proximity to military bases.<sup>23</sup>

Centrally-dictated ratios for the numbers of population per warden/first aid posts, air raid shelters etc. certainly seem to have also given BCC a focus in their logistical planning. Guidelines issued by the ARP department governing the ratios of infrastructure to population were first discussed during the October 1937 meeting. Including the newly created role of 'Air Raid Warden', BCC had to train a total of 3900 personnel in anti-gas measures.<sup>24</sup> These were to be made up of 1300 Air Raid Wardens, 2000 First Aid personnel and 200 personnel each for rescue parties, decontamination squads and repair gangs. By 1939, ratios had become even more specific: BCC had to recruit and train 1480 male wardens, 370 female wardens and a compulsory reserve of 25 per cent.

Inevitably, the outbreak of war brought the issue of establishing Civil Defence infrastructure into sharp focus. BCC was divided into 18 districts operating for administrative purposes under three areas: East, South and North Berks, each with an Assistant CARPO (Chief ARP Officer) overseeing it. For incident reporting purposes, geography and local knowledge were taken into account, with a reduced number of six Report Centres operational: East Berks, Wokingham, North Berks, Bradfield, Newbury and Hungerford. This remained the case throughout the duration of the war. The ARP Committee became the Emergency Committee for Civil Defence upon the outbreak of war.

Colonel Ernest D. Galbraith was Major Collins's successor, having previously been an Assistant Officer. As CARPO throughout the war, it was he who had the final influence on the county's wartime civil defence

operations, and he who had the operational responsibility of ensuring that services were delivered.<sup>25</sup>

Even during war, the layers of bureaucracy determining the acquisition and management of Civil Defence properties were thorough, sometimes to the point of confusion. The Committee would decide upon a suitable property for civil defence use, or a suitable site for an air raid shelter. A check would then be made on the Central Register to see if the property had been earmarked for use by another party e.g. military operations or Ministry of Food. The Clerk to the Council would issue requisition notices under the Defence Regulations 1939. If needed, the County Valuer would visit the site, decide upon rates payable, and an inventory would be taken. An architect would draw up site plans. A tenancy agreement would then be drawn up and agreed upon by both parties before being signed. The County Treasurer oversaw payment of rent.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that the administrative wheels of BCC took to the process with aplomb; the ARP files of the period reveal Harold J. C. Neobard, the Clerk of the Council throughout this period, to be an extremely efficient and clever administrator, able to smooth over difficulties, ensure that other departments did their fair share of the work and took their fair share of the flak if necessary.

The minutes of committee meetings show an almost zealous attention to the logistical minutiae behind operations. Topics discussed were routinely mundane e.g. salaries of personnel, allocation of anti-freeze, uniforms, the Meat (sic.) [Rural] Pie Scheme.<sup>27</sup> These were decisions that had to be made and there seems to be a distinctly British air of resignation and tolerance towards due process throughout the existence of the committee.

Of course, BCC's logistical planning was not fully tested until it was forced into action by enemy bombing raids. Each raid created an incident report,<sup>28</sup> and while, on the whole, there is no criticism of general operational process, there are occasional suggestions such as: 'Would it not be possible for the County to buy a suitable lorry and crane, with the necessary tackle and tools, and keep it at some fixed place in the County, with somebody in constant attendance on the telephone?'<sup>29</sup> Reports are also littered with praise for local ARP services, for example '... Local Services did good and prompt work.'<sup>30</sup> Such constant appraisal and evaluation shows the professionalism and dedication of all those concerned with Civil Defence in Berkshire, from those in Local Government right down to the volunteers, in quite extraordinary circumstances.

The greatest test of BCC's Civil Defence structure came on 10 February 1943 at 16.40, when Newbury was attacked by a single enemy aircraft. Eight bombs are recorded as having fallen; fifteen people lost their lives. From

reading the accounts given by the Wardens, Rescue Parties and First Aid staff, it is clear that the systems established to deal with such events worked when needed, despite understandable gripes: 'My own observations were that the whole organisation worked smoothly and efficiently with no serious delays in any service.'<sup>31</sup> No mean feat, given how relatively untested the County was in dealing with attacks causing such devastation and loss.

This was the same day as the largest single loss of life in a bombing raid over Reading Borough; four bombs were dropped, with accompanying machine gunning around Minster Street and Friar Street by a solitary German plane, killing 41 and injuring over 100 people. There is no evidence as to whether any BCC ARP personnel were requested, or involved in offering assistance in the recovery and clear-up operations around central Reading.

The small number of bombing raids over Berkshire bears out the relative insignificance of the county as a target, despite what parish councils may have thought, and seems to justify BCC's slow start with Civil Defence planning. Clearly, the county did experience bombing raids throughout the war, but with nowhere near the ferocity experienced by other parts of the country. The words of Galbraith's report of May 1945:

From the commencement of the war until the end of June 1940, the County (as distinct from Reading) escaped any enemy attention, although the sirens were sounded for one or two alerts. Between July 1940 and May 1941, some 1,595 bombs and many incendiaries were dropped on the County. After May 1941, only occasional small attacks, totalling 115 bombs were experienced, and the last of these being April 1944. Between June and the end of 1944 a dozen flying bombs and in March 1945, a long-range rocket fell in the County. The number of casualties was Fatal 43, Serious 96, Slight 181. Five enemy planes were reported to have been destroyed in the County. The total number of bombs dropped was 1,710, of which 1,595 were high explosive. 105 were oil bombs and 10 were parachute mines. In addition there were 54 occasions when falls of 1kg incendiary bombs were recorded and as these incendiary bombs numbered several thousand, no attempt was made to count them accurately. The fall of bombs by years was as follows: 1940 1,310, 1941 296, 1942 21, 1943 11, 1944 72. No complete record of the damage to building was available at the date of the report (May 1945).<sup>32</sup>

Home defence was being wound down towards the end of 1944, despite some bombing raids during the summer of that year. The Civil Defence War Organisation was disbanded on 2 May 1945, the same date that air raid

warning systems nationally ceased. ARP operations formally closed on 30 June 1945.

The success of ARP operations in Berkshire during this period can be put down to the (eventual) organisation and dedication of the administration behind the thousands of volunteers, most notably the County Clerk, Harold Neobard and CARPO Col. Galbraith. Both men carried out their roles with efficiency and purpose. They made it work because they had to; that they did so in the face of a constant flow of changing instruction from central government is admirable. Although it can be argued that it is precisely because of central guidance and instruction that BCC took action, the same could probably be said for the majority of rural counties at this time. It cannot be denied that success was down to the skills of those charged with making it work.

## Appendix

At its beginnings, 'Air Raid Precautions' covered the provision and resourcing of Report Centres, First Aid Posts, Decontamination Squads and Rescue Parties, Fire Guard and Ambulance Services. The phrase 'Civil Defence' came to be officially used around 1940/41 to describe the wide range of services and activities that were acting in the public interest to help protect and assist the population during wartime.

Several voluntary organisations such as the British Red Cross, St John's Ambulance and newly created Women's Voluntary Service were involved in the provision of personnel and resources, particularly as drivers of ambulances. Many local ambulance and fire services had a voluntary 'Auxiliary' wing; Berkshire was no exception.

Report Centres were the coordinating offices for ARP activities in an emergency, staffed by senior council officials and representatives from local emergency services.

First Aid Posts were managed and resourced by local authorities and were to deal with casualties during an incident. Local authorities were also to ensure that sufficient mortuary accommodation was available to deal with a large number of fatalities.

Decontamination squads were trained to deal with the aftermath of a chemical attack. Such an attack never occurred against British citizens during the war.

Air Raid Warnings (sirens) and the Wardens' Service were managed by the local Police Chief Constable, although local authorities were responsible for recruitment of Wardens and the supply of resources. The role of Air Raid Warden was created in 1937. Wardens were responsible for patrolling the streets during blackouts as well as assisting casualties at the scene of a bomb

incident before the emergency services arrived. Each Wardens' Post reported to a Report Post, which in turn reported to the local Report Centre.

Teenagers from organisations such as the Scouts and Guides were used as Messengers to carry reports and instructions around during an incident.

Public Air Raid Shelters, including 'Morrison' and 'Anderson' shelters, were erected by a mixture of local District and County Councils, although eventually it seems that most shelters came under County control for funding purposes.

## Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to Dr Peter Durrant MBE, County Archivist and Dr Jonathan Brown, Journal Editor.

## Further reading

Mike Brown, *Put That Light Out! Britain's Civil Defence Services at War 1939 – 1945* (1999)

Tim Essex-Lopressi, *A Brief History of Civil Defence* (Civil Defence Association, 2005). Available as a pdf document, downloadable free from <http://www.civildefenceassociation.org.uk>

## References and notes

1 The Committee of Imperial Defence had created an ARP committee in 1924 to forecast the effects of aerial bombings on civilians in response to the progress of aviation technology and armaments since the First World War. It had been decided from the outset to keep the work of this department secret so as not to alarm the public.

2 Councils are still required to plan for civil emergencies. Reading Borough Council's plan can be found at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/council/strategies-plans-and-policies/EmergencyPlanning/rbc-emergency-planning-policy-document/> accessed on 2 Feb 2012.

3 Berkshire Record Office (BRO), Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939. C/CL/C3/15/1.

4 Manchester City Council and the Development of Air Raid Precautions 1935-1939 Eddie Little [http://www.mcrh.mmu.ac.uk/pubs/pdf/mrhr\\_02i\\_little.pdf](http://www.mcrh.mmu.ac.uk/pubs/pdf/mrhr_02i_little.pdf) accessed on 19 July 2011. The Act clarified which ARP costs would be centrally funded.

5 See Hansard H. C. Deb, 22 December 1937, vol. 330, c2017: [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1937/dec/22/royal-assent#\\$5CV0330Po\\_19371222\\_HOC\\_307](http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1937/dec/22/royal-assent#$5CV0330Po_19371222_HOC_307) accessed 19 July 2011.

6 It is important to note that there is not an extensive archival collection of official documentation regarding wartime civil defence organisation and operation within Reading County Borough (CB); these records seem to have been either lost or destroyed. In contrast, the records of BCC are extensive, but not exhaustive.

Comparison with or mention of Reading CB has therefore been made where pertinent evidence is available and the contrast with an urban authority has instead been made with Manchester. On the basis of Reading CB being a smaller, less disparate and more industrial authority than BCC, one could reasonably assume that, like Manchester, they were quick to establish an ARP scheme and organise its infrastructure. Indeed, it seems that Reading CB had appointed an ARP Officer before BCC.

7 The main threat posed by aerial attack was considered to be chemical, in the form of Yperite, or mustard gas, as used by the German army against the Allies in WW1. Hence, as directed by ARP Memo No 1, much of early county ARP planning was concerned with the establishment, recruitment and training of first aid and decontamination parties to deal with the aftermath of such an attack on civilians. However such attacks never occurred during the course of WW2, possibly due to Hitler's belief that chemical warfare would be ultimately ineffective due to the fact that such weapons were not unique to the Germans.

Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939. Comment made at the meeting held on 28 March 1936. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

8 Ibid.

9 Windsor (Borough and Urban District (UD)), Maidenhead (Maidenhead UD and Cookham Rural District), Wokingham (Borough, RD and Easthampstead RD), Bradfield (RD), Newbury (Borough and RD, Hungerford RD), Wantage (UD and RD, Faringdon RD), Wallingford (Borough and RD) and Abingdon (Borough and RD).

10 Reading, Abingdon, Wallingford, Didcot, Faringdon, Hungerford, Newbury, Wantage, Wokingham, Maidenhead, Windsor, Ascot and Bracknell. See Appendix for a brief explanation of the role of the Report Centres, as well as some other areas of ARP.

11 Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939. Discussed at meeting held 6 May 1938. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

12 Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939, BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

13 During the spring of 1939, Wokingham District Council successfully lobbied the Home Office for an increase in the number of Wardens' Posts allocated to their area.

14 The file regarding this can be found at BRO, C/CD/A2/4.

15 Emergency Committee for Civil Defence Minutes. Discussed at the meeting held 11 September 1940. BRO, C/CL/C3/19/1.

16 Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939. Comment made at meeting held 5 July 1938. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

17 This was in direct contravention of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles; by 15 September 1938, Hitler had taken control of both Austria and some areas of the Sudetenland.

18 Minutes of the Air Raid Precautions Committee 1936–1939, comment made 1 March 1938. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

19 Aldershot Command area Air Raid exercise May 1939; RAF Southern Region Black Out 9/10 August 1939.

20 Included as an appendix to the ARP committee meeting held on 9 June 1939. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

21 After taking control of some areas of the Sudetenland on 15 September 1938,

Hitler initially promised that the rest of Czechoslovakia was safe. Yet by the end of the month, at the Munich Conference he was demanding control of the remainder of the Sudetenland. On 29 September under the terms of the Munich Agreement, Britain, France and Italy gave the Sudetenland to Hitler, and de-facto control over the rest of Czechoslovakia to begin on 10 October, as long as he went no further. Hitler and Chamberlain signed an additional resolution determining to resolve all future disputes between Germany and the United Kingdom through peaceful means. On 30 September, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain famously called this separate agreement 'Peace for our time'.

22 Air Raid Precautions Committee Minutes. Aldershot Command discussed at meeting held on 9 February 1939. BRO, C/CL/C3/15/1.

23 Equipment Store at Old Carpet Factory, C/CD/A3/1/1-2. Area Office at 23a Ock Street, C/CD/A1/1 The other was East Berks Indoor Bowls Club as First Aid Post, C/CD/A3/1.

24 ARP Memo 4 'Organisation of the Air Raid Wardens' Service', recommended one warden per 500 inhabitants.

25 The ARP Controller, Sir George Mowbray, Bart., Chairman of BCC, had overall responsibility for ensuring that government guidance was met and that local ARP services co-operated, although it was the job of the CARPO to make it happen in reality.

26 Many of the files in C/CD/A1-5 contain examples of or correspondence regarding this.

27 The Rural Pie Scheme was a Women's Voluntary Service initiative to supply food to farm labourers working in the fields at harvest time. For details: [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/womens\\_voluntary\\_service.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/womens_voluntary_service.htm) accessed 13 July 2012.

The Ministry of Food wished for a County Meat Pie Committee to be established in order to coordinate and control distribution. Emergency Committee for Civil Defence Minutes, Mentioned during meeting held 17 June 1943. BRO, C/CL/C3/19/1.

28 Incident Report Log Book, BRO, C/CD/C3.

29 Ibid. Comment made in letter from the ARP Controller of Bradfield Rural District following an incident at Streatley and Lower Basildon on 24 September, 1940, in which magnetic mines were dropped and did not detonate. There were no suitable vehicles available in the county for recovery of the mine.

30 Ibid. Comment made by the Local Controller of Wallingford Rural District Council after High Explosive and Incendiary Bombs were dropped around Upton overnight on 9/10 March, 1941.

31 Ibid. Comment made by H. H. Dennis, a senior member of Newbury Report Centre staff who was called to be in charge of the centre's operations on that day in the absence of the Centre Controller.

32 E. R. Davies 'A History of the First Berkshire County Council', Berkshire County Secretariat, 1981.

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### Ann Smith

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## Internet and Other Resources

Reading Local Studies Library now has the General Register Office Index of Births, Marriages and Deaths on microfiche, and a subscription to the family history website Find My Past.

West Berkshire Libraries have a subscription to Ancestry.

Bracknell, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham and Slough Libraries all have Ancestry and Find My Past.

Thank you to colleagues in the Berkshire Record Office and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Libraries for their contributions.