Berkshire old and new

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Front Cover: Colonel William Crawford Walton. Commanding Officer of the 8th Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment at the Battle of Loos, September 1915.

Back Cover: Panel 93 on Loos Memorial showing some of the casualties of the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

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Colin Fox

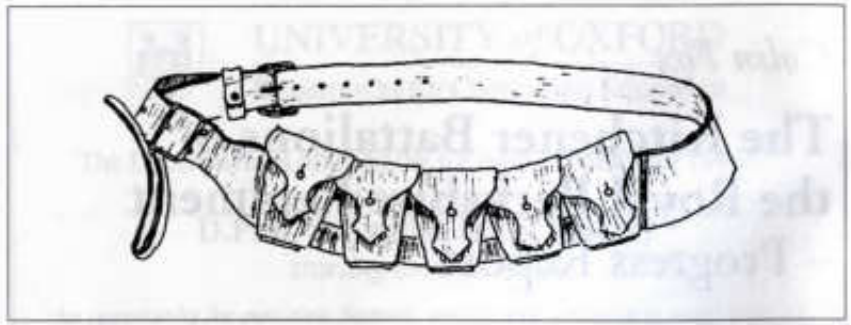
The Kitchener Battalions of the Royal Berkshire Regiment – Progress Report

The last issue of '*Berkshire Old and New*' contained an article on the Kitchener Battalions of the Royal Berkshire Regiment which outlined the work being carried out by a research group based at the University of Reading. In the meantime the first of the group's publications, '*Responding to the Call*', has appeared, which deals with the experiences of two of the battalions from the time of their raising in 1914 to their first major action in September 1915 at the Battle of Loos.

We are currently working on material related to the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and we are planning a second publication for the summer of 1996 to mark the 80th anniversary of the campaign. All three of the battalions we are researching took part in the various stages of the Somme offensive and we have been able to build up a substantial archive of primary source material covering 1916 and the later war years. The purpose of this report is to give a brief account of our sources which we hope will be of interest to readers working in related fields.

Two main lines of inquiry have been pursued throughout the project team's work: firstly, into the military events (although we have been careful here to keep in mind the needs of the general reader rather than the specialist military historian) and secondly, into the service experience and family background of the officers and men of the battalions.

For the military events we draw mainly on the archives of the Public Record Office. Available here in the War Office files are the unit diaries which give a day-by-day account of service on the Western Front and which, depending on the assiduousness of the diarist or on the accidence of documentary survival, can also contain valuable maps, operation orders, after-action reports and summaries. The

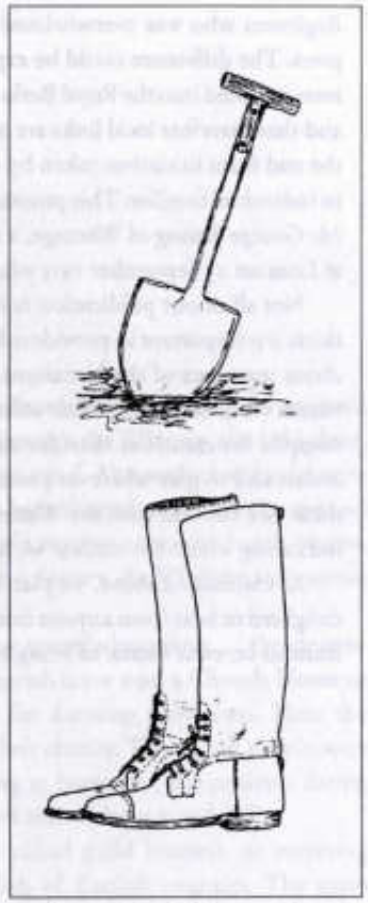


regimental museum in Salisbury also has copies of the battalion diaries, although these really need to be supplemented through the PRO holdings at brigade, division and corps level in order to build up a context in which the actions of small groups of men within a battalion can be understood. Of particular interest is a section in the Cabinet papers at the PRO which contains the correspondence of the Official Historian, Sir James Edmonds, at the time when, after the war, he was sending drafts of the various volumes of the Official History to officers who had served in the operations he was recording. Not only does this correspondence give a fascinating insight into the way a history on this huge scale was compiled but it offers evaluative reflections from participants ten or twenty years after the events. As stated earlier, the aim of this part of the research team's inquiry is not to produce a highly detailed, 'technical' account of the Royal Berkshire Regiment's active service but to ensure that our narrative line is soundly based and has a meaningful context.

Supplementing these PRO sources are the reports which appeared regularly in the Reading and Berkshire press throughout the war and which contain accounts of actions sent in by families of local men or by the men themselves. Unfortunately, press censorship in 1915 apparently forbade the publication of battalion details and, given that we are dealing with only three of the seven Royal Berkshire battalions which served on the Western Front (the others being either Regular or Territorial), it is sometimes possible to establish battalion membership only by reference to place or date - and even this is not always conclusive. Another hazard in dealing with the personal accounts is their often colourful, not to say inaccurate, version of events. They need to be checked against other sources.

The press archives are however extremely useful for our second line of inquiry: into the biographies of the men of the battalions. The regular weekly press frequently included in their reports biographical details of the men at the front, but of particular

value is the illustrated supplement published by the Reading Standard, *Berkshire and the War*, an indexed copy of which is available in the Reading Central Reference Library. This contains a wealth of photographs together with details of family, education, and employment. Much of it makes sad reading since a large proportion of the men featured here were casualties and the devastation caused to families in the area is all too evident.



Useful as newspapers are, their biographical coverage is inevitably limited and tends to be related to specific incidents. The team has benefited enormously from contacts made with families of members of the battalions, mainly officers, who were prepared to give access to private papers, including some extensive collections of letters. From these we have been able to build up continuous accounts of the experiences of recruitment and training as well as of actions at the front which give authority to general statements about service life. Private papers deposited with the Imperial War Museum have been similarly helpful in providing extended accounts in the form of memoirs by a number of members of the battalions. It is however not always possible to trace the genesis of the memoirs and some of them, written apparently many years after the event, need treating with caution. By a happy chance, most of the IWM papers from the Royal Berkshire battalions were written by private soldiers and they provide a balance to the officers' letters obtained from the families.

For both these sets of sources we were profoundly grateful since our appeals in the Reading and Berkshire press for contact with relatives of men who served with the battalions produced virtually no response. This is in rather strange contrast to the experience of a fellow researcher working on a battalion of the Gloucestershire

Regiment who was overwhelmed with material following his request in the local press. The difference could be explained by the fact that only about a third of the men recruited into the Royal Berks Kitchener battalions actually came from Berkshire and that therefore local links are not as strong in this area. All our contacts came in the end from initiatives taken by one of our team members in tracing and writing to individual families. This process resulted also in the happy discovery of a veteran: Mr George Strong of Wantage, a 100 year old survivor of the 8th Battalion's attack at Loos on 25 September 1915 who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

Not all of our publication is devoted to narrative and personal biography. We think it is important to provide information, perhaps of interest to family historians, about members of the battalions who do not feature in the main text but about whom we do have some basic information. This is, by the nature of things, easier to compile for casualties than for survivors, and so we aim to list all those killed in action and to give wherever possible their place of burial or commemoration. For those not familiar with the Western Front we give a guide to the battlefields today indicating where the actions we have described took place and how to get there.

As mentioned above, we plan to publish our next booklet in 1996. We would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in our project, either wanting information from us or, even better, offering to guide us towards new sources.

Joanna Mattingly

Church Houses in Berkshire

Church houses are first noted in the early 15th century, but only became universal after 1500. Their purpose was to raise money, through the Whitsun ales held there, for church maintenance and, subsequently, poor relief. Although church-ales were not finally abolished until 1640, many parishes had adopted parish rates by the end of the 16th century. Consequently, there was little attempt to revive church houses, along with maypoles, at the Reformation.[1] As John Aubrey, the Wiltshire antiquarian wrote in the late 17th century:

"There were no rates for the poor in my grandfather's days .... the church-ale of Whitsuntide did the business. In every parish is (or was) a Church House to which belonged spits, crocks, etc., utensils for dressing provisions. Here the housekeepers met, and were merry and gave their charity. The young people were there too, and had dancing, bowling, shooting at butts etc., the ancients sitting gravely by, and looking on. All things were civil and without scandal."[2]

References to church houses (sometimes called guild houses), or surviving buildings, have been found for over two-thirds of English counties. The main exceptions are the northern counties and parts of the Midlands, although church-ales have been noted in Derbyshire and Yorkshire.[3] My own researches have unearthed at least seventeen documentary references for Middlesex and twenty-five for Cornwall. Over forty church houses are listed for Wiltshire, the neighbouring county to Berkshire, in a card index of documentary sources kept at the Wiltshire Record Office.[4]

Extant buildings are most numerous in the dispersed settlement areas of the south-west where church and church house often stand apart from other buildings.[5] Several church houses or guild houses have also survived in East Anglia.[6] It may be significant that these are the two main areas where major rebuilding of churches was in progress in the late medieval period.

Only nine church houses have been noted by me for Berkshire, although a detailed search has not been made. These cover the parishes of Bray, Cookham, Binfield, Sunninghill, Sonning, Hurst, Uffington, Stanford in the Vale, and probably Warfield, but not all are extant.[7] Church ales are also mentioned in the churchwardens' accounts of New Windsor and St Lawrence's, Reading.[8] It is likely that here, as in other counties, many more remain to be discovered.

The church house was usually a two-storey permanent structure held by the churchwardens on behalf of the whole parish. Mostly purpose-built on available land near the church, the church house often abutted on, or was sited in the churchyard itself. Other examples were located on the opposite side of the road and a few were further afield. Rather like bank barns, these buildings had separate external access to each floor. The downstairs room was where the brewing and baking went on, while feasting took place in the room above. Wheat, malt or barley were collected by the young men of each parish going from house to house, and used to produce cakes and ale for the annual Whitsun feast. All parishioners could attend on payment of a penny or two. Funds could be enhanced by holding further ales, allowing local guilds to hold their feasts there, entertaining neighbouring parishes in Whit week or hiring out the brewing vessels. The overall concept was rather like the present day bring-and-buy sale, and can certainly be classified as fun fund-raising.[9]

Similar events may previously have been staged in churches, before the introduction of pews.[10] They were certainly not built to house church masons as is often stated, although they may have been built by them. Usually church houses were not built until after major structural rebuilding work on the church was completed in the late 15th or early 16th centuries. Good quality materials were used in their construction and this is why many church house buildings have survived, though often unrecognised.

The comparatively early date of 1448 appears in Arabic numerals on the lychgate at Bray, which may have been the church house. A late 19th century engraving of the churchyard shows an external stair providing access to the chamber above (see illustration). At Binfield on 5 August 1517 a plot of land, at the east end of the church next to the cemetery, was granted by Queen Katharine of Aragon as lady of the manor to the churchwardens. The plot, which measured sixty feet by thirty-three feet, was to be used to build "le churchehouse". The churchwardens were to pay an annual ground rent of 1d and in addition had to burn 4 lbs of wax before an image of the Blessed Katharine Virgin in their parish church.[11]

Bray Churchyard

These possible foundation dates for two Berkshire church houses can be compared with Twickenham, Isleworth and West Brentford in Middlesex where church houses were being built in 1525, 1527 and 1531, respectively. The sixty-one feet by twenty-six feet building plot at Isleworth is comparable in size to that at Binfield, because the intention was to seat the whole parish at one sitting in the upper feasting room.[12] By contrast at St Lawrence in Reading only the church could provide the space necessary for 'the day of drinking' as late as 1506. A middle range of seats is first mentioned there in 1532 and a pulpit in 1537-8. Before this time it is likely that the nave of St Lawrence's was a flexible open space with relatively few seats provided for the comfort of wealthy townswomen.[13]

Church houses also required furnishings and fittings, like the 'good tablecloth' left to the church by Nicholas Radish of Cookham in 1545 'to serve the parishioners in the church house or elsewhere as they shall see meet.'[14] Ale brewing and the preparation of provisions was clearly still going on at Bray as late as 1623. The church inventory of that year lists a spit, a great and a lesser brass pot, twelve trestles and one table. An earlier inventory of 1602 lists a cauldron (used for brewing), two spits, eight dozen

trenchers, two planks and a great chest with a cover. It is probable that these items were kept in the lower rooms of the lychgate. Upstairs in the long loft were two forms and three trestles, while in the other loft were two tables and one form.[15] At Stanford in the Vale in 1583 youths of the town, between the ages of ten and thirteen, exchanged a bushel of wheat for four new platters and two new potyngers. Some of these items may have been made of pewter, although the trenchers at Bray were probably wooden.[16]

Costumes for the May Games or Robin Hood plays were also stored in Bray church house. In 1602 there is a mention of five garters with bells and four morris coats. The morris coats are enumerated again in 1623 but with the addition of a costume for Maid Marion and a pair of breeches and a doublet for the fool. These items along with the brewing utensils may well have gone by 1640. They are noticeably absent from the 1662 inventory.[17]

Evidence of the subletting of a church house, because the building was only rarely used by the parish during the year, has been found at Binfield as early as 1558. John Malthouse left 20s to the churchwardens in this year, for rent of the church house and church maintenance. At Stanford in the Vale the church house was rented out for 12d a year in 1600. It seems likely that the church ales had ceased some four years previously in 1596, when the church pewter was sold for £1 9s 6d and the church brass (including brewing vessels) for £1 12s 1d.[18]

Money from church ales was often diverted to poor relief by the Reformation period, and a number of church houses subsequently became poor houses. At Uffington, the building may have been converted to a school as early as 1617, while at Bray two poor people resided in the lychgate in 1853.[19] Continuity of original use is suggested at Hurst where the old church house is now the Castle Inn, or at Sonning where the church house of 1609 may be the Bull Hotel which occupies a traditional site for a church house.[20] At Cookham there is a half-timbered building alongside the churchyard with a massive chimney breast which might have been the church house, and at Warfield a 16th century house known as St Michael's is associated with a single storey parish room of probable 17th century date in the churchyard.[21] The final example from Sunninghill was demolished by 1779 when 'all the materials of the house call'd the Church House' were given to build a new vestry.[22]

A search through extant churchwardens' accounts in the Berkshire Record Office or chantry certificates and charity commissioners' returns in the Public Record Office would no doubt yield further references, while local studies may well have

already uncovered other examples too. The resultant list is unlikely to be exhaustive, because these buildings and their records are by their very nature transitory. Unless alternative uses, as parish or poor houses, schools, inns or private houses, were found, such buildings might well have been demolished without trace like those at Binfield and Sunninghill.

It seems clear, from work done so far, that every parish in Berkshire probably would have had a church house, although town churches may have relied more on urban rents than church ales for revenue funding. It is noteworthy that specific references to church houses have been found for six of the seven Berkshire and Middlesex parishes that appear in the thesis, while that at Bray is inferred. Of these seven parishes, Sunninghill was the poorest and is located on the sandy heathlands bordering Surrey. Its church was by-passed during the great rebuilding of the late Medieval period and retained its Norman plan and central tower until the early 19th century. In the early 16th century the population of the parish was little more than sixty people, or maybe ten to fifteen families at most.[23] Despite its poverty and dearth of residents, the churchwardens and parishioners of Sunninghill invested in a church house - perhaps inter-parish rivalry or emulation was at work here in the early 16th century? This a further indication that every Berkshire parish was likely to have had a church house to make merry in.

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3 Cowley (1970), p 62; Hutton (1994), p 29

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6 Information from Beth Davis.

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Dr Peter Durrant

Records of the Boards of the Guardians in Berkshire

"Despite the measures of central government control imposed upon it by the Act of 1834, the nineteenth century poor law remains one of those institutions which can only be properly seen in its local context. Until its demise in 1929 it was shaped and reshaped by a continuous debate between central and local authorities as to the proper modes of relief for, and degrees of expenditure on, those whom personal or economic misfortune had rendered dependent. The debates, carefully recorded by bureaucrats at centre and periphery, created quantities of archive material which provide an invaluable source for local historians, even those whose interest lie outside the fairly widespread bounds of the poor law system."

Thus wrote Professor Michael Rose, a leading historian of the new poor law, in a recent review in *The Local Historian* .[1] It is the starting point for this article that, in spite of a substantial amount of writing about the poor law in general, in spite of guides to sources, in spite of a wealth of material at national and local level, disappointingly little has been written about the workhouse system or about the operation of the new poor law generally in Berkshire; and it is the author's hope that by reminding people of the opportunities for research that exist, he will encourage more research into the Berkshire scene.

The new poor law of 1834 (strictly, the Poor Law Amendment Act, 4 & 5 Will IV c.76) was based largely on the recommendations of the royal Commission on the Poor Laws which reported earlier that year and which had itself been brought into being as a result of widespread concern at both the cost and effectiveness of the unreformed system. Some alleged, indeed, that the method of topping-up wages, which was a major feature of that system. was actually counter-productive, encouraging idleness and worsening the very problems of poverty which it was

meant to alleviate. The new Act took responsibility for poor relief out of the hands of parish officials and provided for its administration in unions of parishes, governed by local Boards of Guardians, under the superintendance of the (national) Poor Law Commission. Each Union was to provide a workhouse and to provide relief on the principle of less eligibility: that relief should be offered to able-bodied paupers only in the workhouse, and that conditions in the workhouse should be harsher, or less eligible, than conditions outside.

The 1834 Act, and the Commission's report, caused controversy at the time and have continued to do so ever since. The effectiveness of the new system in meeting the criticisms levelled at the old and at countering the problem of pauperism, the extent to which it was accepted or opposed in the localities, the impact it had on society, and the way it was modified, both locally and over time, have all been the subject of debate; and that debate goes on.

Extensive writing at national level has shown a system which changed dramatically over time, and which was never uniform across the county.[2] This has been supplemented and our knowledge enlarged by an increasing number of local studies. Anne Digby's *Pauper Palaces* (1978) is based on study of workhouses in Norfolk. Other studies (of variable quality, admittedly) have appeared of individual workhouses in various counties, as reviews in *The Local Historian* testify.[3]

Research has been encouraged recently by the appearance of guides to sources. National records were discussed by Dr Kate Thompson in 'Sources for the New Poor Law in Public Records' in the *Journal of Local and Regional Studies* (vol.7 no.1, 1987), and the Assistant Poor Law Commissioners' Correspondence was the subject of Simon Fowler's leaflet in the Historical Association's *Short Guides to Records* series (SG37, 1994). There remains no comprehensive guide to local records, though Guardians' minutes are featured in one of the Historical Association's original *Short Guides* (SG124, reprinted 1994), and the 'Gibson Guide' to Poor Law Records includes a list of the main series of records created by the Boards of Guardians, noting in some instances the principal type of information contained. Berkshire Record Office published in 1979 (reissued 1984) its *Guide to the Records of the New Poor Law and its Successors in Berkshire, 1835-1948*, which includes a brief introduction to the records. Andy Reid in *The Union Workhouse: a Study Guide for Teachers and Local Historians*, Phillimore (1994), provides a useful introduction to sources and to themes for study.

But in spite of all this the Berkshire scene, as indicated above, remains relatively unexplored. The only general survey of the impact of the Act in Berkshire was

written nearly 20 years ago. Since then there have appeared a thesis on the relief of poverty in Tilehurst under the old and new poor laws; a thesis on poverty and paternalism in Berkshire, 1820-1850; an article on the new Reading workhouse; and a discussion of poor law medical services. A recent book on the 'Swing' riots describes briefly the impact of the poor laws on the lives of the families of some of the men transported for their involvement in the riots.[4] Clearly there is scope for further work, even in the early period. The later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries offer even more opportunity.

The Records

The records of the Poor Law Unions in Berkshire are extensive. There were twelve unions in all, incorporating virtually all the parishes in Berkshire, and some 40 parishes from neighbouring counties. Some records from all have survived, and from most unions a good number exist. Altogether the surviving records occupy over 150 feet of shelving. Board minutes alone account for nearly 500 volumes, or perhaps 150,000 pages of evidence. Perhaps the problem is not insufficient evidence, but too much.

Union records fall into five broad categories: records of the guardians, general administrative records, records of the workhouse, records of outdoor relief, and records of medical services. Clearly there is a degree of overlap. The Board of Guardians discussed all manner of matters of concern to the Union and their records reflect this. The Clerk's letters relate to administrative matters, to indoor and outdoor relief, to assisted emigration and much more. Nevertheless, such a division provides a framework, and will be followed in this article.

Records of the Board of Guardians

The Board of Guardians met regularly, often weekly or fortnightly in the early years, but more usually monthly later in the century. They were concerned with policy; but policy often meant dealing with individual cases. In the 1830s a typical meeting in the Bradfield Union would start with the approval of the minutes of the previous meeting and a discussion of matters arising - often cases of individual paupers outstanding, or where the Guardians had ordered the Relieving Officer to investigate a case and report back. Business would then move on to financial matters: payments from the parish overseers to the Relieving Officer would be ordered, and any accounts approved. Next, provisions for the Relieving Officer or the workhouse might be

approved. Important items of correspondence would be read, and possibly entered into the minutes. Finally, application for relief would be considered.

In the early days, it was usual for the full board to consider all matters put before it. Later in the century it became common for the board to delegate certain business to committees. In 1900 there was a Visiting Committee at Abingdon, a House Committee at Bradfield, and a Cottage Homes Committee in Wallingford. By 1914 Reading had no fewer than six committees.

General Administrative Records

The level of detail in the Guardians' minute books reflects of course the degree of interest and concern that the Board showed for day-to-day business. But even the most interested and industrious Board could not manage the affairs of the Union without support, and the officer upon whom the Guardians chiefly relied was the Clerk.

Perhaps the most important function of the Clerk - arguably the most useful to the historian, at any rate - was as sender and receiver of letters. Inevitably, many of these were routine. Nevertheless, the clerks' letter books, where they survive, are often very informative. The tale of Robert Lovelock, who had left Berkshire with his family for Lancashire in hope of work, but who had been faced there with a recession which had led to the closure of several mills and widespread lay-offs, is graphically told in the letter book of the Bradfield Union.[5]

But the Clerk, as the Guardians' legal officer, did more than conduct correspondence. He had to prepare contracts, whether for supplies to the workhouse or for the placing of paupers in other institutions; he had to receive and communicate Poor Law Commission orders; he was responsible for preparing all applications by the Board to Quarter or Petty Sessions (in case of disputes), and he had to complete all returns to the Poor Law Commission. Evidence of this work, often of some value to the historian, is to be found among his papers.

Records of the Workhouse

The Union Workhouse was the central feature of the new Poor Law - though it often took several years, and much debate (sometimes bitter) before the house was actually built. Bradfield built its workhouse almost immediately. Wokingham, on the other hand, did not complete its new building until 1848. However, even if they did not have new purpose-built workhouses immediately, most Unions had inherited

parish workhouses, and in all Unions the administration of the workhouse was an essential activity, generating numerous records.

The workhouse was under the charge of a Master, usually assisted by a Matron. It was common, though not essential, for master and matron to be husband and wife. The Master was responsible for the building, its inmates, and the staff (though few workhouses had a large staff, and smaller ones possibly none at all). His duties included admissions, inspection of paupers, discipline, registration (of births and deaths), provisions, arrangements for medical treatment, education and employment, and he had to make a regular (usually weekly) report to the Board. All of these activities generated records.

Admission and discharge books are perhaps the basic record. They vary in quality, but the most detailed supply a considerable amount of information about the paupers: name, age, date of admission, description/occupation, religion, parishes of settlement, reason for admission (and subsequently for discharge), and 'general observations' - an entry with plenty of scope for subjective opinion, but nevertheless informative. When surviving in numbers, as they do for some Unions, the books provide not only an overall picture of the population of the workhouse (showing, for example, some occupants being regularly discharged and readmitted), but also detailed information about individual cases, so that the paupers are revealed as real people, not just figures or statistics.

The Master's weekly report book, however, is largely statistical. It records the number of inmates of the workhouse, by category, and chronicles the changing occupancy of the house. However, this record contains illuminating details. The names of children ready for service, or sent into service, might be entered; punishments administered during the week would be recorded; and special events might be noted. The Windsor Union report book for 1883 records the estimate for the workhouse Christmas dinner (since special permission from the Board was needed). It included 220lb beef, 40lb suet, 50lb raisins, 2lb snuff, 6lb tobacco. The Board gave its approval, but even at Christmas could not resist the proviso - it is entered in the report book in the Chairman's own hand - that 'the able bodied [were] not to be allowed the beer and tobacco.'[6]

Other records kept included birth and death register, punishment books, casual paupers books (that is, admissions books for vagrants and travelling paupers), stores and provisions books, service books (registers of children who entered service), and very occasionally school registers.

Records of Outdoor Relief

While the workhouse was central to the system of poor relief set up by the 1834 Act, and while the workhouse test was, with a greater or lesser degree of enthusiasm, fairly rigidly applied at least to the able-bodied pauper, there remained a large number of people who for one reason or another were entitled to receive relief outside its walls. Indeed, throughout the century paupers on outdoor relief always outnumbered those in the workhouse by at least two to one, and in bad years by more than seven to one.

The official responsible for administering outdoor relief was the Relieving Officer. His principal duties were to receive all applications for relief, to investigate the circumstances of the applicant, and to report to the Guardians; and to distribute relief authorised by the Guardians. He was permitted in exceptional circumstances to administer temporary relief, though such action had to be reported to the Guardians at the first opportunity; he was responsible for liaising with the Medical Officer in cases of sickness; and he was required to superintend pauper apprentices.

The records with derived from these duties were threefold. Particulars of applications for relief were entered in the *Application and Report Book*. The information recorded included the name and age of the applicant, parish, number of children, special circumstances (e.g. sickness) and reason for request. Since applications were seldom recorded in detail in the minutes (Bradfield in its early days was an exception), this record provides important information about the people applying for relief. Relief distributed was recorded in the *Weekly Relief List* and the *Relief Order Book*. The former provides a weekly summary of the cost of relief for each pauper; the latter usually includes the name and age of the recipient, his or her condition (sick, 'imbecile', widowed), and the relief given, noting whether this was in cash or kind.

Besides allowing an overall assessment of relief patterns, the Relief Order Book helps to add personal colour to the story. In the parish of Bucklebury in one week in September 1835 there were 56 entries, though since many of these represent families the number in receipt of relief was rather higher. Of the 56 named individuals, 32 were over sixty years old, two were crippled, one was blind, four were ill, and a further two had sprained ankles. There were seven families in which one or both parents were missing. In the Keaton family both parents had absconded; in the case of the Woodley family the father had been transported and the mother was dead; Isaac Barr's children were described simply and bleakly as 'friendless.'[7]

Records of Medical Services

Medical Officers under the new Poor Law had two distinct functions: they had to supervise the medical relief of the outdoor poor, and they had to attend to the sick in the workhouse. Generally, though not invariably, the posts were held by different individuals.

Although the workhouse medical officer was required to attend to sick paupers, supply medicines, and to report on various matters to the Guardians, very few separate records seem to have been kept. Certainly none survives in Berkshire. Perhaps this was partly due to a degree of indifference on the part of the Guardians to medical matters. In any event, such evidence for medical services as survives must normally be sought in the minutes. The District Medical Officers, however, had to keep a *Medical Officer's Report Book*, recording the name, usually the age and generally the ailment of the person visited, together with a note of the prescription. Even towards the end of the century food and alcohol were still more commonly prescribed than drugs and medicines. Survival of such records in Berkshire, however, though slightly better than for workhouse medical records, is still poor.

Non-Poor Law Duties

As the nineteenth century progressed, various additional duties were laid upon the Boards of Guardians, principally vaccination (from 1840), valuation (from 1862), sanitation and public health (from 1872), and school attendance (from 1876), though for reasons of space it is not possible to do more than mention them here.

Conclusion

The workhouse had a powerful impact on nineteenth century English society. It was a large and brooding presence. In many cases it would have been, at the time of its erection and for many years afterwards, significantly the largest building in its neighbourhood. Socially and emotionally the workhouse carried a stigma, which was remembered well into the second half of the twentieth century. But the workhouse was only one part of a system of poor relief administration which extended over nearly 100 years, until the Boards of Guardians were swept away in 1930, and in some respects continued until the National Health Act of 1948. Yet in spite of all that has been written, there is still much to discover about the buildings, people, local variations and the changes over time, the circumstances of those who were affected, and the aims and attitudes of those who administered it - and much of evidence for this is held locally.

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Kerr Kirkwood

The Contribution of Berkshire to Wartime Agriculture

Berkshire farming 1920-1938

When the war broke out in 1939, the British government once again looked to their farmers to help feed a nation that had for 25 years relied heavily on imported food from the colonies. From 1920 onwards the Government had given way to free market conditions and a policy favouring the boosting of trade agreements for industry made agriculture subordinate. As a result, Great Britain had become the largest customer of agricultural produce on the world market. In fact, 70% of food came by ship from other countries.[1]

Berkshire farmers played their part well between 1939 - 1943 by ploughing up over 20,000 acres of permanent pasture and sowing wheat and oats. However, around 1937-8 few Berkshire farmers were prepared for the challenge that came in 1940.

Background to a shrinking industry - prelude to war

Berkshire agriculture experienced severe depression in 1921 a year that became known as the 'Great Betrayal' and left bitter memories in the minds of all farmers. During 1916-1917 the disruption of shipping by submarine attacks had attracted a greater sense of urgency into home food production. As a 'carrot' to farmers for converting pasture into arable (the cost was high), the Government introduced guaranteed prices for wheat and oats (Corn Production Act 1917.) These guarantees were to last for 6 years with a review in 1920. Farming profits soared in 1917-1918 but minimum wage legislation coupled with a fall in price of wheat in 1920 began to worry growers, but even more so the Government, who feared their inability to meet minimum guaranteed prices. In 1921 the Corn Production Act was repealed and as compensation farmers received for corn already planted, £3 per acre of wheat and

£4 per acre of oats. The Wages Board was dissolved. Berkshire farmers did not recover financially until 1938.

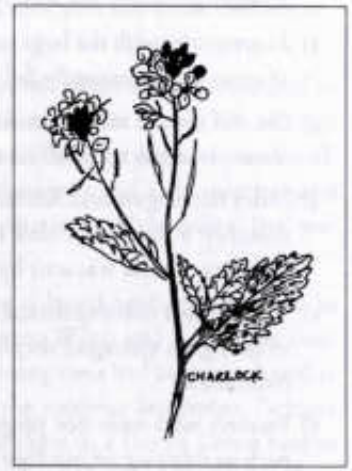
In July 1938 the prime minister Neville Chamberlain made his 'Kettering Speech' which was, many thought, ill considered. He strongly denied the need for the British farmer to increase home production and declared that Britain would **not** starve if war came. However, in March, 1939, when Germany entered Prague, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, (Minister of Agriculture) immediately introduced in hand emergency measures to increase production.

The national concerns of 1938 were an echo of Sir William Mount's speech at the luncheon of the Wokingham Agricultural Association Annual Show during the 1938 crisis.[2] He said: 'These are anxious days...and if the worst comes to the worst I am quite certain that the victors in any contest will not necessarily be the people with the largest army, but the country which can stick it the longest and whose food supplies will last the longest. We shall depend on our farmers even to a greater extent than we do today. I am sure that everyone connected with agriculture will do their bit to see us through. Some thanks will be due to the Wokingham Association for the encouragement they have given during peaceful times to a better understanding of cultivation and to the breeding of the best stock.'

Mr W Percy Colebrook (a well known Berkshire farmer and butcher) summed up and said "We do realise that agriculture is one of our lines of defence. If the need comes, the agriculturalists of Berkshire will play their part and will not be found wanting." Many farms in the Thames Valley were small, about 140-200 acres, typically tenanted and carrying some 12 cows, 50 breeding ewes, 200 hens and 60 acres of corn and run by 3 hired men. Farming at that time was much more a "way of life" than a business geared for profit and expansion. Farmers were assessed for Income Tax on their rent and the Inspector was rarely far out in his assessment of about £1 per acre nett profit.

Mounting dilapidations to land, fences and cottages had grown as no cash was available to repair or maintain. The far reaching effects of the disastrous Corn Production Act 1921 were still very much in evidence on some Berkshire farms as late as 1939. Large holdings of 400-500 acres on the Downs beyond Inkpen were unfenced, farm houses were dilapidated and cottages falling down: there was no electricity or mains water available for connection. The low price of corn, free trade and the unprolific Hampshire Down ewe all made business extremely difficult. Farmers who only grew corn lost heart and many became insolvent who only grew corn and were not progressive.

Grain prices hit rock bottom



Cereal prices remained depressingly low and by 1934 at London Corn Exchange (Mark Lane) wheat struggled to reach 20s - 9d a quarter (504 lbs). By comparison the well known farmer H C Stilgoe of Addenbury, Oxfordshire was pleased to sell his malting barley at 55 shillings a quarter in October 1926.[3] However, the Newbury Corn Exchange was dead, as barley was only quoted at £2 per quarter (July 1926) and few bargains made.

In 1935 corn yields in the Burghfield and Grazeley area only achieved 17 hundred weight. But by 1943 they rose to nearly a ton per acre through better bred, higher yielding varieties, and improved tillage methods. The blaze of the annual yellow arable weed, charlock in spring barley was not controlled by herbicide till 1942. Often a plague of rabbits reduced growing corn to a mown cricket pitch.

A fall in productivity in the County Analysis of Berkshire Farm Enterprises 1876-1937
4th June Returns - Berkshire (acres, made annually)

	1876	1893	1922	1937
Corn	146000	115000	95000	57000
Roots	56000	48000	18000	9900
Clover / grass	42000	37000	22000	–
P.Pasture	114000	159000	160000	193000
Bare fallow	9900	11000	17600	17000
Working horses inc. brood mares	14800	15800	13000	6200
Cows in calf in milk	16000	21000	21000	30000
Other cattle	18000	23000	29000	41000
Sheep +1 year	177000	132000	59000	69000
Sheep -1 year	103000	80000		

The above statistics[4] illustrate the changes in farming policy over some 60 years.

1) Folded sheep with their dung encouraged more wheat growing but by 1893, acreages gradually fell and by 1937 only 57000 acres sown.
2) In sympathy with the large exodus from sheep fed on folded system, the amount of roots grown naturally fell from 1922-1937 to 9900 acres i.e. 50%.
3) On the reverse side, permanent pasture mainly from Streatley to Hungerford almost reached 200,000 acres and fallow 17,000 acres.
4) Dairy farming around Reading, Newbury and Faringdon benefitted from assured monthly milk cheque and the number of cows in milk rose to 30,000 - the majority of milk was sent by rail to Paddington each morning.
5) The number of sheep shrank to 59,000 by 1922 and there was a change of breeds: to ones grass managed: shepherds who had folded the sheep with hurdles became redundant.
6) Farmers who were not prepared to change from corn to livestock enterprises such as dairying or outdoor pigs became insolvent and farms were left vacant and unlet until Devon and Scottish tenants arrived.

The Hampshire Breed Goes out of Fashion

Along the Kennet valley towards West Berkshire, hurdle folding of Hampshire Down sheep was traditional farming practice from 1860 to 1940. The breed was ubiquitous, produced fine textured Easter lambs. The sheep was patient to the fold, i.e. the ewes rarely jumped out of the pens! The Berkshire Downs farmers enjoyed a free-draining chalk soil and the rigid rotation practice rarely changed:-

1st year	Folded roots by sheep
2nd year	Barley or oats (undersown grass)
3rd year	Young grass seeds hay/graze
4th year	Winter wheat
5th year	Barley/oats

Disadvantages of hurdle folding:-

a) Costly labour, moving wattles daily was a hateful job in the frost and the mud.
b) Planting spring corn became late in a wet spring as the soil was severely puddled.
c) While the corn yields improved after sheep had been kept on land and fed on turnips - the price of lamb fell due to the introduction of heavy imports from Canada. The Hampshire Down flock was entirely geared to early fat lamb for

Easter so that the ewes went to the ram late August and lambed early January in the snow. Trough feeding with oil cake and corn plus hay continued from December to April when spring came.

d) The breed[5] only gave "singles" (one lamb) a severe disadvantage compared to Scotch-Half bred ewes that averaged one and three quarter lambs. Then started lambing 26 March and were never close folded. The cost per lamb was much lower. Furthermore the Scotch-Half bred lambs were up and sucking 10 minutes after birth while the Hampshire lambs were lethargic and 'the will to live' was not always there. (Appendix 4)

Before World War II there was a wide choice at breeding sheep sales[6] but in 1930 a progressive sheep farmer C Wookey (Upavon, Wilts) sold 2,400 Half bred gimmers (yearling ewes) at Marlborough. These young ewes had been purchased as lambs at Hawick and St Boswells in Scotland in the previous September. Farmers changed to Scotch or Welsh bred ewes and mated them to a Dorset Down ram to produce fat lambs. Sadly, as a consequence the shepherd often lost his job hurdling sheep - the employer could not afford to pay him and additional staff at lambing. It was time to cut feed costs and breed more lambs per ewe off the grass when the spring growth came. A major change had taken place, aided by the cheap and easy movement of sheep from Scotland. Fewer and fewer sheep were being bred in Berkshire, instead Welsh and Scottish lambs were being purchased. The cheap and easy movement of sheep from Scotland by rail encouraged farmers to change breed away from their father's tradition.

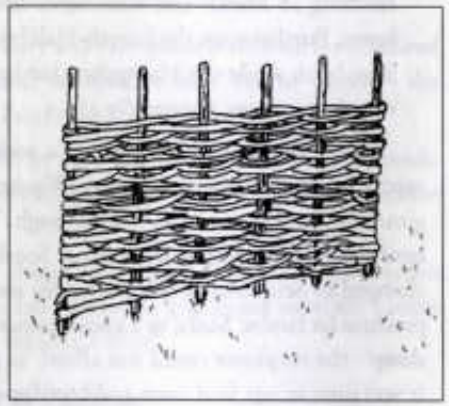
A good example of changing sheep management took place with Squire Loyd of Lockinge near Wantage. In 1920, he was farming 10,000 acres of which 49% was arable/folded by a Hampshire Down flock. By 1937, this was down to 37%. In 1901 the flock had numbered 3,000 but by 1938 most of the ewes had been sold and were gradually being replaced by 2,300 Kerry Hills from Radnor in Wales, retaining only the top ewes for the pedigree Hampshire Down ram trade at Salisbury Fair. A number of tenants who had come down from Cumbria and Dumfries purchased Half bred ewe lambs each Autumn from the Borders and put the best grown to the ram on 21 October. All lambing took place outside, the farmer being his own shepherd.

Berkshire Sheep Breeding Ewes

1939	37,000 - majority folded on roots
1941	28,000
1944	22,000

Berkshire had by now virtually all grass managed flocks, principally Scotch Half-Breds, Exmoor, Welsh and Kerry Hills. These figures include two teeth ewes (maidens about 18 months of age). The ewe flock continued to fall as feeding stuffs for sheep became scarce and this made many farmers decide to go out of hurdle folded flocks.[7]

The urgency to Get on with the Job 1939



Allied losses in the Merchant Navy through U Boat warfare in the North Atlantic worried the British Government as sinkings doubled in 1941-42 and then doubled again in 1943-44. Much of the last cargoes were feeding stuffs for human consumption and cattle feed.

An acute awareness of the strategic importance of a thriving home agriculture was in evidence when the 1937 Agriculture Act was passed giving subsidies to farmers who applied lime and basic slag. Deficiency payments on oats and barley were introduced and a ploughing-up grant of pasture at £2 per acre converted into arable was announced. A deficiency payment for sheep was only paid to flocks that did not rely on imported food stuffs.[8]

The Berks War Agricultural Executive Committee (Appendix 6) was set up and the first Chairman was A T Loyd and later H A Benyon. This body had wide powers to acquire machinery and labour to plough up permanent pasture - by December 1940, an area of 20,000 acres had been converted - some magnificent achievement! (Appendix 7)

Farm Horse Versus Tractor

In Berkshire in 1937 there were 6,200 working farm horses, about half the number there had been in 1922 because of the sharp fall in arable farming.

In October 1939 the Ministry Grants under the Heavy Horse Breeding Scheme were suddenly cancelled, killing interest in those who bred Stallions or bred from their working Shire mares. Immediately after the announcement breeders of heavy horses were deprived of the right to any fodder that they grew at home. William J

Cumber (Theale) had 60 licensed Shire entires in the 1939 season and as a result of the regulations he castrated the majority of them, while 11 were broken to work and a few were sold to Westminster City Council. The very fine Lockinge Stud, of A.T Loyd was cut back, destroying 60 years of constructive blood lines as farmer interest quickly waned - the tractor was inexorably catching on![9]

Before 1939 mechanisation was very slow in its development for two valid reasons - first many tenants could not afford to purchase a new Standard Fordson at £136 and few had the desire to purchase one as their implements were all horse drawn and were not easily converted to fit tractors. The ploughmen were not experienced in the use of tractors and there was precious little arable.

In 1935 Edward Lousley at Loyd's operated only 11 tractors on his 4,000 acres - the rest was tilled by horsemen, many of whom were second generation. Ploughing heavy clay with a single furrow plough and a pair of horses covered one acre per day but a 2 furrow tractor plough trebled output.

In 1941 a large loan was taken up by the British Government to purchase all types of farm machinery from the USA (US Lease Lend 1941 programme) and 6,000 tractor units were ordered, mainly wheel and caterpillar tractors plus combine drills and harvesting machines. By 1943 27,000 British tractors were in use in addition to American models.[10]

King George VI and the Berkshire War Agriculture Committee

King George VI and the Berkshire War Agriculture Committee set the example and the Wokingham Association followed.

In 1939 when a ploughing-up campaign was announced the King gave orders to reclaim 600 acres of the 2000 acre Norfolk Farm at Windsor Great Park. All the Park deer were rounded up and slaughtered and the 600 acres of wilderness (being bracken, bushes/dead trees overlying stiff clay) met the bulldozer, gyro-tiller, disc harrows and numerous bonfires. After 70 years under permanent pasture the soil was fertile enough to support the planting of four heavy successive white straw crops. During the next four years the land was re-seeded with clover/rye grass leys and grazed. After which its fertility restored, it could be put back into arable again.

During the 1940 harvest at Windsor, the clay gave bountiful yields of beans and wheat (total 400 acres). A Friesian dairy herd of 30 cows was milked and much of the home grown barley was ground to feed a 50 sow herd of Wessex Saddlebacks.[11]

Maidenhead Thicket, an area of 200 acres, was reclaimed through the efforts of the 'Berks War Agriculture Committee. James Steel, Grazeley, Reading, was the Arable Consultant and Site Supervisor - it was a superb achievement that could only have been achieved by farm mechanisation.

In South and East Berkshire, the local Wokingham Agricultural Association formed an Emergency Wartime Committee under the guidance of Chairman W Percy Colebrook a local farmer at Earley, their members were all sound practical farmers, who encouraged field classes at the county show of standing corn. During 1941, 24 growers entered 43 crops in competitive classes, E S Bush (Wargrave) came first with wheat and with David S Strang second for his best field of oats grown at Worton Grange, Reading. The judges were O J Bishop and R Bitmead who urged farmers to increase yields and improve crop management.[12]

Livestock & Improvement Schemes 1940-1945

In 1943 school milk which had been sold at half-penny for one third of a pint was made free. Such was its food value for protein and calcium. In that year 28 million gallons were drunk by some 4 million children nationally. Bovine TB (a scourge of dairy farmers) was slowly being eradicated through Tuberculin Testing while contagious abortion (Brucellosis) was screened by blood testing. Milk producers were encouraged by the Milk Marketing Board to milk record their cows and test for butter fat while at Shinfield the first Cattle Breeding (insemination) Station was set up in 1942 which was to revolutionise stock breeding.

James Steel (Grazeley), a Shorthorn breeder preached clean milk production. He was ably supported by Miss 'Jessie' Matthews (Dairy Husbandry Officer for Berkshire). The youth on the land were not forgotten, as local Young Farmer's Clubs blossomed mainly due to the enthusiasm of Mr Cox of Newbury who dreamt

of a Berkshire Federation of Clubs. His hopes came to fruition in 1945. The all important feeding of dairy cows to achieve maximum winter production was greatly supported by the National Institute for Research in Dairying, on their farm trials at Shinfield.

The War Agriculture Committee men handled a wide variety of improvement grants covering land drainage, ditching, land re-clamation, contract machinery hire, fertiliser and lime grants, water and electricity installation and improvements to rural housing and road ways. They also became responsible for organising labour gangs, the Women's Land Army, and prisoners-of-war.[13]

The Berks County Agricultural Organiser ran open field days which locally, giving demonstrations on silage making, cereal plot trials and cattle grazing systems for the new strains of pasture grasses bred at Aberystwyth.

Mr Ross became responsible for allocating potato quota acreages and selling stock feed potatoes when there was a glut in the County which was common.

To conclude Berkshire tenant farmers proved reliable[14] in producing more corn, milk and lambs and in this they were greatly encouraged by their landlords such as Squire Benyon of Englefield.

The farm workers supported by the Women's Land Army gave long hours at hay and harvest times.

Breeds of dairy cattle gradually changed from the ubiquitous Shorthorn to the more economical Ayrshire cow and, later, the British Friesian which became dual-purpose (milk or beef progeny).

In 1938, the UK was only 30% self-sufficient in food but by 1946, the figure had risen to 70% to which Berkshire agriculturalists had contributed.

By 1942, farmers had become businessmen, taxed on profits from audited annual accounts and a new breed had arrived...."economists".

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Appendix 1

Expansion of Food Production in Berkshire
All data 4th June Annual Returns
Source: 'Agricultural Statistics 1939-1944'
England & Wales HMSO

Crops & Pasture (acres)	1939	1942	1944
Wheat	31037	50685	55645
Barley	12488	24468	35850
Potatoes (main)	1240	4435	5426
Clover / grasses (hay / mown)	20680	29300	44200
Permanent pasture (graze)	120027	82276	72561
Cows in milk and in calf	31000	29900	30600
Sheep and lambs	75700	61900	45600
Pigs	39807	19319	17252
Heavy farm horses	4668	4054	3779
Poultry	518000	326000	285000

Yield of corn in Southern England

1939	19 cwt wheat	18 cwt barley
1942	23 cwt wheat	20 cwt barley

Berkshire

Tillage crops	1939	105,000 acres
	1943	158,000 acres

Appendix 2

'Annual Statement of Trade of the UK with British and Foreign Countries 1934 - 1938' Vol.2 HMSO pub.1939

All figures in cwt (hundred weight)

Country	Crop	1934 (cwt)	1938 (cwt)
Australia	wheat	21,658,000	30,995,000
Canada	wheat	35,702,000	28,830,000
France	wheat	1,881,000	1,246,000
Argentina	wheat	35,081,000	5,810,000
Canada	barley	1,369,000	5,466,000
Argentina	beef	6,942,000	–
New Zealand	lamb	2,655,000	2,660,000
Denmark	bacon	4,287,000	3,389,000
Denmark	butter	2,485,000	2,364,000

Summary for 1938 of Imported Foods

Total - all foreign countries:-

Wheat	101 million cwt
Ground Nut Cake	280,000 tons (mainly Indian)
Cotton Seed Cake	243,000 tons (mainly Egyptian)
Frozen Lamb	5.8 m cwt
Bacon	6.9 m cwt

Appendix 3

Farmer & Stock Breeder Autumn Sheep Sale Reports 1938 - 1939 referring to Hampshire Down Breeding Sheep at the following centres:-

Oxford Market, Wilton Fair, Ilsley Fair and Marlborough Fair. A total of 60,000 ewes penned annually plus at each Centre 160 - 250 Registered Hampshire Down Ram Lambs and Yearling Rams (one year old). Their numbers declined due to economic forces and the more popular Scotch and Welsh bred yearling ewes.

The other great Fairs were at Overton and Weyhill (Hants) and Britford (Wilts).

Two Berkshire Squires bred Hampshire Downs in large numbers and they were H A Benyon (Englefield, 1913) and Major J A Morrison (Basildon, 1902).

Appendix 4

Prolificacy of the Hampshire Down Breed was rarely more than a single lamb per ewe. In the Shepherds' Prize and Flock Competition 1898, 51 flocks entered with 20,733 ewes which bred 23,000 live lambs - the average percentage was 110%.

Appendix 5

Women's Land Army in Berks: Enrolments:-

December 1939 = 103
December 1940 = 214
December 1943 = 1209
March 1945 = 1042

Appendix 6

Members of Berkshire War Agricultural Executive Committees (1939-1945)

* A.T. Loyd, Lockinge (Chairman)
* H.A .Benyon, Englefield
Edward Lousley, Lockinge Farms
\+ W.J. Cumber, Theale
\+ James Steel, Grazeley
S.W. Allwright
* Mrs Howard Palmer, Wokingham
James MacIntosh BSc NDD NIRD
\+ W.J. Simmons, Hampstead Norreys
R.H. Barnes
* Sir William Mount, Wasing, Aldermaston
C. Dalgleish (Executive Officer)

* Landlords + Tenant/Yeomen farmers

Source: A. Hurd *A Farmer in Whitehall*

Naturally a few were outstanding in their own particular field; James Steel was an eminent Shorthorn breeder and champion of Clean Milk production; W.J. Simmons was excellent on sheep, arable and dairying; W.J. Cumber farmed a large acreage at Theale and Yatesbury and was good on beef and dairy enterprises.

James MacIntosh pioneered Milk Recording in Berkshire and ran the Dairy Institute farm. Later L.J. Strang, W.A. Fifield and D.S. Strang did sterling work.

Appendix 7

Financial Assistance Schemes, Ministry of Agriculture 1942

- Grants for bush clearance and land reclamation, land drainage and ditch clearing.
- Ploughing up grassland, £2 per acre (under pasture for at least 6 years).
- Machinery Hire from Berks War Agricultural Committee at discounted rates.
- Fertilisers and Lime, 50% grant to cost and transport.
- Water supply, 50% grant on Approved Schemes.
- Labour, Women's Land Army and Prisoners-of-War.
- Pests: War Agricultural rabbit clearance officer.

Appendix 8

A tribute to a few of the many dairy farmers who were exceptionally good at mixed farming around Reading.

James Steel	Grazeley	Dairy Shorthorns
Jim Hayes	Three Mile Cross	Dairy Shorthorns
W.A. Fifield	Pikes, Bill Hill	Dairy Shorthorns
L.J. Strang	Mortimer	Dairy Shorthorns
James Strang & Sons	Wickcroft	Dairy Shorthorns
David S. Strang	Worton Grange	Dairy Shorthorns
F. Hannington	Penge Wood	Dairy Shorthorns
W.J. Cumber	Theale	Dairy Shorthorns
W.J. Simmons	Hampstead Norreys	Dairy Shorthorns
Englefield Home Farms	Reading	Dairy Shorthorns
Francis Lee	Woodley	Dairy Shorthorns
Jim Bucknell	Stratfield Saye	Dairy Shorthorns
John W. Bucknell	Coley Park	Dairy Shorthorns
James Lindsay Bryce	Butlers Lands	Ayrshires
R.D. Hodge	Brocas Lands	Ayrshires
Robert Black	Sheepsgrove	Ayrshires
W.E. & J.E. Craig	Burghfield Green	Friesians
J.W. Salter Chalker	Hurst	Friesians
Sidney Mattick	Diddenham	Friesians
Frank Bullingham	Hartley Court	Guernseys
A.P. Steel	Burghfield Place	Guernseys
Mrs Howard Palmer	Wokingham	Guernseys
J.E. Bullingham	Grazeley	Market Gardener

Yeoman farmers such as W.J. Cumber also kept sheep, reared fat cattle and were good on the arable side. James Steel and W.E. Craig were well known breeders and fatteners of large white pigs.

Pat Preece

Osier Growing and Cultivation in the Kennet Valley Area

The weaving of willow osiers or withies into many forms of basket ware took place from prehistory onwards. Their many uses included such diverse articles as fish traps, crinoline hoops, pack horse panniers and cradles, besides baskets of many sizes. As withie is an Anglo-Saxon word, it is likely that there were osier beds in marshy areas at that time. However, the oldest reference found to the planting of willow, presumably for osiers, in the Thames Valley, is in the Battle Abbey accounts of 1336 for Preston Crowmarsh. In this 3d was paid for planting willow on an area of land called 'le Causey' [1]. There are relatively few references to osier or withy growing as it was not a major industry and seems to have been almost a 'cottage' industry.

This article will try to set out how and where the osiers were grown - mostly around Reading - the conditions required for their growth and their cultivation. The types of willow and their names, the length of the rods and their preparation will be described as far as possible, as will the workers and their methods of working. I have also tried to find the final destination of the withies although this has proved difficult.

Quantities of osiers were produced on small islands in the Thames called 'rod eyots' or 'aits'. F. S. Thacker refers to crops taken from the aits in the Thames at Kingston in the early nineteenth century [2]. On these islands access would have been by the wide punt which could still be seen on the river, mostly used by fishermen, after the 1939-45 war. The rods in the term rod eyot, were the shoots growing up from willow stools. The latter were formed by the cutting off of the first stem that grows, this forming a stump from which an infinite succession of rods or shoots can be cut [3]. This is also the method employed in woodland coppice. Willow shoots can grow more than two inches in a day.

In the Christ church Oxford accounts for South Stoke there are references to eyots: 1749 Two eyots in the river to Dunn of Wallingford £2

1796 There are eyots in the river Thames of 1 acre in occupation of Caterine Clark of Wallingford[4].

In 1887 in the description for the sale of the Perch and Pike, a public house which still exists in South Stoke, it says 'Some valuable rod eyots let to Mr A Hed upon a verbal agreement for 7 years... at £20 p.a.'[5].

Although osier beds needed plenty of moisture and occasional flooding was considered desirable, the soil had to be rich and well cultivated to produce a good crop. It also had to be well drained as stagnant water round the roots apparently spoilt the crop. There were drainage ditches between the beds, preferably with running water, and these would have been dug by hand. A descendant of the Excells (rod merchants) of Twyford said they used old fashioned narrow spades for this and for turning over the soil of the beds[6]. At Caversham an old inhabitant describing the withy beds there said that they were ploughed and consisted of banks of withies with drainage ditches with tracks used by the carts to bring out the rods.

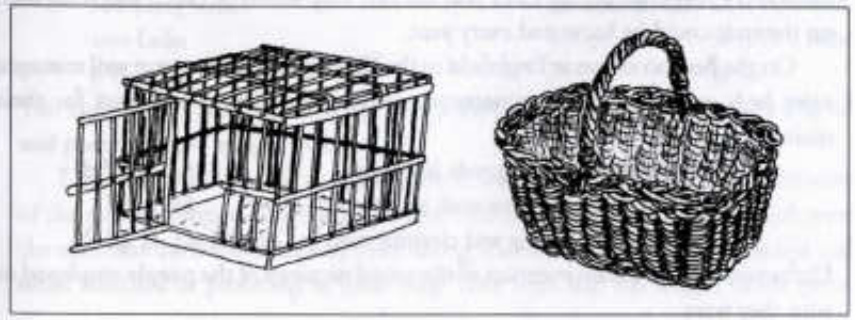
The cultivation of the withy beds was important and in Silva, first published in 1664, John Evelyn goes into great detail about the cultivation of willow sets or 'oziers'. He described how the ground should be trenched 1 feet deep and the sets planted 6 feet apart. Their roots must not be in water[7].

In 1736 near the Kennet at Thatcham 'a piece of meadow near the mill'was included in a lease and the lessees were to have 'all the benefit of the hosiers (sic) and willows lately planted on such parts of the mead from whence peat has lately been cut'[8]. It seems that they were using wet land by the Kennet and the loss of the peat cover meant that they must have manured and cultivated the land before planting. In the same bundle of papers as the lease there is a letter about the withies in 1744. In this Jos Wimpey was writing to Bill Waring offering to buy some withy beds (situation unknown) and is obviously trying to reduce the price '...if you do cut them this season they'll be unfit for use and then you'll lose two crops besides the land wants to be cleaned weeded? and in the vacant spaces (which are many) replanted,

for he has been a bad husband to them....I'll take what's left of this crop at 30 ... A later letter between the same correspondents states 'He has left your eight near farmer Machels very foul and in bad condition having not weeded it this last year....' Jos Wimpey must have had several osier beds as he refers to having other 'eights' near to those he is trying to lease. Eight or eyot in this case may not mean an island but a piece of land surrounded by ditches. His reference to the condition of the beds emphasises the labour intensive cultivation required. The beds had to be dug over and weeded every year to produce a good crop and the ditches had to be kept clean and free from stagnant water - hence the reference to the beds being very foul. Despite all his efforts the lease stayed with the original lessee - John Higgins. In the latter's lease he was to have 'the oyer bed for 21 years...to leave the said ground well planted with oyers and not to grubb or destroy the stooles or stems of them...'

The men who owned and cultivated the osier beds were known as rod merchants or growers. There were several rod merchants in the Thames Valley including William Broadway of Salem House Pangbourne who was advertising in Kellys Directory of 1854. The Loddon had several: William Breach of Hurst, Richard Giles of Twyford, both of whom were working in 1842-3 and listed found in Snares Directory. Another family firm who had osier beds near the Loddon were Benjamin Excell and Sons, of Ruscombe near Twyford. It operated from the middle of the nineteenth century through three generations until 1941, with beds also at Caversham and Borough Marsh near Reading.

Woolhampton, according to the census returns, had a flourishing osier industry. In 1851 Daniel New, William Brown, William Chandler, and George Langswell were listed as willow rod growers. There were only two by 1871, William Brown and his four sons and wife, all described as rod merchants and William Chandler as rod grower, he had his son Tom, aged 13, working with him as a rod labourer. In 1881



there were still the same two, but by 1891 the Browns had the monopoly. The great grandson of William Brown still lives in Woolhampton and gave me some of the information about the industry.

In 1888, at an auction held at the Hinds Head Inn at Aldermaston, the rods from various beds were up for sale, the buyer doing the cutting. None of the beds advertised exceeded three acres in extent and some of them were only a few roods in size. They were all situated by the Kennet in Aldermaston [10]. Unfortunately no prices were entered. At a later date, in an auction catalogue of 1920, a 'well stocked' osier bed, 10 acres 1 rood 16 perches in size at Caversham, was let at £18.14s. Two others were described as 'valuable'. They were all being worked by a 'representative' of W Talbot, a well-known firm in Reading, whose family interests included barge building, timber merchants, coal merchants and removals!

In Somerset, where there was a great osier industry, the cost of preparing ground in 1920, also planting and keeping the beds weeded was £48.5s an acre. To plant an acre, 15,000 sets (in horticultural terms, cuttings) were required at a cost of roughly £25 an acre. The stools, if they were planted wide apart might produce 25 rods each but if closer only 6 to 8 [11]. The sets were obtained by cutting off part of a willow shoot or rod 12 to 14 inches long by means of 'set cutter' shears. These shears had one blade fixed on a stand and the other was worked with a long handle. The cut sets were stacked until needed between four sticks stuck in the ground. Evelyn says that 'the sets should be soaked in water for 2-3 days' [12] but no mention of this could be found in later literature or from local knowledge. The set planter had his hand protected with a heavy leather glove and the sets were pushed down into the soil by the palm of the hand. The planter used his forefinger to measure the amount (approximately 3 inches) the set should protrude from the ground. The following autumn the growing shoots were cut to encourage the new growth and this was done every year until on the third year the first crop could be taken and from then on the rods could be harvested every year.

On the Benyon estates at Englefield in the Kennet valley, there were well managed osier beds and in the early nineteenth century there were accounts for their maintenance:

1832	Payment for cutting rods in Mapas	£4. 9. 7½d
	Payment for planting rods in Garretts	£3. 7. 7d
	Payment for hoeing and cleaning rods in Garretts	£3. 6. 4d [13]

Unfortunately there is no mention of the actual earnings of the people employed or who they were.

The rods were cut with a reaping hook (Illustration I) and tied into bundles sometimes called bolts. These bundles were tightened with two pieces of ash, pulling on a joined rope round the bundle (Illustration II). After this the ends of the bolt were levelled by beating with a paddle (Illustration III). The bundles were bound with a withe or strip of split willow which was twisted to make it flexible: this was known as winding a withe. The work done by the men in the beds was probably classified as labouring and paid at a similar scale to the agricultural labourers of the period. During the 1914-18 war, according to Sid Angliss who worked for the Browns at Woolhampton, the men were paid 18s a week and the women who were also working on the beds were paid 8s a week.

There were many varieties of willow grown, many with strange names and here are a few of them:

Black Top	Dicky Meadows
Sally	Blob
Kellum	Kecks
Glib Skins	Merrin

Various rods might be used for different purposes, the thicker and stronger ones for panniers and fish traps and thinner and more flexible rods for the sides of baskets. One very fine and flexible osier was the 'keck' which, apparently, could be skeined and used for various purposes including hats. George Brown, the descendant of the Browns of Woolhampton has a small rough account book of 1896 which mentions some of the varieties grown there and names the lengths of the bolts. They were selling brown rods to Scott & Son of 144 Charing Cross Road - probably basket makers. The names of the lengths and the quantities sold and price are as follows:-

150 Middling Brown *(another name Middleborough)*	7-8 ft	at 4s 9d a bolt
100 Threepenny	5ft6ins-7ft	at 4s 6d a bolt
100 Long small	4ft 6ins-5ft 6ins	at 3s 6d a bolt
200 Luke	3ft-4ft 6ins	at 1s 8d a bolt
6 Ragged		1s 2d

The ragged were poor (Illustration IV showing different lengths of bolts) shaped and possibly short 'rough' rods.

The osiers could be sold as green, brown, white or buff and this was descriptive of the rods after treatment. The green were sold as cut, the brown rods (which were the ones that the Browns seemed to be selling the most) were dried and stacked and often thatched or protected in some way. They were half the weight of the green

Illustration I
Cutting rods from stool

Illustration II
Tightening Bundle

Illustration III
'Paddle' for levelling stems in the bundle

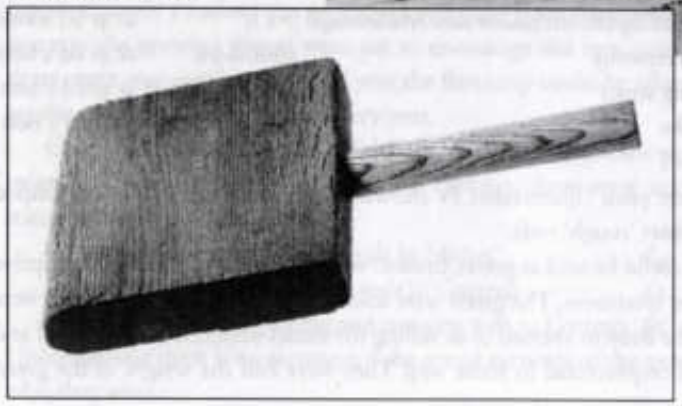


Illustration IV
Bundles showing different lengths of bolts

Illustration V
Rods Drying

Illustration VI
Women stripping rods through a Brake at Woolhampton

due to loss of moisture. The white were rods cut in the autumn and stood in several inches of water, which must not stagnate, until the spring. The white rods were left after being dried for a short time against wire or racks.(Illustration V) This should not take too long or they became brown. They were handled with clean hands and after stripping, they were bundled and stored in a dry place. The buff colour was obtained by boiling the green rods for 2-5 hours and leaving them to cool overnight. They were still very hot in the morning and the women strippers would wrap their hands in rags when pulling out the rods.

The rods were usually peeled or stripped by women who thrusted them through the metal jaws of the stripping 'brake' (Illustration VI). The women selected a bolt for stripping and would receive a token or 'tin' or sometimes a ticket. William Brown the great grandfather of George had zinc tokens made in the middle of the nineteenth century and I was given one (Illustration VII) which is now in the Rural History Centre. There were two sizes, the larger may have been for 3 bolts. Frank Brown, the uncle of George had some made with FB on them. These were coated with tin but the one I saw had rusted. When Frank was in charge the tokens were redeemed for 2d. The tickets issued at a later date were of blue card with 5d shown on one side. There are some Excell of Twyford tokens in the Rural Life Centre so they were in common use. When the tokens were surrendered the women received payment.

Women seem to have done the stripping, at least from the middle of the nineteenth century. They were needed from the beginning of April until June 1st and they were on piece work and may have earned as much as 8s a week depending on their speed of work[14]. The rods may have been sent to London, although apart from the reference in the Browns account book no other reference has been found.

There is an entry in the Benyon accounts to rods being sent to Pangbourne, though whether this was to a basket maker there or to be loaded on a barge for London, it is not possible to know. The Kennet and Avon canal provided transport to Reading and London for other forms of wood, so it might have been used here too. There were eight basket makers in Reading in Kellys Directory of 1854 and one in Newbury (also on the canal) so some may have been transported there. At the same date, there was a basket maker in Woolhampton so some rods were likely to have been used locally. In Caversham where

Illustration VII
Zinc Token of William Brown

there had been many osier beds there was a family of basket makers called Knight. There was a sign on the side of a house in Caversham 'Knight and son Basket Makers' and another member of the family Henry Knight made baskets and also had osier beds in a cottage near Caversham Mill[15]. It is interesting that the Kellys directories of the 1880s list basket makers with sieve makers, so possibly rods were used in sieve construction.

The industry in the Kennet valley and elsewhere declined in the 1930s as the labour costs were too high to compete with imports. There was also a disease affecting some of the willows. Woolhampton is a small village and the loss of the osier beds must have affected the economy. Although only a few men were employed, the loss of the seasonal work for the women probably meant going without some minor luxuries.

When I went to see George Brown he showed me the site of the old osier beds at Woolhampton, that he still owns. This was a marshland with old willow trees, part of which has been designated a site of scientific interest, not because of its history, but because of the marshland plants and birds found there.

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Acknowledgements

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Mary Fellgett

Women and the Reading Woolhall in the Seventeenth Century

The legal status of women in early modern England theoretically excluded them to a large extent from owning property or engaging in trade. Actual practice could, however, sometimes differ markedly from the supposed legal norm, as illustrated by two exceptional women who managed the Reading Woolhall during separate periods in the seventeenth century, when this enterprise was the second largest single source of income to the Borough of Reading.

An unmarried woman was regarded as being the responsibility of her father or eldest male relative. Marriage was seen as a partnership in which the husband provided the income, dealing with external matters including trade, while the wife saw to the running of the household. Her role was therefore distinct, but not necessarily inferior, and she might take part in the family business just as members of a family do today. Nevertheless, unless a marriage settlement were made (which was rare except in wealthy families), all she owned became the property of her husband, and consequently she could not make a will. It was only if she became a widow, and perhaps inherited her husband's property, that she acquired the unique status in early modern England of being an independent woman, an owner of property, and able to dispose of what she owned in whatever way she pleased. She could then become the generator of legal records, including her will; and the wills of widows form a principle source for our knowledge of women in the period in question.

Specifically, the probate records of the widows of the town of Reading proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Berkshire, and deposited in the Berkshire Record Office; they are an important documentary source of information about women's employment in the town. The other major documentary source is the records of the Borough Corporation. These contain the rent rolls, cofferer's or chamberlain's

accounts, and most important, the diary of the Corporation. The latter for the years 1600 and 1655 are in published and printed form, transcribed by J.M. Guilding. For the remaining years of the seventeenth century the original records, also deposited at the Berkshire Record Office, were consulted. The parish records, including the registers of the three parishes of the town at that time - St Mary's, St Giles and St Laurence - were another original source. The town Guild records and freeman's rolls do not survive.*

The use of probate papers of those widows whose husbands also left them, gives particularly valuable information about the progress of businesses Reading widows had inherited. There was, for example, Elizabeth Horne who died in 1667, four years after her clothier husband Peter. His estate was valued at £577.4s. His widow's inventory was valued at £715. 1s. 8d. The inventory lists in detail all items belonging to the parts of the cloth trade in and around the house. There was white wool, dyed list, raw cloth, cloth in yarn, dyed wool and so on. There were all the rooms and sheds filled with the tools of the trade, and even in Elizabeth's parlour there were twenty nine bales of cloth with the town mark ready for sale. What woman would allow bales of cloth to be in her parlour, unless she was actively involved in her business? She had kept the trade going for four years, and also had three children to care for. Other widows may have played a more managerial role in an inherited business.

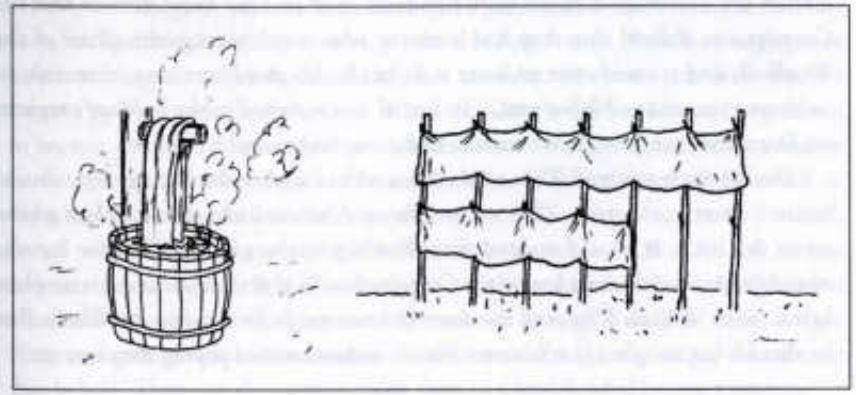
Inventories of many widows of the town reveal the extent to which they had been involved in a web of money circulation. Elizabeth Stretch, who died in 1667, had an inventory valued at £185. 7s. 8d., of which cash and debts owing to her totalled £164. 10s. Other widows owned houses for rent, and so provided themselves with an income. These widows formed an important part of the economy of Reading, lending money, entering into agreements by bond and supporting themselves with the interest.

Wealthy widows had a chance to re-marry, and many did so quite soon after their previous husbands had died. The poor widows were not so fortunate. They did not leave wills, but information about them can be found amongst the payments of parish poor relief. In 1665 Widow Webb of St Mary's received a few pence from the parish when her child was sick, and then a few pence more was paid for a shroud and the burying of the child. Life for such widows must have been hard.

The records of the town Corporation tell us of employment of maidservants. Archbishop Laud, a son of the town, had endowed a charity which provided annual gifts of money for maidservants about to marry. For a few years there are lists of names and the years they had provided service, and the names of their employers. The Corporation employed women during plague years to search bodies of those who had died for signs of disease. They were paid well, and also given new clothes. Borough records, and especially the rent rolls, are the main sources from which information comes about the women lessees of the Woolhall.

The Reading Woolhall was in Fishe Rowe/Fishe Streete, above a row of shops and sheds, mostly occupied by butchers. It was possible to determine this position from remarks reported in the Borough Diary during the 1660s concerning the state of disrepair of the building.

In the Woolhall the scales and weights were installed for the weighing of wool. Many wool towns had such premises, and it was common practice for the town Corporations to lease these buildings to town residents[2]. In return for paying the rent, the lessees were expected to collect taxes due upon the buying and selling of the wool in that town, the amounts depending on the town regulations. Reading had been a town dependent on the making of woollen cloth for several centuries



before the seventeenth century. Indeed, in 1535, the Corporation found it necessary to employ four cofferers to administer the trade. By the seventeenth century the cloth trade had begun to decline, and in the 1630s there was sufficient poverty amongst the cloth workers to make John Kendrick, a rich London Merchant who had been born in the town, give a large sum of money to help the poor among them. Nevertheless, an analysis of the probate papers, between 1600-1642, suggest that 31% of the men of the town were concerned with the cloth trade. Between 1658-1700 this had dwindled to 19.4%, but the cloth trade was the largest employer of labour throughout the century.

During the early years of the century John Malthus and Richard Stevens were joint lessees of the Woolhall. They had held it since at least 1607 when they paid an annual rent of £7. 10s. In 1609 this rent was increased to £12. John Malthus died in 1628, and left his part of the lease to his wife Anne. In 1630 Richard Stevens died. By his will, in which he was described as a clothier, he also left his part of the lease to his wife. Richard had married his wife Margaret in St Giles in 1583, and she bore him a son and three daughters, all of whom grew to adulthood, married and had children. The two widows for a short time were joint lessees, and then in 1631 Widow Malthus became ill and relinquished her part of the lease. The Corporation ruled that the remaining lessee was to pay Widow Malthus 'four shillings a week in order to maintain her in her sickness and poverty'. By 1633 Widow Stevens was being asked to pay £14. 10s. in rent, and this brought her into conflict with the Corporation, for she protested that this rent was too high. There follows in the Corporation Diary several references about what rent was to be paid, and whether Widow Stevens would pay it or not. Eventually in 1635 the rent was back at its old level of £12, and there it stayed until her death in 1640. One could surmise that the Corporation realised that they had a tenant who could manage the affairs of the Woolhall, and it was better to leave it in her hands at a lower rent, than risk an unknown tenant at a higher rent. Her burial was recorded in the St Mary's register on December 22nd, 1640, where it said she was 80 years old.

During the tenancy of Widow Stevens, a wife of a feltmaker had, in 1633, abused her in a street in the town. This woman shouted 'where hadst thou this fine gowne upon thy back, it would make a fine show upon the gallows.' Widow Stevens complained about this incident to the Corporation. In 1638 she had cause to complain again, when William Elkyns of the town did not weigh his wool in the Woolhall as he should, but weighed it at his own house, and so avoided paying the town tax.

To try to understand the extent of the business of running the Reading Woolhall is difficult. There are no records of Reading that give this information. In Newbury, a town some 15 miles west of Reading, and also predominantly dependent on wool in the seventeenth century, it was recorded that 1d. per tod of wool was the tax levied for weighing wool if sold to an inhabitant of the town, and 2d. per tod if sold to an outsider; that is 1d. from the seller and 1d. from the buyer.[1] It could be a useful exercise to use these figures to try to estimate the likely extent of business at the Reading Woolhall, although it is not known whether the tames charged were the same as in Newbury. Certainly, during the seventeenth century all wool sold in Reading was supposed to be weighed in the Woolhall.

A tod of wool weighed 28 lb. To raise enough money to pay the rent of the Woolhall at 20s. or 240d. per month (£12 annual rent)

240 x 28 = 6720 lbs. of wool would have been weighed each month at 1d. tax rate

120 x 28 - 3360 lbs. of wool would have been weighed each month at 2d. tax rate[2]

A fleece in the sixteenth century has been estimated to weigh 1lb. 9 oz., but by the eighteenth century the weight was 3lbs. 5 oz.[3] If an estimate of 2lbs. for a fleece is taken for the seventeenth century, then at 1d. tax rate 3360 fleeces a month (or at 2d. tax rate 1680 fleeces a month) were needed to be weighed just to pay the rent. So for every working day in the year, allowing a six day week with no holidays, between 65 and 130 fleeces would have been weighed each day. These figures are estimates only, but they serve to give an indication of the extent of the business involved in running the Woolhall. It must have been seen as a profit-making business by the lessees, so in order to make a profit, as well as pay for workers to carry and weigh, the figures estimated above would have been base figures only.

Widow Margaret Stevens had inherited ownership of several houses in Reading from her husband; he left an inventory valued at £167. 13s. in 1630. She bought more houses during her widowhood, during her seventies. She was a relatively wealthy woman by the standards of the time. When she died she left her cane with a gold top to her son, she had a least one fine gown, and she was a strong woman able to stand up for herself. One wonders if she had financial need to keep the lease of the Woolhall, or if she kept it because she was a business woman keen to retain her interest in Woolhall. In her will she left the lease of the Woolhall to her grandson Richard Maine. He was to have it 'upon express condition that he do usually and constantly employ his father about the managing of the business and worke in the said Hall to be done, and do allow and give unto his father reasonable allowance of wages for his paynes taken in that behalf.' There are the unmistakable signs of a hard-headed business woman.

This Richard Maine continued as lessee until 1667, when John Pearcey, a clothier, took over the lease. A number of petitions were made to the Corporation by Richard Maine concerning the regulations about the Woolhall, and about the state of disrepair of the building. In particular, complaint was made, and subsequently in 1673, regulation was made, concerning the necessity that 'all perforce being sellers of wooll, yarne and list... bringing the same within this Borough to be sold, shall bring and lay the same in the Woolhall in and belonging to this Boroughe, there to be exposed to sale and weighed with the scales and weights there, and not elsewhere within the said Boroughe'.† In 1678 Widow Elizabeth Pearcey was the lessee of the Hall, taking over from her late husband, and this was the start of the second period in the seventeenth century when the lessee of the Woolhall was a woman. In July 1680 she took a complaint to the Corporation that 'divers persons who sell wooll within this Borough do not weigh the same at the Woolhall there to the great damage of the town.' It was decided by the Corporation that these offenders should be examined and punished as seemed appropriate. These complaints about traders trying to evade paying tax by not weighing in the Woolhall were a continuing cry throughout the century. All the lessees had complained, and so it was not only a woman who had need to seek the protection of the Corporation or the courts; it was a problem for whoever was running the Woolhall.

Elizabeth Pearcey continued her tenure of the lease of the Woolhall until 1695 when she married John Evans. The rent was paid subsequently by her new husband, until, according to the rent tolls, he changed his name to Mr Thomas Pearcey, and in that name the lease continued into the eighteenth century.

These two widows in their time ran a large business. The Woolhall was an important source of income to the Corporation, and a significant feature of the dominant wool trade of the town. Widow Stevens was a well-known figure in the streets of the town, and both widows felt able to take complaints to the Corporation when the rules of the Woolhall were not being observed. It could be said that they were singular women, and not typical of the women of the town. But any community is the sum of its individuals, and so any individual is worthy of interest when that community is the subject of research. It is possible that such singular women had a big influence on the other women in the community, affecting their thinking and activities. It caused one to be angry and possibly jealous. It may have caused others to strive to emulate them.

Women and the Reading Woolhall in the Seventeenth Century *Mary Fellgett*

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* For catalogue references the reader is referred to the author's M.Phil. thesis 'Revealed Women - Widows and Spinsters in Seventeenth Century Reading', Department of History, University of Reading, 1990, from which the material for the present article has been extracted.

† List was a border of cloth, or selvedge.

John Chapman

Purley During the Second World War – Essay Competition 1995

The Second World War had a profound effect upon Purley, as it did on most other villages in England. It brought many changes and an influx of new residents. The war had been looming for several years but after Chamberlain's visit to Hitler in Munich in 1938 many thought the fear of war had gone. The Parochial Church Council went so far as to resolve in September 'That as the crisis is now over, an appeal can now be asked for a thank offering to God for the blessing of peace'. They launched the appeal for funds to repair the organ and raised £49.[1]

Preparations for war however had begun some years earlier when the Baldwin Government issued the first circular on 'Air Raid Precautions' in September 1935 and local authorities were charged with the responsibility of protecting their public.[2] The main threat was perceived as being from the air and the popular belief was that the rain of bombs from the heavens would utterly destroy everything on the ground and anyone who did survive would be killed or crippled by poison gas.[3] In a lecture given in Reading in January 1939 however, and expert, Commander Dawson, gave his view that it would be quite impossible to raze Reading to the ground as was popularly feared.[4] It took a long time to get things organised and it was not until March 1938 that the Parish Council received a circular from Bradfield RDC on the subject.[5] Officials and experts travelled around the country giving public lectures especially on how to protect oneself. Gas was particularly feared and in a lecture given by Mr S V Fawkes on 12 February 1939 at Purley schoolroom he released samples of several gases for the audience to savour.[6]

The Air Wardens Service had been created in April 1937 and organised on a county basis[7]. Major L P Paget was appointed to the post of Berkshire Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Officer. He resigned in April 1938 to be followed by Sir Archibald Campbell of Flowers Court in Pangbourne.[8] The Assistant ARP Officer for the County

was initially Purley's county councillor, Colonel J N Norman Walker who resigned in February 1940 to be replaced by Mr Cary-Elwes.[9] Pangbourne was the centre for ARP organisation in this area and Mr C L Stock was appointed as Head Warden.[10] Purley Parish Council was asked to nominate a Chief Warden for Purley and Mr Stockley was nominated in October 1938.[11] In the following January he reported to a meeting in the Pangbourne Council Chamber (which was also being used as the HQ for the Fire Brigade) that 'there was general organisational chaos, his appeals for warden's equipment had gone unheeded and they still had not yet had their full issue of civilian gas masks. What was alarming however was the local reaction which ranged from apathy to downright hostility, shown very forcibly to the ARP volunteers when they went from door to door.'[12] The ARP were finding sites to dump materials such as sand and fencing posts, finding sites for trenches in the local villages and compiling a register of those with a telephone. A first aid post had been established in Purley but this was closed down in April 1940 and the people of Purley were told they would have to go into Pangbourne for treatment.[13] Shortages of equipment had caused great resentment so in April, Bradfield RDC resolved to purchase an additional 98 helmets for the ARP at a cost of 12/6 each.[14] Previously an allocation of 256 gas masks for civilian use had been delivered to the school for distribution among the villagers.[15]

Mr Stock resigned in July 1941 and, when a woman, Miss Ashlow, was appointed to replace him, all the other wardens protested to the County's ARP Controller that she was only an administrator and should never have been appointed as Head Warden. The County promptly dismissed the complaint and the Pangbourne and District wardens resigned en-bloc. Purley was informed that Mr Sims had been appointed to replace Mr Stockley and all equipment that had been issued to the other wardens was to be returned promptly. The Parish Council was so alarmed at developments that it asked for all the facts to be put to the County Controller, Sir George Mowbray.[16] Attempts were made to get the wardens to withdraw their resignations but only Mr Webb did so.[17] By March 1942 the service had resumed its activities under a new Chief Warden, Mr Skidmore.[18]

Other arrangements made included the installation by Messrs. Carter of a platform above the police station in Pangbourne n February 1939 for the air raid siren. This was electrically controlled from within the station and could easily be heard all over Purley.[19] This helped the Parish Council to come to a decision when they were asked by the county to make a local determination whether they would rely on the sirens or would send a warden out into the streets when a red alert was received from the RAF's Fighter Command Alert Centre at High Wycombe.[20]

The County Council were very concerned about the responsibilities that were placed upon them, especially the potential problems that would occur if large numbers of school children were to flow in as refugees. They earmarked four of their schools, including Pangbourne Council School, for use by the authorities in case of emergency, but individual members were insistent that any arrangements should not upset the teaching in the schools.[21]

In 1940 Civil Defence was reorganised by the County into six areas. That covering Bradfield Rural District had its reporting station in Sulhampstead at what is now the Police Training College.[22] The County announced in 1941 that a Local Defence Committee was to be established and on 25 August the Parish Council set it up with Messrs Hodgkin, Pocock, Harvey, Bucknell and Tidbury, with powers to co-opt.[23] Just after war broke out there was a public outcry for better protection and local ratepayers demanded that a shelter be built at the Purley School. The rector, The Rev Ernest Skuse, was appalled by the idea and vigorously opposed it. He claimed that the village had been declared a reception area and therefore could be presumed to be safe from attack. He had called in the experts to examine the arrangements made at the school and they had pronounced them satisfactory.[24] In May 1940 the Board of Education at Whitehall sent out a circular which advised that rural schools need not be provided with shelters in the same way as urban schools, but that all children should be rehearsed to take shelter within the school. If bombs were falling in the neighbourhood, they should keep away from windows and if possible lie on the floor. Under no circumstances should they attempt to leave the school and go into the open.[25] The Parish Council considered the matter and decided on 16 July 1940 not to support the demand but to ask instead that 5 stirrup pumps be provided.[26] Eventually the County Council agreed in April 1941 to spending of £307 to provide a shelter in Pangbourne to accommodate 110 persons, but this was little comfort to the people of Purley.[27] It would seem that The Rev Ernest Skuse was right as the nearest Purley got to being bombed was when a stick of incendiaries were dropped on Thames Avenue in Pangbourne on 17th November 1940[28] and a further three bombs dropped in the fields between Long Lane and Sulham Woods, aimed no doubt at the searchlight battery which was established in the quarry there.[29]

The Local Defence Volunteers was an initiative of the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, when he announced in May 1940 - 'Now is your opportunity. We want large numbers of...men...between the ages of 15 and 65 to offer their services...'[30] The volunteers were renamed the Home Guard in July.[31] Purley came under the command

of the 4th Berkshire (Pangbourne) Battalion.[32] A rather silly dispute broke out in 1943 about the colour of uniform. It had taken some time before any form of uniform at all was available as initially all that was issued was an arm band. Gradually army type uniforms were supplied to the Home Guard and a deep blue uniform to the Civil Defence. By 1943 many members of Civil Defence (which included the ARP) had transferred to the Home Guard or had joined both organisations. Originally all such Civil Defence personnel had been issued with a khaki uniform which they wore when on Home Guard duty. After a specified date however it was decided to adopt a District approach with all Civil Defence personnel wearing either blue or khaki.[33] One of their number, Stan Pocock, was killed by an accidental explosion near Highclere in 1942 and is commemorated on the Purley War Memorial.[34] Purley also saw activity from the Upper Thames Patrol of the Home Guard which was formed by uniformed staff of the Thames Conservancy and covered the Thames above Teddington with 116 craft by 1941.[35] The Home Guard was stood down on 1st November 1944.[36]

In the statistics which were published after the war Bradfield RDC is seen to have suffered comparatively little. Prior to 1st June 1944 no buildings were demolished, 4 were damaged beyond repair, 44 were seriously damaged and 103 slightly damaged. No building damage was reported after that date. There were incidents in Purley on 28th October 1940 and 19th November 1940; in Pangbourne on 16th November 1940, an incendiary bomb in Pangbourne 17th November 1940, three unexploded high explosive bombs in Sulham 5th November 1940 and one in Pangbourne Meadow 15th November 1940.[37]

The arrangements for refugees had been announced as early as January 1939 by the Home Secretary, Sir Walter Elliott. The programme was aimed principally at children but it accepted that parents (but only as 'helpers') and teachers would probably need to be evacuated as well. The Government were prepared to pay 5shillings a week to accommodate a helper or teacher and 10s 6d for the first and 8s 6d for subsequent children.[38] They called for people in the designated reception areas to volunteer to go on the register in case their accommodation was needed. For those that did volunteer a window sticker was provided.[39] The village became a reception area for two quite different groups of people. The first official evacuees arrived on 4th September 1939. The party consisted of some 50 children from the Islington and Holloway areas of London of whom 8 were below school age. Some mothers accompanied them and all were found billets.[40] Kennelgates (Belleisle) was nominated as a reception hostel despite the advice of the local fire brigade that work

was needed to be done on the fire escapes.[41] The other group, the self-evacuees as they were termed, were people who had bought plots on the River Estate and who came down to live on their plots. By September 1939 some 100 children of school age had come to live on the estate as a result of their parents' initiative and the numbers were putting severe pressure on the school as, unlike the government refugees, they did not bring teachers with them. A second teacher was appointed at Purley school on the 2nd October to cope with the additional children.[42] Just before the air raids began in earnest there was a second wave of official refugees and in April 1940 Bradfield RDC were told to take 700 unaccompanied evacuee children, Purley being allotted 20 of them.[43] In June 1940 24 children arrived from 'dangerous areas' but they were accompanied by two teachers who were able to help out in the school.[44] The numbers of children in the school fluctuated considerably. In July 1940 there were 68, by August the number had dropped to 54 of whom 30 were evacuees.[45] In July 1941 the numbers were back to 68 of whom 14 were local, 21 were self-evacuees and 33 Government evacuees.[46] By September the numbers had dropped to 64 but only two teachers remained. Thereafter the numbers declined steadily until by April 1945 there were 34 children of whom 10 were local.[47] Many refugees did not stay very long as the expected devastation did not occur and parents resented the different cultural environment i which their children found themselves.[48]

As well as children being evacuated a number of companies and other organisations moved to the area. There had been a concerted move to decentralise and disperse many major industries. This caused companies to look for industrial sites in what would otherwise be most unsuitable areas and such was the concern expressed by many Local Authorities that Joint Industrial Planning Board was set up in early 1940 to deal with the problems being caused.[49] In Purley Westfields became the offices of the exam department of the Royal Society of Arts[50] and Purley Park was bought by May and Baker's, a chemical firm, who established their Head Office there and later used it as a centre for packing cosmetics.[51] Purley Garage, which had been bought by Charley Edwards just before the war, had built up a small engineering capability with two machine tools. He successfully tendered to build parts for Spitfires which were being assembled at Woodley.[52]

During the war everyone was exhorted to make the most of what they had and to make sure that nothing was wasted. Several lectures were held in the village on subjects such as 'Fruit Preservation' and 'Horticulture'[53] and a Fruit Preservation Centre was established in Reading which offered practical courses which were

attended by people from Purley.[54] 'Dig for Victory' was a national slogan and everyone was exhorted to use every scrap of land possible for growing food. People were expected to dig up their lawns and to seek allotments wherever possible. Many school playing fields were turned into gardens and special lessons on gardening given to the children.[55] It was suggested that highway verge land should be used but the County Council ruled against this in May 1940 on the grounds that there was too big a danger of disturbing underground cables and services.[56] School children were encouraged to play their part and there were several campaigns for the collection of medicinal herbs and other plants which were primarily aimed at the children. Drying centres for foxglove leaves were established at Reading and Bucklebury and there were centres for the collection of horse chestnuts and rose hips.[57] In February 1943 the County Council reported that 86 tons of horse chestnuts had been collected for which the manufacturers paid £12 per ton, raising a total of £1032. Four tons, 14 cwt and 26 lbs of rose hips, for making rose hp syrup were collected which the County Council sold for £20 per ton. Collectors were paid 16s a hundredweight[58] The children did not usually get their hands on the money however as it was usually 'donated' by the schools for such purposes as the 'Spitfire Fund.'[59] Also in 1943 the Ministry of Education urged local authorities to release older children from school to perform seasonal work on the land. This applied to children over 12 and they were paid at the rate of 4d an hour.[60] A 'Books for the Forces' drive was set up in July 1944. This built on a programme started in March 1943, but this one was aimed at the schools and pupils could earn a 'rank' depending on how many books they collected, for example, 25 for a Sergeant or 250 for a Field Marshall.[61]

In July 1940 the Ministry of Agriculture sent out a reminder that the 1919 Act (on the destruction of rats and mice) should be rigorously enforced as they were destroying too much food.[62] Wood Pigeons had been protected under the Wild Birds Protection Act of 1880 and in May 1840 the County Council resolved to ask that they be exempted.[63] This was granted by an Order from the Secretary of State dated 31st May 1940.[64] The exhortation on rats and mice did not seem to be very effective however as on the 6th February 1943 the Ministry of Food sent out a circular stating they were not satisfied with progress and intended to deal with the problem directly with District and Borough Councils and they also imposed obligations on the owners as well as the occupiers of property. In October the County Council finally relinquished their powers and delegated the responsibility to Bradfield RDC.[65]

In April 1942 the Bishop of Oxford sent out a circular to his clergy telling them how to respond to requests from the authorities for the removal of iron railings from church yards.[66] Materials of all sorts were desperately needed for the war effort and many houses had their railings removed. It does not appear that railings round any of the graves in Purley churchyard suffered this fate. In practical terms very little of the metal collected in this way was ever re-used and the collection of aluminium cooking utensils was unnecessary and caused great shortages of objects that could not be replaced. The appeal which was directed towards collecting metal for Spitfires was almost entirely a morale-building exercise.[67]

Bradfield RDC gave up collecting refuse in July 1941 and concentrated its efforts on collecting salvage.[68] The Sanitary Inspector, Mr T H Windle, had been appointed Salvage Officer and he devised a scheme for separating waste which became a model adopted by all other Rural Districts in the country. There were two lists, the A list of items t be collected for salvage and the B list of items which would not be collected. In the A list were:- Rags, Bottles and Jars, Paper (subdivided into Newspapers, Magazines, Cardboard and other), Bones, Scrap metal, Broken glass and Tins. At the last minute rubber articles, excepting bicycle tyres were added. All these had to be separated and boxed for collection on the usual collection date, which in Purley's case was every other Thursday. The system started on 14th July 1941 and before long the Ministry was sending representatives from other councils to see how Bradfield did it. On list B were: ashes, garden refuse and kitchen waste. It was recommended that ashes be sifted and used for filling sandbags, garden refuse made into compost heaps and kitchen waste used to feed pigs and poultry.[69] These arrangements continued until 6 May 1946 when normal collections were resumed.[70]

Officialdom at all levels seemed to be full of questions and Purley Parish Council were asked frequently to provide information. In March 1940 they were asked where bodies might be accommodated and recommended that the recreation hut on the River Estate be used as a temporary mortuary.[71] In March 1941 the questions were about alternative water supplies and the clerk was instructed to send off a list of wells in the village.[72]

Many men from Purley either volunteered or were conscripted into the armed forces and five lost their lives. The best known of these was Major Hugh Lister who used to live at the Old Rectory and who had been ordained as a priest just before the war. He joined the Welsh Guards as a combatant however and earned a reputation for great daring and courage. he was awarded the Military Cross for a particularly

ferocious attack on a German gun emplacement but was killed in action in Belgium in 1944.[73] Edward Reed was taken prisoner by the Japanese and died in Siam in June 1943.[74] Ronald Rawlins joined the Royal Armoured Corps and was killed just after the crossing of the Rhine in the closing days of the war.[75] The other two names commemorated on the War Memorial are Dick Warburton and Stanley Pocock. Not all the men with strong Purley connections were listed on the memorial as witness John Gulliver from Scraces Farm. He had been killed when over Germany as a tail gunner and was found dead in his turret when his plane returned to its base in Abingdon.[76]

The military were very active in the area. The meadows near the lock and between Purley and Pangbourne were a great training ground for the Royal Engineers and their equivalents from both the Canadian and American forces, who delighted in practising the building of temporary bridges and launching landing craft. The Canadians used to do it all with muscle power, unloading the pontoons from their lorries (there were four pontoons per lorry), getting them into the water and laying the decking. When the Americans arrived they came fully equipped with cranes and heavy lifting gear but in a competition near Mapledurham Lock the Canadians had two tanks across the river before the Americans had even got the decking on.[77] The Americans were mainly from the 181st Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion and were based in Whitchurch and Pangbourne.[78] The Canadian troops were stationed at Basildon Park and Wollascot House in Whitchurch and there was another camp at the top of Whitchurch Hill. The majority were from the 39th Field Company of Engineers and used to return to Purley to drink at the Social Club on Wintringham Way. After a good bout of drinking they would often fire their guns into the air, much to many people's annoyance. The unit took part in the Dieppe raid on 19th August 1942 and many of them were killed or captured.[79] Later a detachment of the Royal Engineers was based in a camp by Purvey's old quarry which was situated behind Kirton's farm and between Long Lane and Sulham Woods.[80] There was also a searchlight battery and camp to the south of the Oxford Road and west of Purley Park Lodges. The searchlight was one of the outer ring around London.[81] A defensive pill box was constructed on the Oxford Road near the Purley/Reading border. Other pill boxes are to be found in the area and form part of the plans for holding the Thames as the main defensive line if German troops attacking from the South. The plan was for these pill boxes to delay the Germans sufficiently to allow all bridges to be destroyed.[82]

Victory came in 1945 and on 8 and 9 May there was a two day holiday to celebrate VE day. As the news was received the church bells across the country were rung. In Purley the bells were none too safe but they were rung with gusto all the same. The sound of the bells from all the nearby churches, especially from Mapledurham could also be heard in the village and as the trains ran through the cutting the engine drivers sounded their whistles to add to the noise. It was a day of euphoria, and as one of the residents remarked 'we will never forget today - because Fred came out of the church after ringing the bells and fell over a tombstone in his excitement and broke his leg'. Fred Rawlins was the sexton at the time.[83]

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Margaret Smith
Senior Librarian: Local Studies
County Local Studies Library, Reading

Royal Berkshire Regiment Panels – Loos Memorial

Major	Bayley	WK	5th
Capt	Coote	RM	8th
Capt	Getting	EN	1st
Capt	Mount	F	5th
Capt	Spencer	SG	5th
Lieut	Hall	GFM	1st
Lieut	Hobbs	WG	8th
Lieut	Peacock	TG	8th
Lieut	Pollard	RT	5th
Lieut	Reiss	SL	5th
2nd Lt	Blazey	JMV	1st
2nd Lt	Foot	DE	8th
2nd Lt	Rawson	PC	1st
2nd Lt	Salman	C	8th
2nd Lt	Skene	JH	2/4
2nd Lt	Spartali	C	8th
2nd Lt	Summers	RA	1st
2nd Lt	Tarrant	AR	2/4
2nd Lt	Woodford	HV	8th
CSM	Farmer	SB	5th
CSM	Ryan	WK	8th
Sgt	Camden	E	8th
Sgt	Coyle	E	5th
Sgt	Galt	M	8th
Sgt	Gaze	J	8th
Sgt	Luker	A	1st
Sgt	Montano	HA	8th
Sgt	Moth	JE	8th
Sgt	Nilen	W.DCM	1st
Sgt	Painter	EE	1st
Sgt	Palmer	B	8th
Sgt	Powell	P	8th
Sgt	Prior	ET	8th
Sgt	Rowney	HG	8th
Sgt	Snellin	J	8th
Sgt	Tallant	AE	2/4
Sgt	Tirebuck	H	8th
Sgt	Walton	T	5th

L/Sgt	Beard	LEJ	2/4
L/Sgt	Beace	SL	8th
L/Sgt	Fawson	J	8th
L/Sgt	King	J	5th
L/Sgt	Sheldon	H	5th
L/Sgt	Westall	AJ	1st
Cpl	Clifford	AH	8th
Cpl	Earl	WH	8th
Cpl	Field	W	5th
Cpl	Green	FW	8th
Cpl	King	E	8th
Cpl	Langan	J	5th
Cpl	Mariner	AWJ	8th
Cpl	Paddon	W	8th
Cpl	Parsons	J	8th
Cpl	Rideout	CH	8th
Cpl	Rothery	AJ	1st
Cpl	Smith	HA	8th
Cpl	Thompson	R	
Cpl	Thorling	HW	8th
Cpl	Tull	AD	8th
Cpl	Ward	F	1st
Cpl	Waterhouse	AD	2/4
Cpl	White	TG	5th
L/Cpl	Abdey	HJ	5th
L/Cpl	Ashford	LF	8th
L/Cpl	Balchin	CH	8th
L/Cpl	Barnes	J	5th
L/Cpl	Bird	S	1st
L/Cpl	Bone	WH	5th
L/Cpl	Bowley	JD	1st
L/Cpl	Brooks	A.DCM	1st
L/Cpl	Brown	EJ	1st
L/Cpl	Bunting	T	5th
L/Cpl	Bushell	WC	8th
L/Cpl	Colesby	LG	5th
L/Cpl	Gay	JW	8th
L/Cpl	Gray	O	5th
L/Cpl	Harris	W	1st
L/Cpl	Horsley	F	8th

L/Cpl	Jones	T	8th
L/Cpl	Kearse	CAL	8th
L/Cpl	Kersley	AE	8th
L/Cpl	King	AJ	5th
L/Cpl	Levey	J	8th
L/Cpl	Lovejoy	AE	8th
L/Cpl	Palmer	C	8th
L/Cpl	Parsons	FC	8th
L/Cpl	Peachey	WJ	8th
L/Cpl	Poole	RW	8th
L/Cpl	Pope	W	5th
L/Cpl	Pratt	FJ	8th
L/Cpl	Robbins	T	5th
L/Cpl	Smith	A	1st
L/Cpl	Smith	CE	8th
L/Cpl	Teear	WA	1st
L/Cpl	Tilley	HH	1st
L/Cpl	Treble	PG	8th
L/Cpl	Upcraft	RM	8th
L/Cpl	Watts	WSJ	2/4
L/Cpl	Weston	F	1st
L/Cpl	Wyatt	NB	
L/Cpl	Young	WE	8th
Pte	Adaway	A	1st
Pte	Alder	FJ	8th
Pte	Alder	WC	8th
Pte	Allaway	F	5th
Pte	Allen	C	8th
Pte	Amos	W	8th
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