

BERKSHIRE RECORD SOCIETY

Newsletter: January 2008

Dear Member,

First of all, a very happy New Year from all members of the Council.

It seems a long time since we held the 2007 AGM, since when some items of interest have arisen which we felt you would wish to know about.

Some of you will have attended the launch of Margaret Yates' book *Town and Countryside in Western Berkshire C.1327-C.1600*. It was held at Shaw House, a most apt and pleasant venue for a very enjoyable evening and a splendid celebration of Margaret's work. If you would like a copy and have not yet ordered it at the special rate for members, please do so before 31st March. It is a really important addition to our knowledge of the county in the late middle ages and early modern period.

Now two dates for your diaries:

On **Saturday, 23rd February 2008** we shall be joining the Berkshire Local History Association and the School of Continuing Education at the University of Reading for a day conference *Religious change in Berkshire*. Full details about the day and how to apply are on a form enclosed with this newsletter. One of the speakers, Kate Tiller, is editing a volume for the Society on the 1851 Religious Census; her talk will give you an opportunity to hear about and discuss this very interesting subject. We look forward to seeing some of you there.

Monday, 14th April 2008. The AGM will be held at the Record Office. Details will follow in due course.

Forthcoming volumes

We hope that the long-awaited edition of the *Minutes of the Thames Navigation Commission and its committees, 1771-1790*, prepared by Jeremy Sims, will now appear in the spring of 2008. This volume has been held up because of pressures on the General Editor's time, and we do regret the delays in producing it. But it will be well worth the wait. The minutes cover the first twenty years of the Commission's existence, during which it undertook a number of major projects to transform the navigation of the Thames. The old cumbersome and inefficient flash locks were replaced by pound locks, weirs were replaced and the towing paths improved, and regulations put in place to improve the safety of barges using the river. Many books have been written about the work of the Commission. Now it will be possible for the first time to read in its own words about the struggle to build a modern waterway. Battles with vested interests, problems with barge-owners, negotiations with riverside landowners, struggles to raise the capital required (and problems caused by financial mismanagement), as well as the technical problems encountered in building the new locks, are all chronicled here, along with detailed reports on some of the projects, often prepared for the Commissioners by some of the most eminent engineers of the day. In 1786, for example, William Jessop was arguing for locks to be of solid brick construction, '4 bricks in thickness from the bottom to the top and battering or leaning backward about ½ an inch in a foot, with proper counterforts behind ... the front course of the bricks should be set in barrow lime, and as the proper management of this sort of lime is best understood by the people of Leicestershire, where it is commonly used, a bricklayer of that county should be got for the purpose.' The work of the Commissioners did not always run smoothly, but their achievement

was immense, and this book will provide a fascinating insight into a remarkable period in the river's history.

We are delighted to report that we have teamed up with Oxfordshire Record Society to bring you an edition of *Bishop Samuel Wilberforce's diocesan notebook*. Wilberforce, son of William Wilberforce, was Bishop of Oxford from 1845 to 1869. He was a man of immense energy - and charm - who transformed the diocese during the quarter century he was its bishop. He was a resolute opponent of non-residence and encouraged a new spirit of activism among his clergy, he vigorously supported the building of new churches, and he promoted education, founding both a teacher training college at Culham and a theological college at Cuddesdon. The notes give a vivid insight into his work. They have been prepared for publication by the Wilberforce scholar Ronald Pugh, who has already published an edition of Wilberforce's letter books. We expect to be able to issue them in 2008.

2008 should also see Kate Tiller's edition of the *1851 census of religious worship for Berkshire*. This provides a snapshot of the religious scene in Berkshire and much useful detail on attendance at churches and chapels throughout the county in the mid-nineteenth century. Dr Tiller has previously edited the Oxfordshire section of this national census, and we look forward to seeing how Berkshire compares with its neighbour in the Diocese of Oxford.

Work has begun on a new edition of *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire*. Since the first edition was published ten years ago, much new work has been done on many aspects of the ancient county of Berkshire. Margaret Yates and Joan Dils are jointly editing the revised volume which will include several new articles, especially on prehistory at one end and the twentieth century at the other. A number of articles are being revised and others rewritten in the light of recent research. We would like to publish in 2008 but there is still much to be done.

New Index to Tudor and Stuart Wills

We are very pleased that the Society has secured funding to prepare a completely new index to wills proved in the court of the Archdeacon of Berkshire, 1508-1652. The existing index is over one hundred years old, and is far from adequate. It is arranged by surname only, provides residence information only incidentally, says nothing about occupations, and beyond distinguishing between wills and admns. (bonds and letters of administration for the estates of intestates) provides no information about document type (so that, for example, inventories and probate accounts go unmentioned). Furthermore, it is known to contain inaccuracies. A very generous grant (of £10,000) from the Marc Fitch Fund, together with support from the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and the Berkshire Record Office has ensured that we have the resources to prepare a full and complete index to these important records. The collection is large: there are 11,000 filed wills, 4,200 filed administrations, and some 9,050 pages of registers, to say nothing of a wealth of supporting papers. The index will be published in book form and on CD. We plan to start work in 2008.

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