

# ***Bracknell New Town Research guide***

**This guide will help you start exploring the new town Bracknell Development Corporation records held by the Royal Berkshire Archives (RBA).**

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## **2. Introduction**

Bracknell was part of the New Town movement to help rebuild the country after the Second World War. The New Towns Act 1946 enabled the Government to designate areas as new towns to address the urgent need for housing. Rather than expand existing cities, New Towns would concentrate development in self-contained places.

New Towns were part of the Government's 'New Jerusalem' initiative along with the NHS and the welfare state. The name, New Jerusalem, originally comes from the poem by the 18<sup>th</sup> century writer and artist William Blake. These New Towns would improve lives through healthy

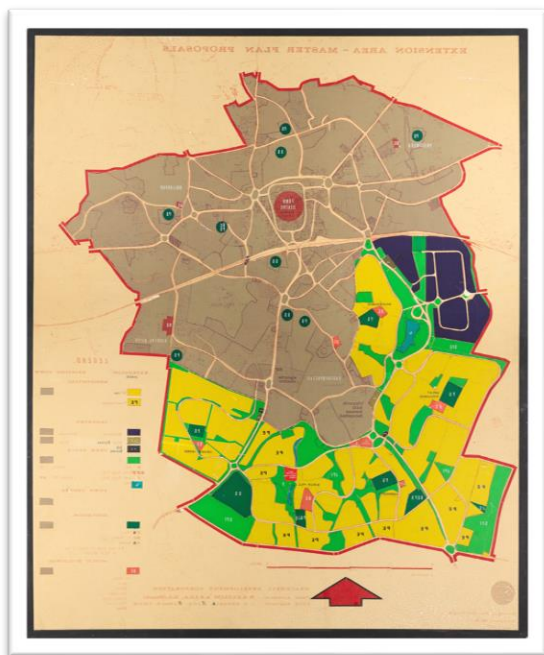
environments and modern housing. The need to travel would be reduced by providing work and amenities on the doorstep, in neighbourhood centres.

Bracknell was designated a New Town on 17 June 1949 by the Bracknell New Town (Designation) Order 1949. Construction was managed by the Bracknell Development Corporation which was formed on 20 October 1949. It is the records of the Development Corporation which form the main part of the collection at the Royal Berkshire Archives.

At that time, Bracknell was a small town with a population of around 5,000. It became the ninth New Town to be designated with a target population of 25,000 within 1,870 acres. People would be encouraged to relocate to Bracknell, mostly from London. In 1961-1962, the target population increased to 60,000. By 1980 Bracknell covered a total area of 3,296 acres.

The Bracknell Development Corporation planned, managed, oversaw, and developed Bracknell New Town from 1949 until the Corporation's dissolution in 1982.

For a full history, see the Bracknell Development Corporation catalogue (reference: NT/B).



*Draft extension area Master Plan, 1973, NT/B/G8/13*

### [3. Bracknell Development Corporation collection at the RBA](#)

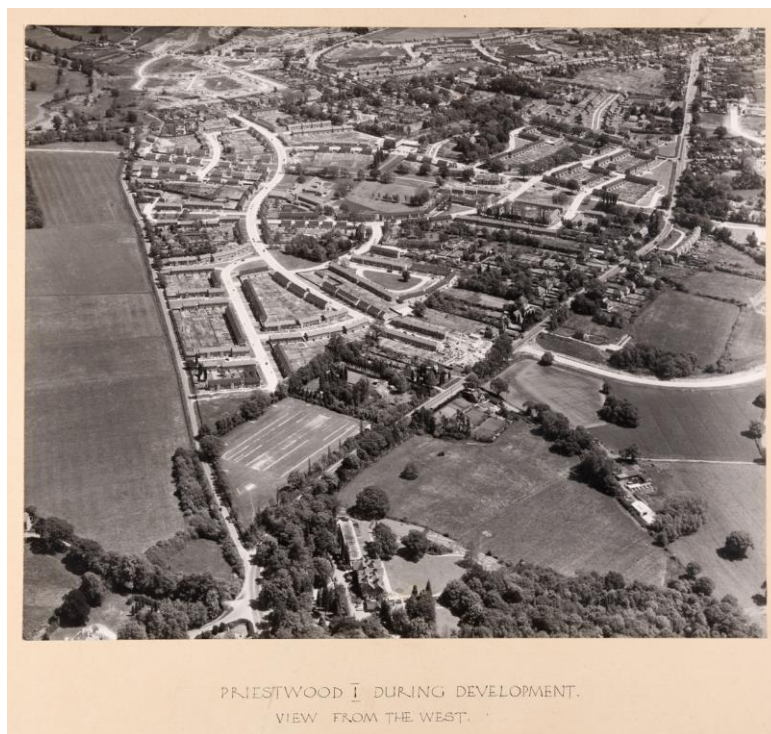
Records of the Bracknell Development Corporation are now readily accessible by the public due to the cataloguing of this collection which was carried out in 2022-2023 (reference: NT/B). This was made possible by funding from the Wellcome Trust as part of the New Jerusalem's Project. The collection comprises of 1142 files, 196 bundles, 95 documents, 92 rolls, 28 volumes, 11 boxes and 4560 MB of digital media in total.

The Development Corporations had a much wider range of powers and responsibilities than local councils. These records are much richer resources than council papers, providing fascinating insights into many aspects of twentieth century life.

There are many contracts, drawing and papers of both the Chief Architect and Planner's Department and the Chief Engineer's Department. The Chief Architect's records reveal the process of planning and managing the construction of Bracknell's nine neighbourhoods, including all buildings of both residential and community use (reference: NT/B/A). The Chief Engineer's records also include documents relating to wider infrastructure, such as the development of roads, sewers, and access to utilities (reference: NT/B/E). The General Manager's Department records contain administrative documents relating to all areas of Bracknell's development, including board minutes, annual reports, housing agreements and master plans (reference: NT/B/G).

A highlight of the collection is the series of aerial photographs of Bracknell and the neighbouring areas, dated 1948-1976 (reference: NT/B/E3/1). Aerial surveys were carried out prior to the designation and during the development of Bracknell new town. These provide snapshot views of the town before and throughout these times of great change.

There are two cinefilms in this collection which have been digitised. There is a film showing the construction of the West Link Road Underline Railway Bridges, [c.1955-1957], and a film created by a student about the development of Bracknell through their eyes, [c.1955-1963] (references: NT/B/E4/1 and NT/B/A4/1).



*Aerial photograph of Priestwood I during development, n.d. [c.1950s-1970s], NT/B/A3/47*

#### 4. What can I find in the collection?

The Bracknell Development Corporations records cover its entire history, from its creation in 1949 up to its dissolution in 1982. The amount and quality of information kept in these records will allow you to undertake research on practically any aspect of Bracknell New Town. Some examples of subjects which might be of interest include:

## Urban planning

New Towns were the most ambitious urban planning projects ever carried out in the UK. Studying the records for Bracknell can help reveal why decisions were made in a post-war context and how plans changed over time.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/A1 - Agreements, drawings and papers relating to contracts for the construction of dwellings, roads and garages.

NT/B/A2 - Proposals for architectural and engineering works to develop Bracknell.

NT/B/A3 - Photographs of Bracknell before, during and after developments.

NT/B/A5 - Chief Architect and Planner's Department correspondence, papers and drawings.

NT/B/G8 - Master plans used as a reference tool and correspondence regarding development and planning. This includes how Bracknell neighbourhoods were designed with centres and neighbourhoods away from industrial areas and a surrounding green belt.

NT/B/G4 - Drawings, documents, graphs, and reports about proposed architectural and engineering development in Bracknell, submitted to the Bracknell Development Corporation's Board for consideration and approval.

## Parks, green spaces and other natural landscape

Bracknell New Town was unique in the way its design celebrated the natural environment. Throughout the neighbourhoods, the Corporation purposely retained and incorporated as much existing woodland and green space as possible. This was under the direction of Sheila Haywood, who was landscape architect between 1950 and 1974. About 0.5-1% of budgets for the development's contracts had to be set aside for landscaping. Hayward performed a survey of all the trees in Bracknell. The landscaping team were part of the Estates Department.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/G4 – Drawings, documents, graphs, and reports about proposed architectural and engineering development in Bracknell including landscapes.

NT/B/E5/1 – Survey drawings of designated area. Some vegetation and trees noted.

A blog post on Bracknell's landscape can be accessed here:

<https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/news/article/bracknells-landscape>

## Building communities and migration



*Drawing of the factory of Premier Precision Limited frontage, 1958, NT/B/G4/75/5*

New Towns were not just about houses but also creating a community. As well as homes, there are designs for schools, shops, churches and other amenities. Many people had migrated from big cities and were new to the local area.

The Bracknell Development Corporation sought to mix new residents with existing ones to create a sense of community. Schools were made up of both existing and new families. Social events were organised including a toddler group and dance lessons to foster social relationships and neighbourly support amongst residents.

To encourage migration, places of work were provided within Bracknell to avoid the need to commute elsewhere. The Corporation constructed and designed residential, industrial, and commercial properties and attracted industries to Bracknell. The Corporation's motto was 'Home, Industry, Leisure' with the aim to meet all its residents' needs.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/G26 – records of the Social Development Office which helped promote Bracknell to its residents, government and visitors. These records include press cuttings, public notices, local guides, and other publications and household surveys.

NT/B/A1-5 – contracts, proposals, and correspondence relating to community buildings, industrial properties, commercial areas, and residential neighbourhoods.

NT/B/G7 - Bracknell Development Corporation's annual reports. The reports provide an overview of the Corporation's activities, successes and losses within a financial year. Some reports include copies of Corporation photographs of housing, factories, shops, schools, bridges, roads, plans and works the Corporation was undertaking in Bracknell.

## Health and leisure

Residents could access their workplaces, sport centres and facilities for leisure activities by walking and cycling. This reduced traffic and encouraged a healthy lifestyle. There were plenty of green spaces, a sports centre with a wide range of facilities, and several sports clubs.

Shops and leisure facilities were provided for residents. The Town Centre was also redeveloped to meet local needs when the designation area was extended in 1961-1962.

Facilities were provided for recreation, including a bingo hall/cinema, arts centre, community and youth centre and a new library which was opened in October 1971.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/A1 – Building contracts including a cricket pavillion for Bracknell Cricket Club, a pavillion for Bracknell Town Football Club, and premises for Bracknell Bowling and Social Club.

NT/B/G26 - Social Development Office records include press cuttings, a brochure for the sports centre and a report into the proposed arts centre.

NT/B/G7 - Bracknell Development Corporation's annual reports. Some reports include the successes of developments, including the sports centre and library.

NT/B/A1-5 – contracts, proposals, and correspondence relating to community buildings, industrial properties, commercial areas, and residential neighbourhoods. This includes shops and town centre developments.

### Housing, design and architecture



*House in Makepiece Road, c. 1960s-1970s, NT/B/A3/58*

Rebuilding the country after the Second World War provided an opportunity for innovative architectural design to reflect the new tastes of the 1950s and 1960s. Many residential properties in Bracknell's new town incorporated traditional brick and tile exteriors with modernist influences. These records can be used to study interior design trends as well as architecture.

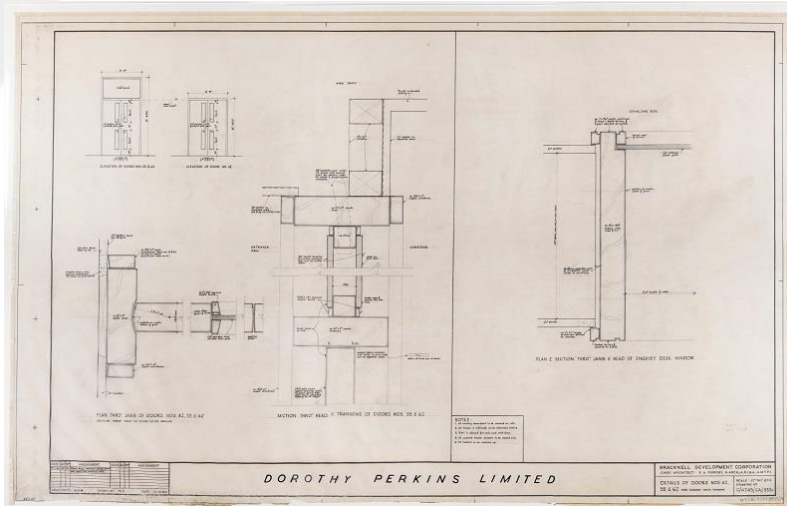
This collection can be used for research on all areas of planning, including the processes and decisions behind building large housing developments. The records can also be used for researching the history of a particular house. Search the road name on the online catalogue to locate proposals and contracts relevant to specific properties.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/A2 – Proposals for the development of industrial areas, commercial areas, and residential neighbourhoods in Bracknell. Not all proposals were carried out.

NT/B/A3 – Photographs of buildings of both residential and community use.

NT/B/A5 – Correspondence, papers and drawing including plans for retail spaces.



*Architectural drawing of Dorothy Perkins Limited premises, 1960, NT/B/A5/39/5*

## Women in the New Town

From its first meeting in 1949 to its last in 1982, Bracknell Development Corporation always had at least one woman on every Board. The first female members were Eva Jarvis and Lillian 'Lola' M Brooke. Jarvis served on the Board from 1949 until 1963 and Brooke served from 1949 until 1967. Kathleen 'Kitty' Dancy served as a Board member from 1968. In September 1977 Dancy was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Corporation, a role she served in until its dissolution in 1982. That same year, she was awarded an OBE for her service in this role.

From 1950 to 1974 the Bracknell Development Corporation hired Landscape Consultant Architect Sheila Haywood. Haywood was a member of the Institute of Architects and designed the gardens of many great homes. She carried out a survey of Bracknell and its natural landscape which impacted on decisions made by the Corporation's Architects.

Records relating to this topic include:

NT/B/G/1/4 - Appointments of Board Members.

NT/B/G3 – Board minutes reveal women in prominent roles at the Corporation.

NT/B/G26/1 - Press cuttings report on appointments and other activities.

NT/B/G1 - Establishment, management, staffing and dissolution papers may be useful for identifying female employees.

NT/B/G7 – Annual reports record achievements.

NT/B/G4 – Drawings, documents, graphs, and reports about proposed architectural and engineering development in Bracknell including landscapes.

A blog post on the women in Bracknell Development Corporation can be accessed here: <https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/news/article/women-bracknell-dc>

Local newspapers are another useful resource for this research. For example, there are reports on women who were longstanding employees of the Bracknell Development Corporation in the *Wokingham Times*, 1974 (document reference: D/EX2470/8/35).



*Sheila Haywood (centre), with a model of Hope Works, Derbyshire, c.1943 [Source: Report on a Landscape Design Plan 1943–93, Blue Circle Cement]*

## 5. [How to search the catalogue](#)

### Online catalogue

A link to the online catalogue can be accessed from the Royal Berkshire Archives website here: <https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/search-catalogue>

The catalogue reference for this collection is NT/B. This can be searched using the Advanced Search option to identify records in this collection. Users can then click on the underlined catalogue reference NT/B to view the collection description. Click NT/B again to access a breakdown of the records in this collection. Click on the + symbols to explore the entries listed under each section.

The Advanced Search can be used for searching keywords in the title or description fields along with NT/B\* in the catalogue reference field to identify relevant records.

For a list of related records in other collections, see the top level catalogue description (collection reference: NT/B).

### Digital Repository

Records in digital format are viewable on the digital repository. Some records are viewable remotely and others will need to be viewed on a computer in the searchroom onsite.

A link is provided in the online catalogue where a record is viewable remotely (for example, please see the catalogue entry for NT/B/E4/1). The catalogue will indicate that researchers should contact staff if a digital record must be viewed onsite (for example, please see the catalogue entry for NT/B/A4/1).

Researchers can browse the digital repository here:

<https://berksrecords.access.preservica.com/>

### Reference library sources

There are several pamphlets on Bracknell New Town in RBA's reference library. These are not currently listed on the online catalogue. Please use the library card index in the searchroom.

### Visiting the archives

Information about visiting the Royal Berkshire Archives, including opening hours and identification requirements, can be found on the website here:

<https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/visit-us/planning-a-visit>

Booking is not essential, but it is advised. Visitors can preorder up to six documents in advance. Please quote document references when making a booking. Additional documents can be ordered in the searchroom on the day. Please indicate if you wish to view maps or plans because there is limited space on the map table.

For researchers who are unable to visit the archives in person, then RBA offer a paid research service, or copies can be provided (fees apply). Please see the RBA website for further details: <https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/our-services>

## 6. [Other new towns in the UK and Ireland](#)

Bracknell is one of several New Towns making their records accessible for the first time. The New Jerusalem's' project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, is cataloguing and conserving the records from eleven post-war New Towns in the UK and Ireland. For researchers, this opens up the potential for studies that compare several New Towns. For heritage, arts and cultural organisations, you can get inspiration and share ideas from the ways other New Towns have used the archives. Visit the New Jerusalem's website to find out more about the other New Towns in the project. <https://www.newjerusalems.info>

## 7. [Further reading and other resources](#)

**Royal Berkshire Archives website and blog.** Information about the Bracknell Development Corporation collection and links to relevant blog posts can be found on the website here: <https://www.royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/berkshires-past-bracknell-new-town>

**Bracknell Forest Libraries.** A local studies collection of photographs and ephemera is held at Bracknell Library. Digitised images can be viewed on Flickr here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/bracknellforest/albums> Further information about the collection can be found here: <https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/libraries/local-and-family-history>

**British Newspaper Archive.** This is a searchable online database of digitised historic newspapers. Local newspapers reported on the activities of the Bracknell Development Corporation and its employees. This website is a paid subscription service, but free access is provided on the Royal Berkshire Archives public computers (advanced booking is advised). The website can be found here: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

**Royal Institute of British Architects.** Their catalogue contains the working papers and drawings of architects, and architectural journals and books. Their website can be found here: <https://www.architecture.com/contact-and-visit/riba-library>

**National Government papers.** The reports, letters, and other working documents created by civil servants are held in The National Archives. These are mostly catalogued as HLG (Ministry of Housing and Local Government and their predecessor and successor bodies). The National Archives also holds the Corporate archives of the Commission for the New Towns and its successor English Partnership. Other relevant collections include: Land Tribunals; Land Registry; Air Ministry, the Royal Air Force, and related bodies; Museum of Science and Industry; Board of Trade and of successor and related bodies; and The Crown Estate. The Discovery catalogue can be searched here: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>. A research guide to Towns and Cities is found here: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/towns-and-cities/>

**Town and Country Planning Association.** The historical issues of the Journal can be accessed here: <https://archive.tcpa.org.uk/archive/journals>

**New Towns: the rise, fall and rebirth.** By Katy Lock and Hugh Ellis. RIBA publishing. 2020. A good starting point for those interested in post-war New Towns in the UK. The book sets out to challenge many of the negative preconceptions associated with the New Town Movement.

**An Historical Atlas of Berkshire.** British Record Society. Second edition. Edited by Joan Dils and Margaret Yates. 2012. See chapter 74 on Bracknell New Town by Julie Grisman.

**New Town, New Me? The formation of social identity in Bracknell New Town, 1949-2013.** Dissertation by Jonjo Maudsley. 2021. Available in the RBA reference library.

With thanks to the Wellcome Trust for funding the cataloguing of this collection.