

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2009-2010

INTRODUCTION

In comparison with its predecessor, the year 2009/10 was one of beginning new projects rather than celebrating completed ones. Nevertheless, and in spite of the difficulties experienced by reason of staff shortages, it was a year of solid achievement. We completed the packaging of the Yellow Pages archive, made good progress on the probate index, began a major records survey, and began work towards a research project on eighteenth-century education in Berkshire. We accepted 4.5 cubic metres of new records, and catalogued slightly more, including an important collection of records relating to the civil war in Reading and a large collection of licensing plans of public houses throughout Berkshire. We published three new guides to records and achieved good media coverage both locally and nationally. And at the same time we carried out the core work of maintaining the public research and enquiry service (for which we received a pleasing number of compliments), of preservation and conservation work, and of supporting educational and community use and enjoyment of the records.

In all of this I have been supported by an able and committed staff, by colleagues in Reading Borough Council and the other Unitary Authorities in Berkshire, by members of Archives Board, and by many volunteers and friends of the service. The achievements recorded in the pages that follow would not have been possible without this support, and it is a great pleasure to be able to acknowledge it publicly and to express my thanks.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
September 2010

PUBLIC SERVICE

Visitor and enquiry services

The public face of the Record Office continues to set a positive tone for how people feel about us. We appreciate that it is important to be welcoming, attentive and polite, and the staff are always pleased to receive the thanks of our customers in return. Once again, a member of staff - Katharine Molyneux - was nominated for one of Reading Borough Council's customer excellence awards. Some of the comments we received during the year include:

Thank you for all your help today - your service is excellent!

This is my first visit and I would like to say how impressed I am with building and its very friendly and helpful staff.

Great improvement to copies from film. The extra work carried out on the printer on [sic] our last visit has made it all worthwhile.

I would like to thank all at Berkshire Record Office for a first class and professional service.

I was very impressed with all that I saw and heard - the staff were TRULY special.

I felt welcome from the moment that I stepped inside. Every one of my needs was well taken care of. Congratulations on running such an effective organisation.

This year we undertook another in the regular series of Surveys of Visitors to British Archives, conducted by the Institute of Public Finance. The results of that survey are awaited. As well as customer comments, we also measure our efficiency through our service guarantees. Over the year these stand at:

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time
- 97% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 100% of copies are supplied within 6 working days
- 58% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

The last result is disappointing, as it has dropped from 84% last year. The figure is due to very poor performances on two of our sampling days for this measure. There is no obvious reason for this, although both sampling days saw a number of requests that was above average. The pattern has not continued, but we will monitor it during 2010/2011.

We continue to look to develop and improve our services. Both our quarterly 'Introduction to the searchroom' sessions and family history evenings have continued during the year with great success. Another two schools guide have been made available, for both Wokingham Borough, and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and a similar but separate guide has been produced for World War 1 records held locally.

Overall usage figures dipped slightly for the first time in a number of years. In part, this was due to a gradual decline in telephone enquiries, as we put more content onto our website, and emails continue to increase. But the number of onsite visitors dropped by around 10% to 5025, with a comparable drop in the number of original documents consulted. As the number of local history visits remained stable, these figures reinforce the idea that the balance of use by visitors has changed. The number of local history visits now stands at 20% of the annual total, which is due to growth as well as the decrease in other types of visitors. In the light of our efforts to develop a local history customer base, this is very pleasing.

Remote access

The number of visits to the service website www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk rose dramatically, though this will be in part due to a slightly different way that the new statistics software logs visits. Final figures for 2009/10 saw 250,176 visits to the site, easily a record figure and around 60% higher than for 2008/9. Most customers looked at around five pages during their visit, and the average person spent around five minutes on the site.

Unfortunately, yet another year has passed without Reading Borough Council's contractors providing a new service website. This has been remarked upon at both Archives Board and Standing Conference on Archives, but there appears to be little pressure that the Office can bring to bear. The contractors' contract with Reading is safe, and they are undertaking the work without additional cost. Despite the continuing frustration we have been able to update the existing site with copies of *The Berkshire Echo*, as well as add the schools and World War 1 guide mentioned above.

Away from public gaze, we spent a considerable period of time arranging an upgrade to the New Landscapes site at www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk. This was occasioned by the weakness of the existing setup to external hacking. The work involved support from Reading's IT team as well as external software suppliers, and was completed at the start of 2010. Although a rather hidden activity with no demonstrable public benefit, it was vital to complete and should ensure that the website has a stable future for many years ahead. The site remains highly valued, and achieved 63,481 visits during the year.

There was a drop of around 20% in the number of catalogues viewed on The National Archives' a2a search. This is reflective of a similar drop in use of the site overall, which is now to be found a few clicks within the TNA website.

Outreach and audience development

We agreed a new policy for outreach during the year, and this reflects the range of activities that we undertake both to raise awareness of the Record Office and also to encourage use of it by all parts of the community.

We put in our usual appearance at the Bracknell Family History Fair, and were also out and about at the Didcot History Days run by Oxfordshire County Council. We also spoke at a Newtown History Day organised by Reading Library, and at the annual meeting of the Berkshire Historic Environment Forum in Newbury.

We continued to fulfil a wide range of requests for talks and visits. We spoke to the Earley Senior's Action Group, Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society, Wokingham Tree Group, Grange Fellowship, Bracknell Deaf and Hard of Hearing Group, Newbury District Field Club and the Swallowfield Agricultural Society. Mark Stevens also delivered a talk on Broadmoor for the Reading Festival of Crime Writing. We hosted visits from Reading University Library and West Berkshire Museum, as well as opening for behind-the-scenes tours as usual on the annual Heritage Open Days. The latter event was also advertised as part of the Slough programme for the first time.

We published our regular four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*, on the subjects of Slough building plans, Reading rate books, food and drink, and our probate project. BBC Radio Berkshire publicised various articles: we did a recorded feature on the Slough building plans, a podcast based on Thameside views, and most interestingly a live tasting of 18th century recipes from a book owned by Mary Loder of Hinton Waldrist. Other local radio coverage was received for the latest series of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the sports survey project, homosexuality in Berkshire during the 1950s, and the proposed redevelopment of Broadmoor Hospital. We also contributed a live interview on the latter to BBC Radio Scotland. Wider broadcast involvement came through a piece about a Broadmoor patient for Radio 4's *Tracing Your Roots*, and a Discovery Channel programme about another patient, James Kelly, of a more sensationalist nature (the programme was called *Jack The Ripper in America*).

We contributed our regular columns to the *Berkshire Family Historian*, *Berkshire Local History Association Newsletter*, *Oxfordshire Local History Association Newsletter*, and have also begun contributing to the *Oxfordshire Family Historian*.

During the year we contributed to a number of exhibitions. The document that travelled furthest was the letters of denization (a royal grant of citizenship) to George Heriot, goldsmith and philanthropist of Edinburgh and founder of George Heriot's School, one of Scotland's oldest schools, in that city. The document, from a private collection in the Record Office, was loaned to the school, where it formed part of a major exhibition being mounted as part of the school's 350th anniversary last summer. All the

other exhibitions were local. We loaned documents to West Berkshire Museum for two exhibitions - one, 'Revealing Portraits', where they supported an exhibition showcasing the recently-restored portraits of five prominent Berkshire figures from the Museum's permanent collection, and the other where they contributed to an exhibition exploring the history of the Museum buildings from their construction in 1626 to the present day. We also contributed to exhibitions at Easthampstead, Lambourn, Reading and Speen, and to three local schools celebrating anniversaries. We featured in an exhibition on *People of the Thames* at the Museum of English Rural Life, whilst in the Record Office we celebrated the completion of repairs to our portrait of Robert Palmer, High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1818, with a small gathering attended by a number of past High Sheriffs of the Royal County.

Learning

It is important to acknowledge that virtually all we do has a commitment to encouraging learning at its heart. The visitor and enquiry services provide a dedicated support network for informal learning, and the production of new content, our talks and visits programme, and other outreach activities, all contribute to increasing both the standards and opportunities for learning throughout Berkshire.

In terms of formal learning activities for those in education, this year saw us fulfil our regular commitments to local users. We spoke to the University of Reading's History undergraduates, as well as its Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies. We also hosted two day schools for the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education, one about the 18th century village and another on enclosure records. Additionally, we spoke at an OUDCE day school in Oxford about crime and punishment in the 19th century. During the year we also provided mentoring support for three students studying for professional qualifications in archives.

We undertook two events this year that were focussed on schoolchildren. The first was to assist with a video for Wokingham's *Clothes Talk* project about historic costumes. A group of secondary school children visited the Record Office to film themselves looking for archives relating to clothing. We also organised a visit for Year 6 pupils from Cranbourne Ranelagh Primary School, giving them an opportunity to extract and respond to information from local archives, and also to try their hand at making paper. This was a great success, and has provided us with a template that we could use for future school visits.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

Virtually every day that the Record Office is open something new arrives to be added to the collections. Sometimes expected, sometimes unexpected, it may be a single item or several boxfuls; it may be very modern - a parish magazine, perhaps, hot off the press (or these days more probably hot from the printer) or extremely ancient; it may be brought by post, by car, on foot or by bicycle; but there is no doubt that it comes. In 2009/10 we received enough to fill 450 boxes (4.5 cubic metres) in 180 separate consignments, ranging in date from the late sixteenth century to the early twenty-first, and from all parts of Berkshire and beyond.

Of course, size and even antiquity are no guarantees in themselves that an accession will be of interest. Happily there is no question about the quality of the records received in the year under review, and some in particular stand worthy of mention. In November two important nineteenth-century official documents arrived - the Yattendon tithe award and map and the Swallowfield enclosure award and map. The latter had probably the most circuitous journey of all this year's accessions: found in the vaults of a local bank, it was first transferred to the bank's own archive in Manchester before being repatriated to Berkshire and the more logical home of Berkshire Record Office. Also in November we received the first accession resulting from our survey of the records of sports clubs in Berkshire, the records of Newbury and District Hockey Club, 1952-2009. Several other clubs and societies, not all of them sporting, deposited records. Among these were the Bracknell Film Society, the Reading Bowling Club, and the Dodeka Club of Reading, this last a men's book club, limited to twelve members, which began at Trinity Congregational church in 1892 and survived until 2009. Parish records, as usual, came in large numbers, and we received a good number of records from non-conformist churches, notably Park United Reformed Church, Reading, which deposited a large collection of records following its centenary in 2008. Finally, mention should be made of a couple of small but unusual accessions. The first is a teaching manual, accompanied by some evocative photographs, showing how in 1912 children at Redlands Infants' School in Reading were introduced to nature study - the manual is illustrated with the children's drawings and with photographs of them engaged in such activities as looking at nests, measuring trees and examining plants. The second is the diary of a young London woman who spent a week at a war agricultural camp in north Berkshire during the second world war, which gives a vivid picture of the work and off-duty life at such an establishment.

Cataloguing work is under way in order to make these records available for research.

Cataloguing

We could not repeat the dizzying achievements of 2008/9, which was a truly exceptional year in terms of cataloguing completions. Nevertheless, we exceeded our target by nearly 50%, with 141 catalogues completed, representing 173 accessions and making nearly 3,000 items available for research.

Perhaps the most important catalogues were of records from the Reading borough archive, mainly from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but extending back to the thirteenth and forward to the twentieth. Some of these had been briefly noted in the report published by the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 1888, but until now no proper comprehensive catalogue has existed. The documents now listed include borough charters and grants of privileges, 13c-1934; freedom records, 1603-1835; gild records, c.1560; legal records, 1525-1736; court leet records, 1563-1832; and miscellaneous documents relating to the civil war, 1642-1645, including Charles I's appointment of Sir Arthur Aston as Governor of Reading in November 1642.

A more modern collection catalogued, of great interest to beer-drinkers, pub-goers and historians of the licensing trade, was that of the records of the Berkshire Quarter Sessions' Licensing Committee, 1931-1961. Licensing was normally a function of Petty Sessions courts, but more problematic cases were referred upwards to the superior court. Nearly 250 files are now open for inspection. Many contain plans and elevations of premises, a few include photographs - among them some fascinating views of saloon bars and public bars before the war - and a handful, mainly of licensed restaurants, also include menus. The collection encompasses old-established premises and new-builds. As well as being very valuable for anyone interested in particular pubs, this collection will provide additional evidence for the history of licensing in Berkshire, and also information for students of architects and architecture: many of the drawings are the signed work of local architects.

Catalogues of the records of several of clubs and society were completed during the year. The largest collection by bulk came from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes, comprising 735 items from branches throughout Berkshire. Dating from 1916 to 2006, these records chronicle in detail the changing role of the WI throughout the turbulent twentieth century. Smaller collections completed include those of two branches of the Townswomen's Guild, Wokingham Afternoon, 1962-2008 and Reading Whiteknights, 1958-2008; Reading Bowling Club, 1874-1989; and Bracknell Film Society, 1959-2000.

Among the school records catalogued, those of Lambrook School, Winkfield, 1883-1997, particularly stand out. This, our first significant archive from a private school, includes management and administrative records, prospectuses, pupil records, photographs, and much on school life generally. From the state sector we catalogued four collections, of which Streatley CE

School, 1873-2003, and Battle Primary School, Reading, 1893-2000, deserve mention.

Other completions include the important archive of the Berkshire Printing Company, 1900-2001 (including some fine examples of its work: it produced a series of picture cards for Brooke Bond); records of St Paul's Church, Wokingham, 1792-2004; Faringdon rating and valuation records, 1892-1973; Wallingford municipal charity records, 1628-1978; and the records of nature study at Redlands School and the war agricultural camp diary mentioned above.

Research and publication

Family history continues to be the most popular subject of study in the Record Office, though as noted above the balance relative to local history has changed, with the latter now accounting for around one in five of our visitors. The subject matter of research varied widely, encompassing mediaeval deeds, Windsor Forest, turnpikes, Shaw House, an eighteenth-century justice of the peace, the 'Swing' riots, non-conformists, and nineteenth-century church building, as well as a number of town and village studies. Broader studies, drawing on the resources of the Record Office but not limited to Berkshire, included domestic life in Georgian England and eighteenth-century reading habits and print consumption.

Four members of staff contributed articles to local or national journals. Kate Tyte's piece on the Broadmoor archive appeared in *Wellcome History*, and Sarah Charlton's on the manorial documents project in *RecordKeeping*. The current issue of *Berkshire Old and New*, the county local history journal, includes a substantial article by Lisa Spurrier and Ellie Thorne on the recently-catalogued Slough building plans. It traces the history of building control legislation and shows how the legislation was implemented (and sometimes evaded) in Slough, before going on to illustrate, with numerous examples, the value of these records not just for the history of individual buildings but also for the story of town planning and for the social and economic history of the town. We hope it will encourage research into this rich resource. Ellie Thorne also contributed an article about house history to the *Berkshire Family Historian*. As mentioned above, the Office published two new guides to schools records and one to local records of World War I.

Library

Some 240 titles were added to the Record Office library during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference books and professional literature. Several were based on research carried out in the Record Office.

Recent publications include studies of towns (*Thatcham, an Historic Town*, and *Studies in the early history of Hungerford*), villages (Marcham, Hinton Waldrist) and even a street (Eastern Avenue, Reading), histories of St

Michael's Church, Blewbury, of Caversham Heights Methodist Church and Sunningdale Village Hall (on their centenaries), a history of the house and estate of Wallingtons in Kintbury, and a study of the eighteenth-century landscape architect Richard Woods.

Several of the titles were acquired as gifts, both from authors and from friends, and we are grateful to the donors for their generosity.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Broadmoor

The Broadmoor conservation project was mothballed for the greater part of the year whilst our conservator was on maternity leave. At the year's end ten boxes of files remained to be treated, and we are on target to do so in the 15 months' funding which will be left. The Wellcome Trust has allowed us to defer the original project completion date. The Wellcome Trust also invited us to submit a full application for funding for a joint project with Kingston University (to produce an index of the earliest admissions registers, and mount this online), though sadly we heard just before Christmas that we had not been successful. The Research Resources in Medical History Fund which the Wellcome offered has now been withdrawn, so we will look for new ways to fund promotion of the Broadmoor archive.

Berkshire Probate Index

We made good progress on our project to create a new index to the Archdeaconry of Berkshire probate records. At the year's end our full-time indexer had extracted data from virtually all the 15,000 original wills and letters of administration and from the 9,000 pages of the probate registers for the period 1508-1652, and was about to move on the task of ironing out inconsistencies, linking up separated case files, checking details, and preparing the final text for publication. We hope the index will appear before the end of 2010. Also during the year, with voluntary help from members of the Berkshire Family History Society, we began the task of checking the existing indexes for the period 1653-1857. This carried on into the new year and is expected to take between twelve and eighteen months. This project has received financial and practical support from the Marc Fitch Fund, the Berkshire Record Society, the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and the Berkshire Local History Association, to all of which we express our gratitude.

Yellow Pages

We hold the national archive of Yellow Pages. Our project to package these to archival standards, generously funded by the publisher, was completed during the year.

Survey of the records of sports clubs

Mindful of the forthcoming London Olympics we have embarked on a survey of the records of sports clubs and associations in Berkshire. An initial investigation revealed the existence of some 800 clubs. At a conservative estimate, around 20% of these were founded before 1950 and some can trace their roots back into the nineteenth century. We have been sending survey invitations to clubs since autumn 2009, working on a different selection of sports each month. The survey was well covered in the press, and some deposits of records have been received, but on the whole the

response from clubs has been disappointing. We intend nevertheless to continue our collaboration with Reading Museum and prepare an exhibition on the history of sport in Berkshire to coincide with the Olympics.

Education in eighteenth-century Berkshire

Planning for a research project into eighteenth-century educational provision in Berkshire got under way during the year. Our bid for funding was unfortunately not successful, so we prepared a scaled-down plan making greater use of volunteer leaders. The three sponsoring bodies (the Record Office, Berkshire Record Society and Berkshire Local History Association) agreed the revised project plan and job descriptions for project leaders. We hope to launch the project during 2010/11.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Conservation and preservation are sometimes thought of as 'behind-the-scenes' functions in a Record Office. In reality they are only that insofar as the operations are not generally carried out in the public gaze. In fact they are vital parts of our programme of preserving and making available the historic records of the County. Without a rigorous approach to conservation damaged documents would remain inaccessible whilst documents in good condition would lack the protection they need to preserve them for the future.

During the year the conservation team made folders or wraps for over 550 documents, encapsulated - that is, placed within an inert plastic sleeve - over 1800 more, secured over 5000 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and re-sewed over 2800 pamphlets - and all that was in addition to numerous cases of first-aid and document cleaning.

Much of this was in response to damage discovered during the cataloguing of new collections or identified when documents were produced in the search room. A good deal took the form of preventative work - for example, the replacement of ferrous staples with cotton thread or the creation of made-to-measure folders for storage. But in addition to responding to individual instances of need we have also continued to work on longer-term projects with larger groups of records. Among these, continued from the previous year, have been the school managers' minutes project and the rate books project. In the former case we were originally faced with nearly 200 volumes and files into which minutes had been fixed with sellotape; as the sellotape dried, so the minutes began to fall out. Last year we dealt with nearly 80 volumes and files, re-affixing over 2500 sheets, where possible on acid-free paper. During the year under review we added a further 50 volumes and files to this total, re-affixing nearly 3300 sheets. The project will continue into 2011/12. In the case of the rate books we were faced with a large number of volumes that had received heavy handling during their working lives: during the year we cleaned and/or provided extensive first aid to 94 volumes.

Among the archives requiring more detailed work, four examples may be cited. Earliest in date was a seal of Reginald Pole, Archbishop of Canterbury 1555-58, which was discovered amongst the Berkshire archdeaconry probate records during our indexing project. This seal was very fragile and incomplete, but had a very fine impression on the part that remained. The surviving part was used to produce a paper template to act as a guide for the missing area. The seal was repaired with natural beeswax coloured with watercolour. The new wax was softened in the hand and applied piece by piece until the lost area was built up to the right shape and thickness of the remaining piece. It is now safe to handle and has been much admired.

Rather different in both date and appearance were the mid-twentieth century plans of Huntley and Palmer's biscuit factory in Reading, together with a notice of fire prevention arrangements at the factory. These appear

to have been drawn up as part of the company's preparations for war: the plans show fire mains, services, spotter's stations, fireguard sleeping quarters and the location of air-raid shelters, whilst the notice details the numbers of fireguards, spotters and sleeping quarters. The plans were torn and crumpled, and the notice was extremely fragile and weak. The former were repaired using cross hatching application of tissue - that is, small pieces of tissue over-laid, similar to cross stitched embroidery, to keep the edge of the tears firmly together - whilst the latter was lined on the back with heat-set tissue to strength the paper and the lost areas replaced with similar paper.

Also of twentieth-century date was the minute book of the Berkshire County Hockey Association, into which had been inserted annual statements of accounts, fixture cards, rules, and a brief history of club. So extensive were the insertions that the volume, a basic hard-back exercise book, had collapsed under the strain. Furthermore, the adhesive used to fix the insertions was irreversible. The only solution was to take the book apart, separate the pages, and mount each individually onto a new sheet. Finally the pages were gathered into sections and sewn on to guards before being collected together into a new post binding.

Finally, mention must be made here of the records of the Berkshire Printing Company (already mentioned in the section on cataloguing) for the work done to secure and protect the large number of picture cards and tea labels received as part of the archive. Over 770 picture cards were individually encapsulated and mounted into fascicles, while 245 tea labels were individually mounted using paper hinges. Although laborious, this work allows the items to be consulted safely and will provide long-term protection for these examples of the output of an important local company. The collection received an enthusiastic mention in a recent issue of the newsletter of the Cartophilic Society of Great Britain.

During the year we received much-valued help from volunteers from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes who assisted with our planned programme of sewing pamphlets and parish magazines with cotton thread in place of staples. With their assistance we were able to treat nearly 500 extra items.

Microfilming

We continue to use microfilm as an economical and effective way of providing substitute copies of documents as a necessary precaution against over-use. Parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials and school admission registers remain our priority, but during the year we also continued to film rate books (52,000 frames) and parish overseers' case papers (8,700 frames). Altogether we achieved a little over 68,000 frames during the year.

STAFFING

During the year we said farewell to Diana Rowley, Hilary Atkinson and Ella Voce who had worked with us respectively as administrative assistant, preservation assistant and archives assistant, and we welcomed Nick Martin as temporary preservation assistant to work on the Yellow Pages project. We also offered our congratulations to Ivone Turnbull, Lindsay McCormack, Rhonda Niven and Gary Lambden on the birth of children.

Several members of staff contributed significantly to professional matters nationally and to the promotion of historical and archival concerns locally. I continued to serve on the Council of the British Records Association, as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society, as General Editor of the Berkshire Record Society, as Treasurer of both the Reading Branch of the Historical Association and the Friends of Reading Abbey, as a member of Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee and as a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust. I also continued as an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History at Reading University. Mark Stevens served on the (national) Council of the Society of Archivists, and was much involved in the planning for the new national archives body, the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland). He also continued as a referee for The Wellcome Trust's Research Resources in Medical History fund. Sabina Sutherland continued to serve on the council of the Berkshire Record Society and on the committee of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. Lisa Spurrier continued to serve on the editorial board of *Berkshire Old and New*.

Finally, mention should be made of our volunteers, old and new, and too numerous to name individually, who have given generously of their time. In addition to the groups who have worked in the conservation unit and on the probate project, we have benefitted from voluntary assistance on documentation projects with twentieth-century records and on a project to improve the storage of some of our longer-held collections, both of which have yielded valuable results.