

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2012-2013

INTRODUCTION

The highlight of 2012/13 was undoubtedly the acquisition of the fourteenth-century formulary of Reading Abbey. While the existence of the manuscript was known to scholars, it had never been accessible for study, having been held in a private collection. News reached us in July 2012 that the owner was planning to sell, and that we were to have first refusal. Thanks to the generosity of the Friends of the National Libraries, the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of Reading Abbey, we were able to raise funds to buy the document, and in January 2013 brought it back to the town after nearly five centuries absence. We held a public viewing in February and were delighted and encouraged by the level of public and media interest that the manuscript aroused.

Important though this was, however, its acquisition should not be allowed to overshadow the many other achievements of the year. Notable among these were the publication of a complete index to Berkshire Archdeaconry probate records and the new edition of the *Historical Atlas of Berkshire*, both ventures in which we worked closely with other local organisations in the county. During the year we rounded off our part in the celebrations of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee with a special reception at which we displayed to an invited audience the Royal County's Loyal Address to Her Majesty, another project in which we had shared with other partners, in this case the Lieutenancy and the University of Reading's Department of Typography. We made good progress on our Broadmoor conservation project and on our Berkshire Schools Research Project, and embarked on a new shared learning project with the U3A on the theme of Historic Pathways. We accepted 9.7 cubic metres of records and catalogued just over 5 cubic metres, and we made good progress towards our online catalogue, which was expected to go live in 2013/14. In spite of reduced staffing we continued to maintain our core work in the public research and enquiry service, in preservation and conservation, and in supporting community use and enjoyment of records.

In all of this I have been supported, as always, 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 noted above and recorded in more detail 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

PUBLIC SERVICE

Visitor and enquiry services

Regular visitors to the Office may have been aware of the various changes to the way that we have staffed the public rooms. This was a result of spending a number of months with significantly fewer staff to help visitors, reply to enquiries and respond to telephone requests. By the end of the year we had been able to recruit to 1.5fte of the 2.5fte we had lost, and hopefully visitors will have already noticed the resumption of a more planned approach to staffing the rooms. The staff are to be thanked for being so ready to step in and help out when there were unplanned absences during the year.

The year was a mixed one in terms of the number of customers we received. There was a substantial increase in the number of copies supplied by staff, as opposed to self-service - some 30% in the case of printouts and over 40% in terms of photocopying - while the number of telephone and email enquiries received was virtually unchanged. These demands were balanced by a fall in the number of visitors by around 15%. The overall figures suggested no reduction in the amount of staff time spent providing services for customers, but perhaps a rebalancing. Nevertheless, we are keen to boost visitor numbers and it is with this in mind that we dispensed with our vending machine and, using the savings from that action, invested in subscriptions to both Ancestry and Find My Past, two of the more popular family history websites. We can currently accommodate free access for up to three visitors at any one time.

Although we took part in the 2012 Survey of Visitors to UK Archives, the full results are not yet available. We did receive the results of the previous year's Survey of Remote Users to British Archives, but most offices' sample rates were so small that their results were essentially meaningless. Our sample size was acceptable, which is again a reflection on staff's encouragement to customers to take part in the survey, but still small.

Of those customers who responded, 94% graded the promptness of our response as good or very good; 89% thought it similarly clear; 84% thought that the content of the response was good or very good. By comparison, only 64% considered our fees and charges to be good or very good.

As might be expected, the profile of the remote user does differ from the onsite visitor. Our visitors are predominantly of retirement age, whereas only a third of the remote users were. In keeping with that balance, the survey suggested that only just over half our remote enquirers live too far away to visit; for the rest, it was a matter of convenience to email a query.

The broad performance of the Office was also measured against our customer guarantee targets. By the end of the year these stood at:

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time

- 96% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 99% of copies are supplied within 6 working days
- 86% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

These results are broadly in line with previous years. There was a slight dip in the production figure, though production had been heavier on the sample days for 2012/13 than on the previous year, and proportionately the dip is not statistically significant.

We continued to receive regular thank-yous from visitors and enquirers during the year. We are always delighted to receive comments from customers and we make use of these to thank staff or to improve our customer experience. Here are some of the comments we received this year:

Everyone is incredibly helpful and friendly. I have dealt with other Record Offices and you are the best.

A very friendly, welcoming environment...A very pleasant experience.

Lovely helpful staff and pleasant surroundings.

Thank you for all you do to help people like me researching our family history. You provide a wonderful service.

I cannot praise the staff here enough, very helpful and polite and professional.

We also feel we should report around half a dozen adverse comments we received after a BBC South news item on the purchase of the Reading Abbey formulary. All these comments related to the fact that we do not require visitors to wear gloves when using parchment material. We wrote back to all concerned to assure them that no harm had come to the formulary, and that the latest research suggested clean hands were a far better line of defence than white gloves.

We redesigned our customer comments form at the end of the year in the light of staff feedback about its ease of use. We are hoping to increase our customer feedback next year as a result.

We also continued with our activities to try and increase visitor numbers. We ran our usual quarterly introductory sessions for new researchers, as well as the joint family history evenings that we provide together with the Berkshire Family History Society. This may be the last year that we provide such regular family history evenings, as the number of visitors attending reduced during the year. We also continued our production of short guides to collections, creating one about our rare book holdings and rating records.

Remote access

Work on the website has concentrated on creating an online catalogue. As with the website itself, work was held up considerably by difficulties with IT

support. Nevertheless, by the end of the year work to customise the product 'Calmview' was well in hand, and although the Office will not end up with a bespoke site, it will end up with one that enjoys a high level of support from its supplier, and is already used by a number of other record offices. We have also put in some staff time to adding catalogue entries to our in-house database, so that when the online catalogue launches it will do so with a greater number of records.

The principal content added to the website during the year were the twelve monthly highlights. These included a habitual drunkard, a reliving of the 1908 Olympics marathon, the toll keeper of Cookham bridge, the 70th anniversary of bombing raids on Newbury and Reading, and a snowy tale of tragedy on the Berkshire downs.

All of these stories were posted on our Facebook page. We had hoped to gain 250 'Likes' by the end of the year, though ended up with a little over 160. The number continues to grow slowly.

We made changes to the way that we collected website statistics, so a comparison with previous years is not possible. The main Record Office site received over 50,000 visits; the New Landscapes site some 5,000. However, use of the catalogue pages on The National Archives' Access to Archives site increased by around 10%.

Outreach and audience development

As usual, we have tried to provide talks and visits to a range of groups across the county, and, despite our reduced staffing, were able to accommodate the vast majority of requests.

We hosted visits for the Phyllis Court Family History group, Bracknell's WM3 group of retired men, Reading Borough Council's sports and social club, the Berkshire Archaeological Society and the Berkshire Family History Society. We gave local history talks to the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, Langley and Iver Probus Club, Reading Museum's 'Happy Museum' project and to the Windsor branch of the Family History Society. The Society's Vale of White Horse and Newbury branches both heard about Victorian Fair Mile, as did an audience at Battle Library in Reading, and a group of mental health professionals at Prospect Park; while Wokingham Library hosted the talk on Victorian Broadmoor. The Broadmoor project was additionally the subject of a presentation at the Wellcome Trust's Medical Humanities Conference in Manchester. This year also saw the debut of a new talk, by archivist Ellie Thorne, about Plenty's marine engineering company of Newbury. Ellie presented the talk to the Newbury District Field Club, Pangbourne Heritage Group and, most significantly, the South East Region's Industrial Archaeology Conference.

We took up our usual stall at the Bracknell Family History Fair, and also attended the Mayor of Bracknell's civic day at Garth Hill College. We

hosted a tour of the Office as part of the Historical Association's Annual Conference, which in 2012 was held in Reading. We provided similar behind-the-scenes tours for the annual Heritage Open Days in September.

A number of events were hosted during the year. Two of these were book launches, delivered in partnership with the Berkshire Record Society. In April, an edition of the diaries and correspondence of Robert Lee of Binfield was published, and we also followed this with a display of Lee's diaries and related archives, which was open to the public over the spring. In December, the new edition of *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire* was launched with much fanfare, and many guests enjoyed an evening of looking at manuscript maps from the county's distant past.

April's other event was an opportunity for guests of the Lieutenancy to admire the Loyal Address presented by the county to the Queen on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee. Other county items relating to royal events were also on display.

Then, in February of this year, the Reading Abbey formulary was proudly shown off to friends of the Office and guests from Reading Borough Council. This event was covered by the local newspapers, Radio Berkshire, BBC South Today and Meridian.

The formulary provided the principal media interest of the year, although the Office featured in two editions of *Who Do You Think You Are?* family history magazine: once within a feature about Berkshire, and once as a feature highlighting gems from the UK's archives. Our contribution to the latter was an account book belonging to John Treacher, the surveyor for the Thames Conservancy during the period when the modern pound locks were constructed. We also contributed our regular columns to the journals and newsletters of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and Local History Associations and also a special piece on the new *Atlas* to the *Berkshire Family Historian*.

We produced four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*, on the themes of gardening, sport, law and order, and education; also monthly highlights on our website, which included features on drink, midwifery and previous Olympics.

Our own contribution to the cultural Olympiad was via *Bikes, Balls and Biscuitmen*, the Museum of Reading's sporting exhibition which coincided with the Games. We contributed both documents and some text for the exhibition, which ran from May to September.

Learning

The year saw the usual mix of events supporting both formal and informal learning. For the former, we hosted visits for the University of Reading's MA in Early Modern Literature and Graduate School of Medieval Studies, as well as speaking to the history undergraduates about to embark on their

dissertations. We also hosted one school visit, for Coley Primary School's Key Stage 2 year 6 class, about the Victorians.

For informal learners, we offered day schools on enclosure records and on the eighteenth-century market town as part of Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education, as well as offering both our usual introductory visits to the searchroom, and family history evenings in partnership with the Berkshire Family History Society. Attendance at the latter has fallen back and we may seek to put on fewer evenings in coming years.

We also discussed and launched our 'Historic Pathways' project in conjunction with the Thames Valley Network of the University of the Third Age. This project aims to encourage U3A groups to research historic highways and byways in their areas, finding out about both the routes and interesting features along the way. Groups are encouraged to write up their research, and also to design and undertake a 'historic' walk. We spoke and presented a research session at an initial event in October, at the Record Office, and then spoke to a follow-up gathering at the River and Rowing Museum in Henley in March.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

The most exciting acquisition of the year was also the oldest - a mid-fourteenth-century manuscript of Reading Abbey, purchased for £36,000 with the generous help of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, the Friends of the National Libraries and the Friends of Reading Abbey. The manuscript is a formulary, or handbook for the authors of official documents, and was almost certainly compiled specifically for use in the abbey at Reading. It is especially interesting and important because most of the models seem to be drawn from genuine texts, many of which have not survived in their original form. It thus contains valuable new evidence for the history of the Abbey not available elsewhere. The original examples can be dated with reasonable certainty as having been created between 1227 and 1337, with the great preponderance drawn from the early fourteenth century, and the manuscript itself was most probably created between 1340 and 1350.

The manuscripts of Reading Abbey were widely dispersed following the dissolution; the early fate of this manuscript is unknown, but by the late eighteenth century it had come into the possession of the De Burgh family of Oldtown, Naas, Ireland. Descendants of the family sold it in the 1950s to James Stevens Cox of Guernsey, from whose son it has been acquired by Berkshire Record Office. It is believed to have been the only Reading Abbey manuscript remaining in private hands, and it is a particular delight to have been able to bring it back to Reading, and to house it close to its place of creation.

However, the excitement surrounding this acquisition, important though it was, should not overshadow the many other interesting and important documents that we received by gift, deposit and purchase during the course of the year. Altogether we took in over 9.7 cubic metres (the equivalent of 970 boxes and an increase of over 50% on the previous year) in 210 separate accessions (roughly one for every day that we were open) ranging from single documents to van-loads, and covering nearly 700 years of Berkshire history.

Our role as a place of record (hence our name 'Berkshire Record Office') was recognised in a number of accessions of modern official records, notably a large quantity of signed minutes and agendas of Bracknell Forest Council, 1973-2011, and smaller consignments from Reading Borough Council, 2005-2011, and Slough Borough Council, 2004-2009, as well as recent registers of electors from all six Berkshire unitary authorities and records of six parish councils (four of which dated back to the establishment of the councils in 1894/95). Our commitment to preserving the records of today for the benefit of the future was also evident in a small way in the sets of recent parish and community magazines that we received from some twenty-two parishes and community organisations.

In addition to recent magazines we received a large quantity of other records from Berkshire churches, including thirty-three Anglican parishes, thirteen Methodist congregations and five churches of other denominations. Most of these were twentieth-century in date, reflecting our past successes in securing the deposit of older records, but a few included records of earlier date, among them, papers relating to the foundation of Cookham Dean parish, 1846; a parochial diary from Tilehurst St George, 1879-1965; faculties, charity papers and other records from Caversham St Peter dating back to the 1850s; the complete archives of East Ilsley Baptist Church, 1832-2012, received following the church's closure in 2012; and perhaps most exciting of all, an accumulation of overseers' papers, rate books and churchwardens' bills and vouchers from Englefield, 1695-1892, discovered whilst clearing out the attic of the Englefield Estate Office.

We continued to welcome records of local clubs and societies, seeing these as important sources for social history, and in particular for the light they shed on the creative ways in which local people make use of their leisure time. This year's accession included records of various sports clubs (Berkshire County Ladies Golf Association, 1952-1993; Sonning Lawn Tennis Club, 1946-2001; Reading Bowling Club, 1983-1997; Hurst Bowling Club, 1899-2012; and programmes of Henley and Maidenhead regattas, 1939-1945); a literary society (Wokingham, 1955-2010); a townswomen's guild (Bracknell Easthampstead, 1958-2003) and several women's institutes (received via the offices of the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes); a local branch of the League of Nations Union (Kintbury and Inkpen, 1933-1941); a horticultural society (Kintbury Cottage Garden and Flower show, 1902-1923); and a social club (Royal Naval Association Reading Branch, 1930s-2010).

Of the great variety of other records received, only a few can be noted here. Among the highlights were two volumes of photographs, taken in the 1970s, of (now mainly demolished) Reading buildings; a rare poster advertising dental services in Faringdon, 1876; the records of St Peter's Church of England School, Old Windsor, including log books from 1863; several hundred aerial photographs of Berkshire commissioned by Berkshire County Council between 1964 and 1996; additional papers of the family of Stanley Spencer of Cookham, 1910-1966; and a scrapbook created by members of the Price family of Farnborough between about 1870 and 1945. This last arrived quite unexpectedly and anonymously in the post one morning in September. It was beautifully made, containing letters, drawings, photographs, historical notes about the Price family, the church, the rectory (once the home of Sir John Betjeman) and other families and events in the parish, many of the items unique. Unfortunately, bad storage at some time in the past had caused serious degradation, many of the pages being damp-damaged and worm-eaten. We plan to repair it, both as a model of its kind, and as a valuable source of evidence for the history of this downland parish.

Cataloguing

Once again our cataloguing work concentrated on the records received from the modern and historic local authorities of Berkshire, notably this year on two important series of files from the former Berkshire County Council, relating respectively to education and civil defence.

The County Council took responsibility for elementary and secondary education under the terms of the Education Act, 1902. While direct management of the education service was undertaken by the newly-created Education Department, much administrative and legal business was handled by the staff of the County Clerk's Department, and a considerable body of records was created as a result. As well as the establishment and maintenance of schools, the surviving files cover such subjects as further education, youth and community services, youth employment, and education welfare services (including the provision of milk, school meals and medical and dental services, school attendance, school transport and the regulation of employment of school children). They offer an enormously valuable resource for those interested in education policy and practice in Berkshire in the twentieth century. Added to earlier catalogues of Education Committee minutes, architects' plans of school buildings, and the records of schools themselves, this latest completion means we have a formidable accumulation of material available for research into this fascinating and important subject.

A little over thirty years after the passing of the Education Act, County Councils assumed another and rather different responsibility, that of preparing for the protection of local civilian populations and services in the event of war. Berkshire County Council set up an Air Raid Precautions Committee in 1936, and a year later a special section was established in the Clerk's Department, headed by a County ARP Organiser, to manage Air Raid Precautions and Civil Defence. The newly-catalogued files of the service - over two hundred of them - document the setting up of report centres, wardens' posts and air raid shelters and the provision of premises from which emergency services could operate. A variety of buildings was requisitioned, including parish rooms, private and commercial premises, garages, and even a sauce factory in Hungerford. This is a rich source for investigating an important aspect of war-time history.

In addition to these important county documents we have also catalogued a large accumulation of records from the former borough of New Windsor. Not all strictly official in character, these include records of local organisations and individuals deposited with the borough archives while these were still kept in Windsor. Transferred to the Record Office some years ago with the official records of the borough, the rich variety of the collection is now revealed. It is a veritable cornucopia, including photographs, title deeds, papers on royal events 1821-1937, poll books 1780-1806, records of the Windsor Volunteer Fire Brigade 1867-1941, and of the Windsor and Eton Choral Society 1837-1932, diaries and personal papers of many leading

Windsor people, and much more besides - all now available for study in the Record Office searchroom.

These and other official records accounted for some 45% of our cataloguing output in 2012/13. The remainder embraced a wide variety of material including records of local societies, businesses, churches, schools, estates and individuals, reflecting many different aspects of life in the Royal County. During the year we catalogued the records of twelve clubs and societies, including the Three Counties Women's Hockey League, 2008-2011; Reading Bowling Club, 1964-1997; Maidenhead Cycling and Athletic Club, 1914-1999; Wokingham Theatre, 1947-2009; Wokingham Literary Society, 1955-2010; Emmer Green Townswomen's Guild, 1952-2011; and Bracknell Easthampstead Townswomen's Guild, 1958-2003. Catalogue completions also included the records of three local businesses - a small additional deposit from Plenty's of Newbury, the records of Clifford's Dairies of Bracknell, and a collection of building records of Owen Phillips and Son of Reading, this last being particularly interesting on account of the number of building plans included, many by local architects, for work carried out in and around Reading by this firm and its successor, A J Davis and Son, between 1886 and 1968.

New evidence for the history of Shinfield in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now available thanks to the completion of a catalogue of the records of the Shinfield estate. The estate was bought by Alexander Cobham in 1786 and remained in the family until 1920. The archive includes numerous deeds and leases (among them leases of the Six Bells public house), some surveys of the estate (one of which appears to relate to a map already in the Record Office), and papers dealing with the sale of the estate in the early twentieth century, including some very detailed sale catalogues for both Shinfield and Woolhampton where the family also had property interests. Alexander Cobham was High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1790, and his great-great-nephew Alexander William Cobham held the same office in 1868.

In addition we catalogued records from thirty-five Anglican parishes, nineteen Methodist churches and three circuits, three other nonconformist congregations, and four schools, as well as a wide variety of small collections and individual items, among them an attractive series of late medieval deeds of Abingdon, a sale catalogue of Temple House, Bisham, 1922; the trust deed and inventory of the Woodclyffe Home, Wargrave, 1913; and a print of Upton Park, Slough, c.1843.

Altogether we completed 134 catalogues representing 167 accessions and comprising nearly 2800 items and requiring the detailed examination of many hundreds of individual documents.

Research and Publication

As in previous years, family history, with its wide appeal across the community, was the most popular subject of study in the Record Office. However, a significant number of our visitors came to explore other subjects, and we welcomed academic and leisure historians alike to research a wide variety of topics and periods. Once again the Broadmoor archives proved very popular, providing a rich source for several student dissertations and other studies. Several visitors came to investigate the history of their towns, villages, schools, churches, streets and even individual buildings. Other subjects of research included medieval seals, seventeenth-century Quakers, early eighteenth-century medicine, Maidenhead Bridge, turnpike roads, the River Thames, Roman Catholicism and recusancy, the poor law, Fair Mile Hospital, Victorian women and public health. We were glad to welcome several members of the local U3A exploring the history of local footpaths, following the inauguration of our learning partnership with the Thames Valley Network of U3As last year.

The most notable publication of the year was the second edition of Berkshire Record Society's *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire*, launched at a reception in the Record Office in December. With 78 articles and maps covering Berkshire from prehistoric times to the twenty-first century, this drew heavily on the resources of the Record Office and included several contributions by Record Office staff. Another Record Society publication that appeared earlier in the year was Harry Leonard's edition of the diaries and correspondence of Robert Lee of Binfield, 1736-1744, drawing on originals held in the Record Office. A major collaborative project with the Berkshire Record Society, the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and the Berkshire Local History Association was concluded in May with the publication and launch of a complete index on CD to our collection of Berkshire Archdeaconry probate records. Other books and articles based substantially on Record Office resources included Brian Lingham's history of Didcot, 1945-1974, Hazel Brown's book *Pupils, Potholes and Poor Relief: the Wantage Town Lands from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, and Mark Clapson's study of Whitley - *Working Class Suburb: Social Change on an English Council Estate, 1930-2010*. In addition to contributions to the Atlas mentioned above, articles by two members of staff were accepted for local journals, 'Plenty and Son Ltd of Newbury' by Ellie Thorne in *Berkshire Family Historian*, and 'The Establishment and Organisation of Civil Defence Operations in Berkshire, 1936-1945' by Natalie Burton in *Berkshire Old and New*, the latter being awarded a national prize by the British Association for Local History for the best short article in a local journal.

Library

Some 209 titles were added to the Library during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference books and professional literature. Several of them were based on research carried out in the Record Office. We were particularly pleased to receive a copy of

Stanley Jackson's BA dissertation 'Organised Religion and Social Change in Reading' which was the winner of the Berkshire Prize for the best dissertation on a local topic submitted by a final-year undergraduate at Reading University. A number 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 as originally scoped had been completed by the end of the previous year. This meant that all the severely damp-damaged patient files that were open were now available for research. However, the project did not end as planned: the Wellcome Trust granted us an extension of a further year to undertake desirable, though non-essential remedial work on other parts of the collection. This was a very kind recognition that we had completed a three-year project on time and under budget. Following approval for this extension the project was scheduled to complete on 31 May 2013, just in time for the Hospital's 150th anniversary. Thus came to an end a very fruitful association with the Wellcome Trust that began in 2005 with a project to catalogue and conserve the archives of Fair Mile Hospital and continued with the Broadmoor cataloguing project that we completed in 2008. However, although the project has concluded, the Broadmoor archive continues to offer many opportunities for research and promotion which we will develop over the coming years.

Berkshire Probate Index

Following the successful completion and publication of the new index to Berkshire probate records, 1480-1652, work proceeded on the revision of the index for the period 1653-1857. The considerable labour involved in checking the existing index and inputting corrections was carried out by volunteers under the supervision of Berkshire Record Office staff. As noted above, this project reached a conclusion during the year with the publication of the new index on CD. We are grateful to all our partners in this project for their support.

Education in Eighteenth-century Berkshire

Our volunteer research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833, run in association with the Berkshire Local History Association, the Berkshire Record Society and the local U3A, continues to make steady progress. Work on Reading newspapers is now virtually complete, and we are looking for volunteers to undertake research newspapers in Slough and Oxford libraries. We made visits to Brunel University to study the archives of the British and Foreign Schools Society and to the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham to examine the Salisbury diocesan archives. Plans are in hand for visits to study the archives of the National Society in Lambeth Palace Library, and for further visits to Chippenham. A picture is emerging of a wide range of educational provision in this period.

Enemies of the State

During the year we joined as a partner to support the University of Reading's English Literature Department in a funding bid to the AHRC. This followed on from a series of discussions about projects which might increase research in the archive of Reading Prison. The bid was for a short project relating to the detention of Irish patriots after the Easter Rising of 1916. It was successful, and the three month project to work with the Prison archive began in early February. It will result in improvements to our Reading Prison catalogue, a display in the Wroughton Room, and an evening event with speakers to discuss the issue of detention without trial.

Survey of the Records of Sports Clubs

As reported last year, this survey, which we began in 2009, officially came to a close in January 2012. However, records continued to arrive as a result, and material acquired as a result of the survey, together with records of sporting activity in Berkshire that we had acquired previously, were used to create five panels on the theme of Berkshire's Sporting Life for inclusion in Reading Museum's summer exhibition in 2012.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Conservation

Most of the work of the Conservation Unit takes place out of the public gaze (though demonstrations of the conservation team's skills are offered from time to time) and much of it is far from glamorous, but it makes a vital contribution both to the preservation of the archives in our care and to our access agenda - for unless documents are fit to be handled they cannot be used for research.

During the year the conservation team, with valuable help from a small band of volunteers, provided first aid (mending minor tears and the like) for over 1100 items, secured over 750 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and sewed with cotton thread (having first removed the ferrous staples) nearly 1400 pamphlets and periodicals. All-too-frequently we find documents that have been 'mended' with self-adhesive tape, which we have to remove before embarking on a better repair. This is still a laborious process (in spite of the introduction of a hot-air pencil to dry the adhesive and loosen the tape). Last year we treated over 400 documents in this way, including a further 70 Thames Conservancy drawings. We also provided a further 60 volumes of Poor Law Guardians' minute books with protective covers (finally bringing this project to a conclusion) and made specialist packaging for a further 226 items. In January members of the conservation team joined forces with other colleagues and with several of our volunteers to mount a major cleaning operation on a van-load of books rescued from a damp and insect-infested life in a rural barn, making them safe for transfer into the strongrooms and eventually for cataloguing.

Preservation work of this sort is the bread and butter work of the Conservation Unit. Some items, however, require more specialist treatment. Among the items conserved were a Slough map of 1900, an inventory and an account from our collection of probate records, and a set of Tudor ordinances.

The Slough map was an enormous document made up of several large Ordnance Survey sheets joined together and backed with linen. It had been rolled up for storage. Most of the map was sound, but all of it was extremely dirty and the bottom (exposed) 50 cm had become very brittle and fragile, to the extent that several pieces had broken completely away. We began by cleaning the damaged end. We then removed the linen backing, carefully collecting the various fragments of map that had become detached. These were relaxed and repaired and pasted on to new linen, which was itself then attached to the undamaged part of the original map. Finding that some pieces of the original map had been lost, we in-filled the missing areas with a pale brown paper, as close to the original colouring as possible. Once this repair had been completed we cleaned the remainder of the map using a plastic eraser, making the whole document useable once again.

Rather smaller than the map, and also rather earlier in date, were the two items from the archdeaconry probate collection. These had been identified during the preparation of the index as badly in need of repair. The first was the probate inventory of John Winchcombe of Newbury, 1610 - at fourteen feet in length probably the longest inventory of all. This parchment document comprised several membranes sewn together head to foot. It had been folded for storage with related papers, and had become badly creased, torn and dog-eared, while in places the sewing had broken. We relaxed it using the damp-pack method (which allows a document to absorb moisture gently from both back and front simultaneously) and then flattened it between two layers of corrugated board. Finally we rolled it round an acid-free tube and placed it in a made-to-measure box. The second was the probate inventory of Dame Mary Gardner of Abingdon, a fascinating document running to several pages which detailed amongst other things the cost of Dame Mary's funeral, including the provision of somewhat lavish refreshments for guests. Amongst other delicacies her executors provided pounds of comfits and biscuits, macaroons, marzipan, dried fruit, 'green dry lettuce', and forty dozen cakes, all of which was washed down with nine gallons of sack, over ten gallons of white wine and nearly twelve gallons of claret. Like John Winchcombe's inventory, this had been folded for storage with related documents, and had become badly torn and rather dirty. Such was its condition that it could hardly be opened without more damage occurring. We gently flattened each page before relaxing it so that it could stay flat. We then cleaned it carefully and repaired it, filling missing section using a technique known as leaf-casting (which uses paper pulp) before resewing with hemp cord through the original sewing holes. Finally this too was given a made-to-measure box to live in.

Different again were the ordinances made in 1589 for the better conducting of the Isbury charity by the Archbishop of Canterbury and others. The large parchment document had originally five seals attached, though only four survived, and only two of these remained attached to the document. All four seals were the worse for wear, having been kept in metal skippets that had become rusty over time. The document itself had been folded and was also kept in a metal skippet. We removed the document from the container, flattened it and cleaned it. We then set about removing dirt and the residue of mould from the seals themselves, cleaning them with a fine brush and warm water. The transformation was remarkable, and the detail revealed was delightful. Finally we reattached the seals to the document, using gold-beater's skin, and once again created a made-to-measure box to provide the document with a home.

Microfilming

We continue to use microfilming as an economical and effective way of providing substitute copies of documents as a necessary precaution against over-use. Once again we completed over 50,000 frames, with parish registers and registers of electors accounting for a significant proportion of the total. During the year we purchased a second-hand 35mm camera, enabling us to film large-format material, including newspapers.

STAFFING

During the year we said goodbye to Robin Elliott, one of our archive assistants, to Katharine Molyneux, one of our search room assistants, and to Rhonda Niven, conservator on the Broadmoor project. We welcomed Natalie Burton as archives assistant, Magz Lord as searchroom assistant, Alex McGuire as temporary Broadmoor conservator, and Cleo Hanaway as cultural engagement office on the Enemies of the State project. We were also pleased to gain funding for Juliet Margerison as Graduate Archives Trainee on a Warwick University Graduate Internship Programme

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 the Friends of Reading Abbey, as President of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association, 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. 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*. Ellie Thorne served as Minutes Secretary of the Pangbourne Heritage Group.

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 have been pleased to offer short-term work-experience placements to recent graduates and undergraduates interested in finding out about work in archives. We are grateful for their contribution.

STATISTICS

Public service

Visitors to the search room	3560
Written and telephone enquiries	5895
Enquiries answered within 5 days	96%
Documents produced	6903
Microforms consulted	10238
Copies supplied	11796
Visits to online resources	128784
Outreach events: number	35
Outreach events: attendance	1020

Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	210
Accessions received: volume	9.72m ³
Catalogues completed: number	137
Catalogues completed: volume	5.07m ³
Accessions catalogued: number	167

Conservation and preservation

First aid	1120
Tipping-in	762
Sewing	1390
Packaging	253
Encapsulation	363
Microfilming: number of frames	54509