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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Record Office

Annual Report

For 2015-2016

Berkshire Record Office, a countywide archive service for all
local authorities in the Royal County of Berkshire

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Introduction

This year has been one of building foundations. The new management team began working together, putting their own plans into place, and also began the process of applying for service accreditation by The National Archives. Being accredited will renew our licence to hold public records, and provide a benchmark that we can be judged against.

As part of the accreditation process, we refreshed our aims for the first time since 1991. Though the existing aims held good, they have been updated to acknowledge a changing world - reflecting digital resources, access through technology, and seeing archives not just as a research resource, but as a wider opportunity for historical experience.

Within these aims remains a core business rooted in Berkshire's communities. We seek to inspire local pride and offer direct contact with some very precious and exciting collections. We also seek to maintain the highest standards of collections care, while recognising the need to work sustainably in a world of diminishing resources.

Showing relevance, sharing our expertise, and being cost-effective: these are the values that we now plan to take forward. The annual report highlights some of the ways we are beginning to develop them. These include creating a prestigious and valued archive 'brand', and then using a variety of public engagement tools to help people make use of what we offer.

It goes without saying that we cannot do any of this alone. The annual report is full of partnerships: with volunteers, the University of Reading, the county historical societies, the Wellcome Trust; with our colleagues in the six Berkshire districts; and now, increasingly, with our friends not just locally but online - sharing what we do, and helping to make us relevant. As we move forward, these partnerships will be invaluable.

Mark Stevens
County Archivist
June 2016

Welcoming Visitors and Enquirers

We had a chance to test our high standards when we received the results from last year's national survey of visitors.

Overall, visitors gave us an excellent 9.4 out of 10 for the service we deliver. This continued our equally excellent run of results over the years that the survey has been run. Staff, as ever, rated particularly highly - a staggering 9.8 out of 10 for attitude and quality of advice. To put these results into context - although I am always wary of placing too much weight on statistics - we were the highest-ranked south east service in 11 out of 24 satisfaction measures.

Nevertheless, it remains true that we offer such a good experience to fewer personal callers undertaking their own research. The great shift of customers towards new channels of communication continues.

We have taken advantage of this shift to work flexibly: we have reduced staffing levels on duty, to reflect diminished staff resources, while also allowing the duty team more freedom to pursue collections and content-creating work at the same time as they provide a public face. This is a positive outcome to the changing nature of our business.

During the year, we also took part in a national survey of remote enquirers, which will give us the opportunity to check that we are delivering the right service for this growing cohort - and to check that we continue to deliver a highly-rated customer experience.

Our customer guarantees stood as follows:

- 99% of visitors got their first choice of visit time
- 98% of written enquiries were answered within 5 working days
- 98% of all copies were supplied within 10 working days
- 100% of original documents were produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

The customer experience

Thank you for your kindness, patience and dedication

Everyone is extremely helpful

The staff are so friendly and welcoming

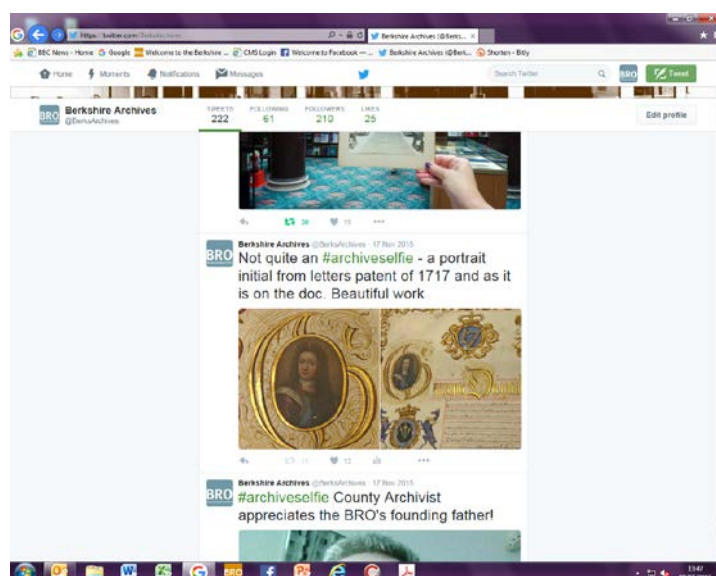
You have no idea how good your service is in comparison to other county record offices

Your staff are wonderful! So pleasant

For the Online Customer

Tens of thousands of people continue to read about us and our collections online – some 50,000 visits were registered on the service website and over 6,000 to the New Landscapes site. We do not yet have logs of page impressions on our online catalogue, however, roughly 3,000 new items were added to our online catalogue during the course of the year.

At the end of September we began tweeting in addition to our regular Facebook posts. By March we had nearly 200 followers on Twitter and nearly 500 friends on Facebook. We were enthusiastic posters during the 2015 'Explore your archive' campaign, as a number of #archiveanimals and #archiveselfies from our collections demonstrated.



Some #archiveselfies

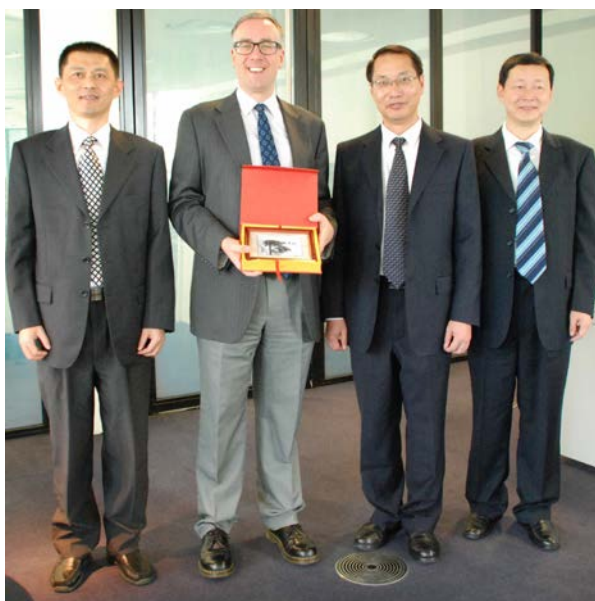
We continued to provide new content online. This included a virtual version of 'Small objects of power', our exhibition of spectacular medieval seals, as well as monthly highlights incorporating life in Windsor Railway Station, naturism in Bracknell, and the Victorian sky at night as seen by an amateur astronomer in Reading. We marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and 200 years since the Battle of Waterloo. The First World War also featured via Ruhleben Internment Camp, mentioned in last year's report, while Lisa Spurrier's First World War blog maintained its daily posting of snippets from the Berkshire home front.

Engaging the Curious

As usual, we created a programme of events to take our collections out into the community. General history talks were provided for the Wokingham U3A, Reading's Pine Cones retirement club, Burghfield WI, and public audiences at Southcote, Britwell and Slough Libraries (the latter two as part of the Slough Festival of Learning). We also presented talks themed on parish council archives for the annual meeting of the Berkshire Society of Local Clerks, and for Wokingham Without Parish Council, while a talk about how to preserve archives was received by the Friends of Reading Museum.

Natalie Burton has compiled a new talk about Second World War evacuees in Berkshire, and this had its debut at Whitley Library; the Victorian Fair Mile talk had outings in Reading Museum, Southcote Library, and Oxford; and Victorian Broadmoor was delivered for the Berkshire Family History Society, the Twyford and Ruscombe Local History Society, a public audience at Slough Library, and a High Secure Social Work conference at Easthampstead Park.

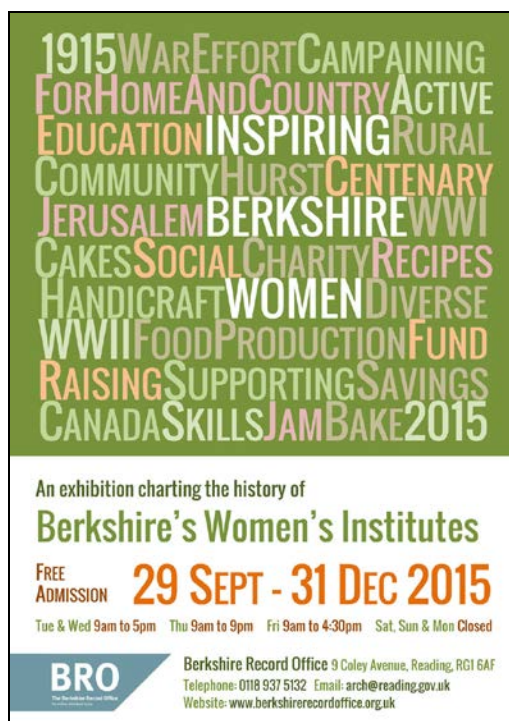
We were delighted to have visits from the Catholic Archives Society, Berkshire Organists Association, the Mills Archive and the Lieutenancy, all of whom were able to see a range of documents relating to their own interests. We opened as previously for the Heritage Open Days, offering behind-the-scenes tours, when we were joined by the Berkshire Family History Society, who offered a public talk on the use of parish registers. We also maintained our place as a destination for visiting Chinese archivists, hosting a group from Anhui Province as part of their UK trip.



With the delegation from Anhui Province Archives

Four editions of our newsletter, *The Berkshire Echo*, were published. One was themed on the Waterloo bicentenary; another celebrated one hundred years of the Women's Institutes (of which more below); while a third focussed on architecture in Berkshire. The year's other edition revisited unpleasant epidemics in the county - the Black Death, diphtheria, and plague.

We had two onsite exhibitions during the year. The first recounted the history of the Dodeka Book Club - a group of Reading men who joined informally for learning and discussion; the second was a celebration of the centenary of the Women's Institute, called 'Inspiring Berkshire Women'. This was our highest-profile event of the year. We were delighted to be joined at the private view by the current chair of the Berkshire Federation of WIs, Sara Staker, as well as by a multitude of delicious cakes, baked by WI members specially for the launch.



Poster for 'Inspiring Berkshire Women'

The WI exhibition featured on Radio Berkshire and Breeze FM, as well as in the Maidenhead Advertiser, Reading Chronicle, getreading and BBC website. The other widely-featured story during the year was our grant from The Wellcome Trust to conserve the prison archive, while Radio Berkshire also interviewed us about the Europeans interned in the prison during the First World War, Heritage Open Days, Broadmoor, and more generally about the county's archives. Our sole television appearance of the year was a feature for BBC South about the Hungerford police murders of 1876.

We also presented a slimmed-down version of our 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' exhibition for a lecture on Wilde, held in Reading Town Hall, by the actor and

broadcaster Stephen Fry. Some 700 people attended this event, and we were able to give each of them a promotional flyer detailing the resources we have for the Victorian prison.

Learning

After the success of the first 'Discovering Archives and Museums' module - whereby undergraduates from the University of Reading spent ten days working here - we ran the course again this academic year. Our two students, Danielle Reed and Erin Shearer, provided invaluable help in starting to make sense of two related archives - that of the Newbury Bypass Protestors, and the Bypass Supporters Group - while in return, we gave Danielle and Erin an insight into managing historic material.

We also provided our usual one-off sessions for university students: the presentation to undergraduates about to embark on their dissertations, and the seminar for postgraduate students of early modern literature, as well as speaking to students as part of a 'heritage' panel at the university's careers fair.



English literature MA students during a seminar

This year's Berkshire prize, awarded by the Record Office and the Berkshire Local History Association for the best local history dissertation by a Reading history

undergraduate, was given to Ellen Barrow. Ellen wrote about 'Exploding the male myth of female biology in 19th century England', and made use of female patients within Broadmoor to challenge Victorian expectations of womanhood.



Ellen Barrow receives her prize from the County Archivist and David Cliffe, chair of the BLHA

Away from formal education, we delivered the closing address for the Thames Valley Network of U3A's historic pathways project. This project was originally sponsored by the Record Office before the U3A made it their own. It has run for three years, and its outcome has been the creation of around 30 walks, all of which interpret the history as part of the walking experience and which will live on as a U3A resource. The pathways have all been enthusiastically walked, and it has been a great example of how to build a social element into a research project; we hope the U3A choose to build on it for future work.

We also piloted a new collections care workshop. We ran half day sessions for the Berkshire Family History Society and the Catholic Archives Society to cover the basics of how to look after books, papers and photographs; feedback was positive and we will look to develop these sessions over the coming year.

Developing Collections

Amongst the many local collections we received was one that will have national recognition. This came from Lynette Edwell, a Newbury resident who played a key role in supporting the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp. Lynette opened her home for the campaigners to wash and cook, as well as joining them in their action and, as a result, she had accrued a wealth of photographs and ephemera relating to the Camp.

Although there is a significant Greenham archive at the London School of Economics, the Camp is such a recognisable part of Berkshire's recent history that we were delighted to have the opportunity to acquire Lynette's material. Her diligent collecting provides as much of an official record of the Camp as is likely to survive. Both its size and subject matter make it an obvious candidate for future funding bids, and we will investigate what grants may be available.



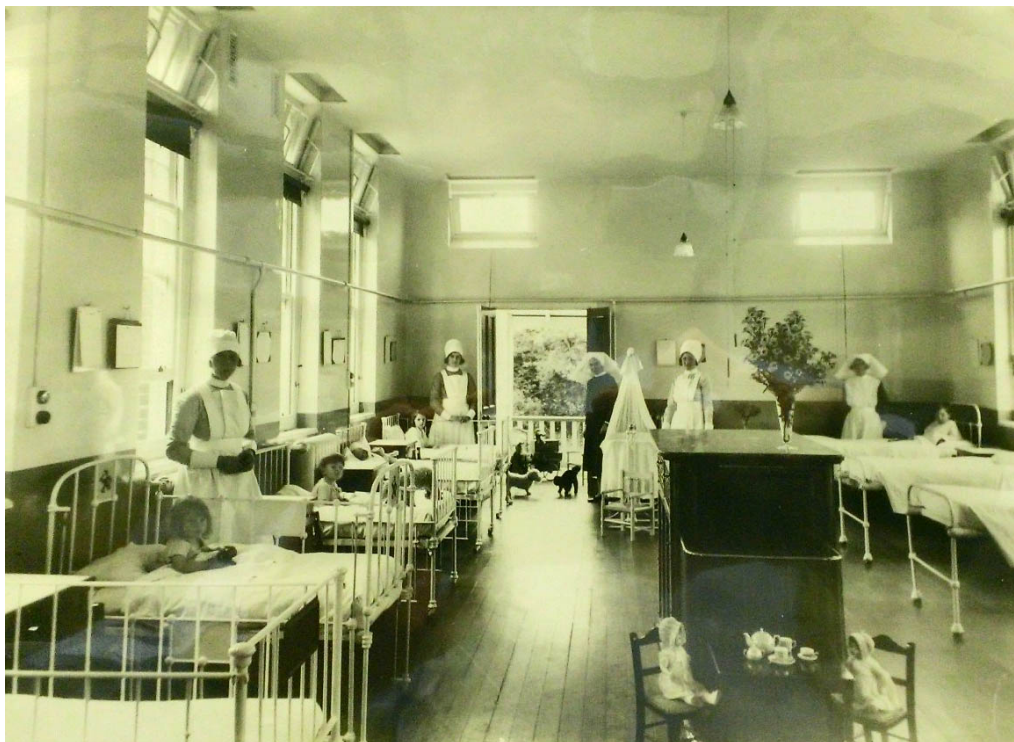
A handful of Greenham Peace Camp posters

The year's other most notable deposit came from old Berkshire. Home Farm in Charlton, near Wantage, remains a significant agricultural business, and for decades has been owned by the same family. Due to the size of its enterprise, Home Farm had become a resting place not only for the family archives, but also for those of various aspects of Charlton life. Even in 2016, it seems that it is still possible to find almost the entire history of a village tucked away in one dwelling. We have become custodians for the Charlton enclosure map, national school records and even the social club minute book, together with estate maps, farming accounts and other records from the mid nineteenth century onwards.

Smaller collections of estate records arrived for Barton Court in Kintbury, the Page family of Goldwell House in Speen, and Desborough properties in Maidenhead and Taplow. Manufacturing and service industries were represented by records from Sargeants of Bracknell, funeral directors, and a further deposit from the engineering firm Plenty's of Newbury.

The pursuit of leisure was found in archives from Berkshire's clubs and societies. We received material from Maidenhead Drama Festival; Reading's Criminal Justice Association, Embroiderers' Guild, and Guild of Artists; the Berkshire branch of the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (men who fought in South African campaigns); Winnersh Gardening Club; Wokingham Theatre; and the Women's Institutes of Maiden Erlegh, Theale and Winkfield. Some 33 Church of England parishes and 39 other Christian places of worship also gave us material; within this, there were substantial accessions from the Society of Friends, Newbury United Reformed Church and St John the Baptist, Crowthorne.

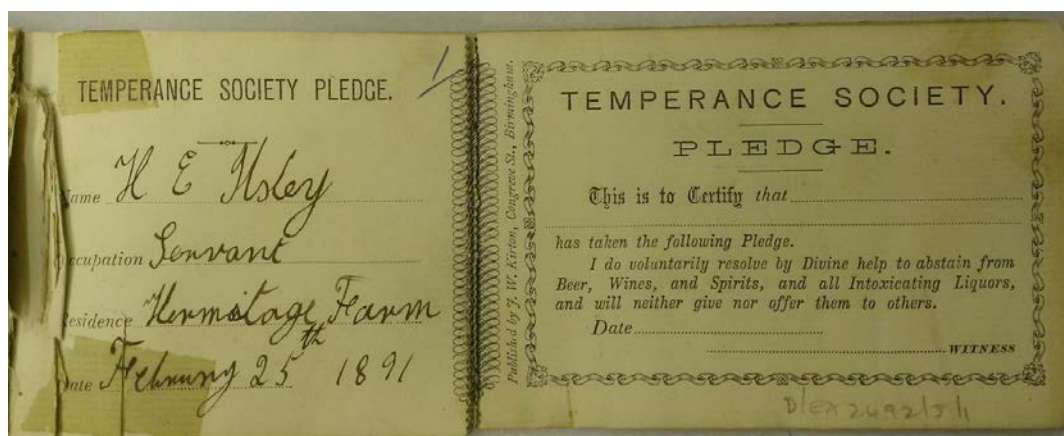
The largest official deposit came from the Newbury Primary Care Trust, who passed us, via West Berkshire Museum, several boxes of photographs and printed material from Newbury District and Sandford Hospitals covering the period 1885-2010. We additionally received some older Wallingford Borough records, Wantage Rural and Urban District papers, and the minutes of the Wantage Improvement Commissioners, 1828-1893. Public authority records were also transferred from: the Berkshire coroner; Bracknell Forest and Reading Borough Councils; the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead; and the parish and town councils of Barkham, Bisham, Bucklebury, Crowthorne, Frilsham, Hurley, Hurst, Newbury, Shinfield, Wallingford and Wokingham.



The children's ward at Newbury District Hospital, 1931

Of the remaining accruals - our annual grand total came to about nine cubic metres - I would like to highlight a contract for building Bear Place in Wargrave, 1784, which came to us in a very sweet bespoke, if perhaps not quite contemporary

wooden box; and a pledge book from the Newbury Temperance movement, containing - like a book of raffle tickets - the stubs for each pledge handed out to supporters. I should also like to make thank-yous for two purchases at auction: a log book for Denchworth School, 1863-1891; and a group of five medieval deeds for Wokingham. The latter were purchased with the help of generous support from the Wokingham Society; our continued thanks go to our customers and friends for their kind donations that allow us to purchase items for sale.



Mr Ilsley's Temperance Society pledge, 1891

Making the Collections Available

By far the largest piece of collections information issued this year was the catalogue for the archive of Conrad Birdwood Willcocks, an architect who lived in Caversham but who had wide-ranging business and local history interests across Berkshire.

Willcocks moved to Reading in 1892, at the age of five. He was an early student at the university before qualifying with the RIBA and then moving into private practice. His architectural work was mostly domestic, including several council housing schemes, but he also worked as a contractor for the Diocese of Oxford, the brewers Dymore Brown, and, perhaps most publically, designed the Arthur Hill Memorial Baths in Reading.

He was additionally a prime mover in the creation of Berkshire's Local History Recording Scheme - an influential attempt to log disappearing heritage, and one that directly inspired the National Buildings Record now run by Historic England. It was Willcocks' love of and dedication to the historic environment that led him to leave his house in Caversham to the National Trust, and his archives to the Record Office. Now, some forty years after his death, we have finally listed the thirteen hundred items he left us.



Opening the Arthur Hill Baths, 1911

Catalogues like the one for Willcocks take many years to complete. But there are quicker ways of dealing with similar quantities of less complex material, and this year we also began a whole staff project to tackle coroners' inquests from the early 20th century until the end of the Second World War. We are working district by district, and the results will continue to filter through into next year.



Working through boxes of coroners' files

Local authority records were also represented by our continuing efforts to review and list legacy material from Berkshire County Council. This year we completed work to a range of inherited items. We listed the annual reports from chief officers up to 1974, a large series of attendance registers from London schools evacuated during the Second World War, and files relating to local management of the national evacuation scheme during the same period.

We also listed those records created by the county's public assistance department. In 1930 this department took over the functions of the workhouses and other aspects of the poor law such as vaccination, 'looked after' children, mental health and public maternity provision. Although these services were reorganised again in 1948, when the public health areas became part of the new NHS, a substantial quantity of material survives for this short period of county management. Some, inevitably, is still closed - including various in-patient and child protection papers relating to Bracknell, Maidenhead and Windsor - but in due course this resource will become a great find for anyone interested in the development of the post-war welfare state.

Other significant collections information was made available for 19th century items from Holy Trinity church in Bracknell, and St James, Ruscombe; the Reading Horticultural Society and Sweet Pea Society; and the Berkshire County Cricket Club archive that was detailed in last year's report.

A full list of new collections for research is published in *The Berkshire Echo*.

Spreading the Impact of Research

Research undertaken in our collections has formed key parts of various books either published this year, or due to be published shortly.

We are beginning to see the fruit of all our work with historic mental health collections. *Fair Mile Hospital: a Victorian Asylum* was published to provide a chronological history of Berkshire's local hospital; *Proper People* recounted the stories of Yorkshire natives who found themselves in Victorian Broadmoor; and *The Life and Times of William Lawley*, a Broadmoor patient and founder of the Wenlock Olympics, featured in the *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*. Next year, *The Apprentice of Split Crow Road* will tell the grim tale of a Gateshead child murderer called Cuthbert Carr; while a chapter on Broadmoor's theatrical performances will feature in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities*.

Other publications to feature our material included *Sir Henry Neville was Shakespeare, Caversham Park and its People* (by ex-Radio 1 presenter Mike Read), and *Loveden: Founder of Buscot Park*; while our own Natalie Burton had an article on the Second World War evacuation scheme published in *Berkshire Old and New*. Postgraduate theses included work on primitive Methodism in south Berkshire and the social and economic impact of the Civil War in Reading.

Images from the collections have also appeared in various texts. There was another Henry Neville mention in *The History of Parliament*, as well as a handful of images used in unexpected places: the Charlton enclosure map illustrated fractured land ownership in modern Palestine; the Denchworth enclosure map found its way into a Swiss book about landscape architecture; and the medieval Southampton town seal - star of our 'Small objects of power' exhibition - was reproduced for its representations of the sun and moon in an American children's science magazine.

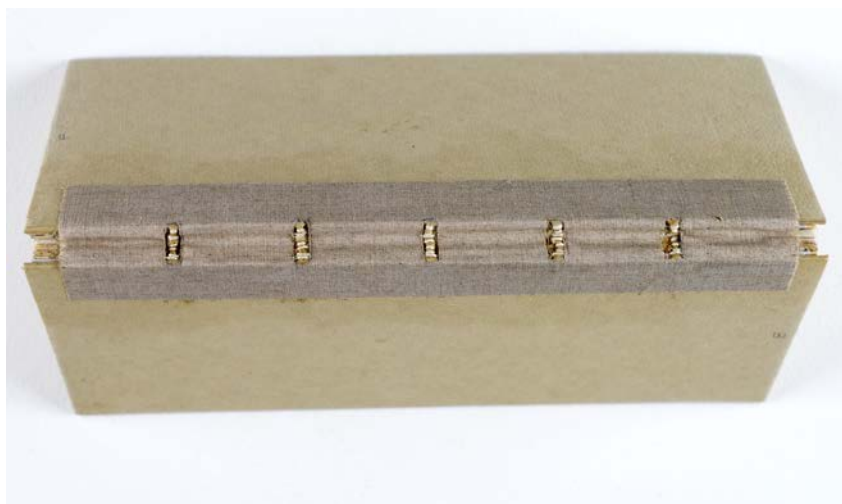
Harwell History Group and The Hendreds School also made use of images in local exhibitions, while Joseph Toomer's census of Newbury, 1815, was loaned for public display in West Berkshire Museum.

Caring for Collections

As usual, we put most of our collections care resources into protecting items from future damage. The routine cleaning of hundreds of documents went hand-in-hand with the creation of individual packaging, and minor repairs. In particular, this year we finished making boxes for Reading borough rate books; humidified and separated a number of fused deeds for Chapel Street, Thatcham; and removed staples then reseeded many modern parish magazines. We also consolidated covers for several series of volumes, including rate books for Charlton and registers from Reading Crematorium.

More intensive intervention was performed on a handful of items known to be wanted by customers, but too fragile to use. Amongst these was a memoranda book dating from the Powlet Wrighte family's ownership of Englefield in the late 17th century, and a volume of manorial court minutes for West Challow, 1602-1612.

The Englefield memoranda book comprised five sections sewn onto raised cords. With no cover or boards, and only some of the cords remaining, the pages had become torn and damaged over time. The book structure was replaced in stages: first the sewing was removed, then the folds of each paper sheet reinforced, and then the structure reseeded onto new, hemp cords. New boards were fashioned by pasting pulp board together until the desired thickness was achieved, and then these were attached to the cords. Finally, a strong handmade paper was used to create a plain cover.



New spine and boards for the Englefield memoranda book

The West Challow court book was written on a French paper in iron gall ink. It comprised only one section, but each page of this was heavily creased and with missing areas. It was decided that the pages would benefit from washing, but because they were too weak to withstand immersion they were sandwiched instead between two sheets of a manmade blotting fabric. The borders of these sheets were then placed in a shallow tray of water. Using capillary action, water was drawn through the fabric and across the paper in between, providing a slow removal of dirt without any physical handling of the document. Once dried, all creases were gently ironed, and the missing areas on each page filled using paper pulp and the vacuum action of the leafcasting machine. The section was then resewn and placed in a new folder - robust once more after decades of frailty.



'Washing' the West Challow court book

At this point I must also thank the Berkshire Family History Society, whose financial assistance has allowed us to purchase a vacuum treatment table and hood. This will make it much easier in future for us to practise a range of damp, rather than wet treatments to documents such as the West Challow book - documents that are too risky to bathe due to their delicate condition, or because they have fugitive or surface inks.

The other new equipment that has boosted efficiency is our A2-sized digital photography rig. This was introduced during the year for customer orders of electronic copies. We also began to use the new camera for our own preservation copying. It replaces the microfilm cameras, which will now gradually be phased out. Due to the expertise of our reprographics officer, Lucie Lang, we were also able to launch a digital restoration service. This allows old photographs to be electronically restored to remove creases, improve colour or reinstate loss.

Special Projects

Preserving the Reading Prison Archive

After the success of 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol', and ongoing interest in the prison's eventual fate, we have continued to develop ways to use its archive for public engagement.

We submitted a bid to the Wellcome Trust for funds to complete a nine month conservation programme, repairing those items in the archive either too damaged to be used or that are at risk of harm. In December, we were delighted to hear that our application had been successful. We began the process of recruitment in the New Year and our project conservator is due to begin work in summer 2016.

As the year drew to a close, we were also about to launch 'Universities of Revolution', an updated exhibition about the Irishmen interned in the prison after the Easter Rising of 1916. Further work with the University of Reading's English Literature Department, our partners in this and the Wilde project, will continue in 2016/17.



One of the damaged prison registers

Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century

The volunteer research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833, is now well on the way to being written up. As our volunteers finish the remaining few items to research our editor, Dr Sue Clifford, has compiled a draft gazetteer of schools and schooling and also begun work on a contextual introduction and commentary.

Work will now focus on refining the text in preparation for publication by the Berkshire Record Society, which we hope will be in 2018.

Accreditation

Meeting the new standard required by The National Archives of places of deposit is an important task for the Record Office to achieve. Although accreditation is largely an internal process, the customer benefits should be twofold: firstly, that we maintain our licence to hold certain public and legal records; and secondly, that we have attained a comprehensive specification for delivering good customer service.

We began preparing for the process with an audit of policies, procedures and other information we produce. We then took the opportunity to refresh our aims, and set the Office on a clear direction to share its expertise, to be relevant to the communities we serve, and to be sustainable as it does so.

By the year's end, we had begun a first draft of the accreditation application, with the intention of submitting later in 2016.

With Thanks to Our Staff

Thanks, as ever, are due to everyone who has worked here during the year. None of the foregoing achievements would have been possible without them. Everyone is valued, and everyone plays a part.

I am sure that staff were pleased to enjoy a more stable 12 months in terms of turnover. There were still a few things to tie up from the previous year, but they were in hand as April began. We completed the management restructure by promoting Ellie Thorne to Senior Archivist in charge of collections, and the subsequent vacancy was filled by our new Archivist, Rosie Everitt.

We also lost one member of staff: Cate Metheringham left her post as Archives Assistant to help Guide Dogs for the Blind with their fundraising campaigns. Her job was filled internally, by Margaret Lord, who moved from a part-time role to work full-time. This left vacant a post of Searchroom Assistant, which remained open at the year's close pending future budget discussions. We have been fortunate that Jane Powell has been able to provide an extended period of casual cover.

Various staff also undertook extra-curricular duties to benefit the Office and raise awareness of its work. I was appointed as a visiting research fellow in the University of Reading's History Department; Sue Hourigan worked as an assessor for the Archives and Records Association conservation course; and Lisa Spurrier sat on the editorial committee of the journal *Berkshire Old and New*.

And with Thanks to Our Volunteers

As well as our schools project volunteers, we were once again fortunate to have a great amount of time donated by friends of the Office.

This year's 'Discovering Archives' undergraduates were joined by two more student volunteers, Halina Bartoszewska and Ben Gibson. Halina listed additional deposits from Progress Theatre, Reading; Ben listed a collection of miscellaneous theatre programmes as well as some hotel inventories from a large collection of land agent's records.

Our teams from the Berkshire Women's Institutes and Wokingham Theatre continued their regular Wednesday work-ins to provide conservation support. This year they have become practised in sellotape removal, gluing in loose items, and even a little bookbinding, as well as replacing damaged covers on a range of Berkshire County Council clerk's files. Please let me acknowledge their help:

Greta Dixon, Marion Searle, Ann Knee-Robinson, Wendy Backhouse, Eve Collinge, Christina McCann, Susan Main-Morris, Sue Baughan and Francesca Heffernan.

We also have a new volunteer in collections care: my predecessor, Peter Durrant. Peter was determined to learn book conservation after he retired and now spends each Monday engaged in the task. He began by rebinding some of our library books, moved onto 20th century registers of electors, and then worked on a variety of older archives with cloth, leather and even vellum covers.



Our newest volunteer at work

I would like to express our thanks to all our volunteers for giving their time, and to helping us complete work that would not otherwise be done.

Key Numbers

Visitors and enquiries

Visitors to the search room	2582
Written and telephone enquiries	4795
Documents produced	5739
Microforms consulted	6470
Copies supplied	6347
Visits to online resources	72170
Talks and visits: number	29
Talks and visits: attendance	724

Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	247
Accessions received: volume	8.981m ³
Catalogues completed: volume	5.099m ³
Accessions catalogued: number	123
Items catalogued	2510

Conservation and preservation

First aid	363
Tipping-in	176
Sewing	460
Packaging	80
Encapsulation	241