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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The Berkshire Record Office

Annual Report

For 2016-2017

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

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Introduction

We can look back on the last 12 months as a special year. It will be one that is difficult to follow.

Last year's report trailed the three values we introduced to inform our work: showing relevance, sharing our expertise, and being cost-effective. The following pages demonstrate how we have begun to put these values into practice. We also outlined how we hoped to create a prestigious 'brand' to engage the public with our collections; what we did not realise then was how quickly we would have opportunities to do so.

It is not every year that our collections form a key part of an international art exhibition; not every year that we convince three separate funders that we are worth supporting with five figure grants; and not every year that we come out of a new process of national validation so well.

Archives service accreditation was that process. And, just as the year was coming to an end, we discovered that we had met its standards. For the Office, this is probably the most celebratory aspect in this report. Not only did it mean we remain 'legal' - we are fulfilling our statutory duties and our contract with the six Berkshire districts - but also we gained recognition from our peers that we are doing a good job.

'Applaud' is the word that I remember most from the accreditation assessment comments. That is a really heartening word to use. We were applauded for the things that we have done but also for being ready to do more things worthy of applause.

It is sometimes difficult in a continuum of planning, monitoring and reporting to pause and reflect on where we are. But this report seems to merit the briefest of pauses. In that pause we should all congratulate each other for what we have achieved. We all help set the tone for how Berkshire's archive service works and the following pages document what is very much a group effort.

There will, of course, be no resting on laurels. We have another round of excellent customer satisfaction scores to defend; we have newly-funded projects to deliver; we have more targets to be met. And we follow a year that was special. But we do so with applause as our encouragement.

Mark Stevens
County Archivist
June 2017

Welcoming Visitors and Enquirers

While this was a fallow year for results from the national survey of visitors - the latest of which was carried out towards year end - we did receive results from the 2015 survey of remote users.

These were exceptionally good. We recorded 100% satisfaction with the quality, clarity and promptness of our responses to enquiries and with our services overall to enquirers. Additionally, some 95% of visitors to our website were happy with its navigation and content. By the time we compared these results with those from other local authority archives we were hard pressed to find anyone with happier customers. This was a wonderful outcome for staff and just reward for their work. We remain, though, keen to maintain these results and already have a shopping list of potential improvements.

The first of those to be completed was a file-sharing account, which allows us to send images electronically to customers. This saves them money and allows overseas orders to be fulfilled in a fraction of the time it used to take to post them. Towards the end of the year we also began discussions about providing a secure credit card payment system and we hope to make progress on this next year.

The visitor experience

Brilliant, helpful staff

I visit a lot of Record Offices across the country and this is the best I have experienced

I honesty did not expect so much help

The service offered at Berkshire is the best I have come across

Great facilities - great staff - knowledgeable and helpful

The Berkshire RO is the best that I have EVER experienced in all my ancestry research

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
- 99% of all copies were supplied within 10 working days
- 100% of original documents were produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

For the Online Customer

The principal new piece of web content was a virtual version of the 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' exhibition staged at the Office in the winter of 2015. We were very pleased to be able to include not only our material relating to the prison, but also images of the various Wildean items held by Special Collections at the University of Reading, to whom thanks is due for their permission.

We continued to post our monthly highlights. This year's included early performances in Berkshire of Shakespeare's play; the Victorian fad for photographing 'ghosts'; Temperance inspiration for anyone wishing to cut their alcohol intake; and the National Lottery, Georgian style. Lisa Spurrier also maintained the daily home front news on the First World War blog for another year.



Spooky goings on at Bisham Abbey

In the autumn we agreed terms with Ancestry to digitise our set of electoral registers spanning 1839-1965. The digitisation was complete by year end and Ancestry had begun the process of producing an index of their contents. Once

available, this new commercial partnership will provide worldwide access to our first pay-per-view online resource. It is hoped that the registers will be live by autumn 2017.

Also towards the year end we discovered that the software used to build our website would no longer be available to us. We began to draft a tender document to commission a new site. We hope to use open source software and to make the site as portable as possible should the same thing happen in future.

Engaging the Curious

The last twelve months have seen us deliver probably the broadest range of community events since the Office opened in 1948. Much of this arose from either heightened awareness about our collections or from our attempts to deliver services for those interested in archive or conservation skills.

Of course, there was the normal programme of group talks and visits. Two were traditional lectures on the sources we hold and how to use us - for West Berkshire Museum and for Arborfield Local History Society respectively; the rest were subject based and reflected many hours of research by individual staff. Wokingham U3A, the Bracknell branch of the Berkshire Family History Society, Henley Historical and Archaeological Society and the Waltham St Lawrence Wednesday Club all heard about Victorian Broadmoor; while 'Life in the Victorian Asylum', based on Fair Mile Hospital, was delivered to students at Wrexham Glyndwr University. Our talk on caring for old documents at home was given at Reading Library, Inkpen and Kintbury Family History Society and Wargrave Local Historical Society, while the Second World War evacuation scheme talk was presented at Wokingham Library. Finally, a new talk had its debut: the history of Reading Prison, given at Reading Library and to the Reading branch of the National Trust.

The Reading-Dusseldorf Society, Wokingham Society and Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives all had bespoke tours of the Office, while the Local History Committee from Anhui Province became our latest visitors from China. This year also saw us begin to offer bookable 'behind-the-scenes' tours, for individual members of the public interested in seeing the strongrooms and the work of the conservation studio. We held three during the year: there is a very high level of enjoyment for those attending. We propose to continue offering these tours in future.

We took part in three open day events. These were the annual Heritage Open Days, where once again our tour guests had the opportunity of hearing a talk from Berkshire Family History Society experts; the West Berkshire Heritage Roadshow at West Berkshire Museum; and a public and charitable sector careers fair at the University of Reading. We also held a number of educational events for the university's students: hosting the Department of History's 'Discovering Archives and

Collections' module once more; speaking to the history undergraduates about sources for their dissertations; and hosting a 'hands-on' session for early modern students in the Department of English Literature. The Berkshire History Prize, awarded to the history undergraduate with the best dissertation using local sources, went to Alexander Fenn for 'Reading During World War Two'.



At the West Berkshire Heritage roadshow

Significantly, we also broadened our lifelong learning educational offer. Having piloted sessions in collections care and reading old handwriting (the latter with the help of postdoctoral staff at the University of Oxford), we introduced these as income-generating activities during the year. Like the behind-the-scenes tours, these sessions received a small but very enthusiastic audience. By year end we had run two further handwriting sessions and two on collections care. One of the collections care sessions was held at West Berkshire Museum, as was another practical workshop on picture mounting. The whole experience has been very positive and we will also carry on offering these sessions in the coming year.

We published our usual quarterly newsletter, *The Berkshire Echo* - this year themed on Irish internees in the prison; public assistance and the welfare state; Anglo-Saxon Berkshire; and the Clewer House of Mercy - and maintained our regular reports in circulations of the county historical societies. A short piece on Broadmoor was also published in *Who Do You Think You Are?* magazine. Finally, we had local press interest in our purchase of some Wokingham medieval deeds - supported financially by the Wokingham Society - and for the BBC First World War project, which included broadcast stories about the gaol internees, Bisham Abbey and 'Operation Grammophone', the county's invasion response plan.

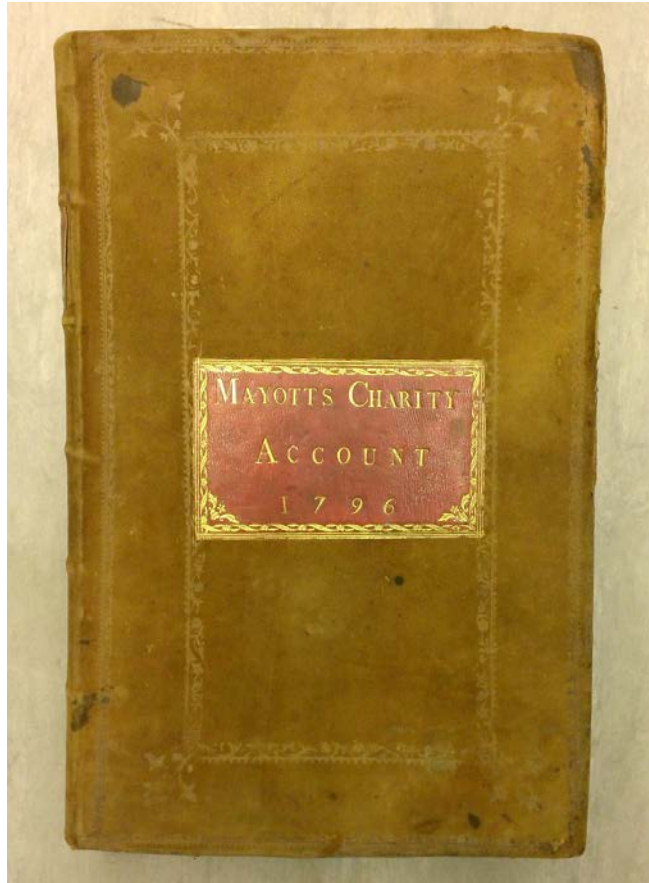


Learning to read early modern handwriting

Developing Collections

Over forty years since North Berkshire was lost to the administrative county of Oxfordshire it remains very much a part of our collections. Proving that history has little interest in local government reorganisation, many of this year's notable additions came from the county's ancient and extended boundary.

This was due in part to a large deposit from Challenors, the longstanding Abingdon solicitors. It included several interesting accumulations, many from public bodies which generations of Challenors had clerked. Several 'missing' collections were included, such as the Abingdon Division coroners and petty sessions records and the archive of the Abingdon Joint Isolation Hospital (now Abingdon Community Hospital). Additional material was also transferred for Abingdon Borough and Rural District Council, Abingdon Workhouse, and the Abingdon Municipal Charities; while long-abandoned client papers included a survey of Lambourn in 1831.



One of the Challenor documents: the accounts of Robert Mayott's charity for schooling poor children of Abingdon

This focus on official collections, in contrast to last year, was also felt in bulk as the new '20 year rule' began to hit the public records sector. A large quantity of recent registers was received from Reading Magistrates Court, while the closure of the Newbury Court led to the transfer of all remaining records from the early 20th century onwards still held there. Broadmoor also delivered a more modern tranche of patient records, while simultaneously finding another boxful of badly damp-damaged Victorian files - about which we will need to speak to the Wellcome Trust about potential funding for repair.

Timely deposits were received too for current projects - the Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation, who found a small handful of original application files for entry to the Orphan Asylum, and the National Trust estate at Coleshill, who discovered a series of 19th century rentals. The other significant charitable transfer was that of the surviving archive of Hemdean House School in Caversham, which closed its senior school during the year.



Hemdean House pupils and staff, late 19th c

Sizable private collections were also received from the estate of Michael Bayley, architect and co-founder of Maidenhead Civic Society and the Berkshire Society of Friends, the latter of which augments the excellent series of Quaker records already held here. Parochial matters - still the bedrock of any village history - were represented, amongst others, by the deposit of 19th century parish records for Bourton, Compton Beauchamp, Littleworth, Shrivenham and Maidenhead St Luke; and key records from the parish councils of Charvil, Hermitage, Leckhampstead and Winkfield.

Making the Collections Available

This year's star catalogue consisted of over 800 additions to the archive of the Community of St John Baptist, the Anglican order of nuns established in 1852 to run the Clewer House of Mercy for 'fallen women'. Cataloguing these additions began many years ago and it is wonderful to report that work is now complete.

The Community - now at Cuddeston, Oxfordshire - grew from its local origins to provide a national network of similar houses, convalescent homes, orphanages and missions. The sisters also took their work to India and the USA.



A ball game at the Pratt Memorial School, Kolkata, India in 1930; Clewer sisters are amongst those watching at the side

The archive is an incredibly rich resource that reflects not just a large religious order but also the growth of adult and children's social care in England and Wales from the mid-19th century onwards. Beside the wide range of residential support and education rooted in Clewer are records of similar work in Devon, Essex, Gloucester, Kent, Newport, Highgate and Soho - as well as material from the two overseas branches. It is very much a collection of national importance.

The reach of the House of Mercy can be contrasted with new collections for more specific local interests. The surviving archives of Yattendon Primary School were listed, as were those for Lambrook independent school in Winkfield. Community collections were represented by the Reading Guild of Artists, Reading Urban Wildlife Group and Maidenhead Drama Festival, while additional material from the Thames Valley Methodist Circuit covered a host of churches and chapels in Windsor, Maidenhead and Slough. Finally, over 100 further items from Newbury United Reformed Church were made available: spanning from the 18th to the 21st centuries and including resources for properties and membership.

We catalogued a small collection of personal papers for the Monck family, one-time owners of the Coley Park estate in which the Record Office sits, while our 'Discovering Archives and Collections' volunteers from the University of Reading made some initial progress with a large number of letters kept by Oliver Roskill, resident of Beech Hill and one of the world's first management consultants. We were also pleased to present various 19th century ephemera from one of Berkshire's

great collectors: Llewellyn Treacher, chair of Twyford Parish Council and a noted antiquarian. Although Treacher's legacy was dispersed after his death the whole is gradually finding its way back into public collections. Our new batch includes the sort of things that do not survive elsewhere. If you have ever wondered how to adhere to the Ruscombe, Twyford and Hurst Sparrow Club's Victorian rules for shooting what is now a protected bird; if you want to relive the contested election for the Tilehurst parish surveyor in 1890; or if you fancy having a go at the 1820 song commemorating the appointment of Newbury's new chief magistrate - well then, Treacher's collection is for you.



Late Victorian handbill from the Treacher ephemera collection

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

Spreading the Impact of the Collections

Local books based on research in the Record Office included histories of the following places: Appleton, Cholsey, East Garston, Frilford, Pangbourne, Reading, Spencers Wood, Sunningwell, Thatcham, Twyford and Wokingham; while family history resources were published for Faringdon, Newbury, and Bradfield and Wokingham Unions. The Berkshire Record Society also published an edition of records of the Chilton Pond turnpike (which ran from Newbury across the Downs).

Further afield, a map of Coleshill featured in *The English Great House and its Setting*; a sale catalogue of Warfield Park in *The East India Company at Home*; a Great Seal of Henry VII in a Polish book about historian Aleksander Gieysztor; the Denchworth enclosure map in a French book on the same subject; and a map of Chennai, 1733 - dating to the period of Benyon governorship of the city forts - in *Own De Beauvoir!*, a book about the family's 19th century garden development in Hackney.

Broadmoor featured again through the publication of Kate Summerscale's *The Wicked Boy*. For her most recent book, the author of *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* made significant use of the Record Office to tell the story of a Victorian teenage murderer who later fought at Gallipoli.

A number of items were displayed as part of exhibitions. Images were provided for the new permanent displays at the Museum of English Rural Life, while Fair Mile case histories were used in information boards for Berkshire Autism. Loans of original material were made to St Luke's, Maidenhead, for the church's 150th anniversary; to Reading Museum, for their exhibition on railway travel; and to West Berkshire Museum, who incorporated church accounts showing payments for burying soldiers after the Battle of Newbury in the Civil War.

The impact of the Reading Prison archive is dealt with in detail below.

Caring for Collections

A lot of conservation time this year went into preparing some of our new skills-based learning sessions and to supervising the Reading Prison project. The remaining time was put, as usual, into a long annual list of minor repairs and incremental improvements.

The year's most intensive repair was to another of our memoranda books. This one was very small, almost certainly kept by William Paul, resident of Braywick, and dates from 1689-1692. As well as various payments relating to his estates it includes receipts for his work as a magistrate and high sheriff.

Special Projects

Reading Prison

A project to care, engage and spread impact: but of such impact that it is worthy of a section to itself. This is because the year included three substantial outputs relating to the old county gaol: our own exhibition 'Universities of Revolution', our Wellcome Trust project to preserve the prison archive; and 'Inside', the internationally acclaimed installation at the prison by national charity Artangel.

We began the year by commemorating Irishmen interned in the gaol after the Easter Rising 1916. For five months, Berkshire was home to some notable participants in the quest for Irish independence. They were brought together in one of the many institutions of internment subsequently known as 'Universities of Revolution' due to their role in teaching the nationalist cause. Our exhibition illustrated the story of the Rising, the regime of internment and those interned. We were delighted, as with previous prison exhibitions, to partner with the University of Reading's Department of English Literature and to include items from the University's Special Collections.



The now infamous 'Aliens and Irish' prison admission register, part of the exhibition

Interest in the collection was national and also crossed the Irish Sea. As well as local press coverage we featured in both *The Irish Post* and *The Guardian*. The exhibition launch was our civic reception, attended by the district mayors and chair, representatives from the Irish Embassy and with speeches from Anthony West, Vice Lord-Lieutenant, and Sir David Bell, Vice Chancellor of the University.

As 'Universities of Revolution' came to a close we began our work to preserve the prison archive. Jas Dhillon, our project conservator, worked from July until the year end to treat over 40 items either damaged or at risk of harm from further handling. These included three report books compiled by the visiting justices to the gaol between 1787 and 1920 and a series of admission books spanning from the 1880s to a similar date - including the severely damaged book that featured in last year's report. It is a pleasure to report that all the work is done: the prison archive is now safe for many future generations. This is an excellent legacy for the continued public interest in the collection.



Jas at work

This interest achieved its highest profile through our work with Artangel, whose mission to place modern art beyond traditional galleries brought them to the empty jail. As part of the 'Inside' installation we displayed three of the original architect's plans and around 30 individual pages showing Victorian and Edwardian

mugshots of Berkshire's 'habitual criminals', arranged side by side in one long display case that took up a whole wing on the ground floor.

The mugshots were a highlight in an exhibition that included work by numerous well-known writers and artists, and attracted reviews from Radio 4, the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph* and the *Guardian*, as well as in the *New York Post*. The installation itself was shortlisted for *Apollo* magazine's exhibition of the year, and many thousands of visitors from across the globe made the journey to see it and also to listen to readings of Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* that were staged in the old prison chapel. Thousands of people found archives in an unexpected place: it is unlikely that our collections have ever been so widely feted.

I had the pleasure too of delivering my prison history talk to a public audience within the chapel, while my media duties included speaking to BBC South and Meridian News and *The One Show* about the jail and Wilde's part in its story.

INSIDE
ARTISTS AND WRITERS IN READING PRISON



THE HISTORY OF READING PRISON
24 NOVEMBER, 19.00–20.00

A talk by Berkshire County Archivist Mark Stevens. For many people, Reading Gaol has an almost mythic quality, but behind the myth there is a harsh reality. Stevens' talk will explore the history of the Prison from the Georgian period until its first closure in 1920, describe the separate system of 'hard labour, hard board and hard fare' that characterised the Victorian regime, take in Wilde and a couple of executions, and finish with Reading's little-known role in the Easter Rising.

TICKETS
£9, £7 concessions
Advance booking recommended:
artangel.org.uk/inside/#lectures

Tickets give access to the exhibition *Inside: Artists and Writers in Reading Prison* from 17.00 on the day of the lecture.

UNTIL 4 DECEMBER 2016
READING PRISON
FORBURY ROAD, READING
BERKSHIRE RG1 3HY
ARTANGEL.ORG.UK/INSIDE

Artangel  

Poster for the history talk in the prison chapel

Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century

Editorial work has continued throughout the year to prepare our volunteer research project for publication. The editor, Dr Sue Clifford, has completed a first draft of

the complete text and she and Peter Durrant are now well on the way to creating a final version for the printers. The book will be published by the Berkshire Record Society.

We are also pleased to report that our band of volunteers have agreed to work on a new project. This will build on our prison work by producing a volume based on surviving management records for the county gaols from 1786-1878, which is the period they were run by the Berkshire magistrates. The Berkshire Record Society has once again kindly agreed to publish the volume.

The Royal Merchant Navy School

During the year we received positive news about two further applications made for external funding. The first was that the Royal Merchant Navy Education Foundation had agreed to fund an archivist to catalogue their own archive.

The Foundation has a long history and an important role supporting British maritime trade. Formed in 1827 in the London docklands, it has since provided educational help to the families of merchant seamen. It moved to Bearwood in 1921, where it founded the school that bore its name, and which was latterly known as Bearwood College.



Register book for the Merchant Seamen's Orphan Asylum

The archive dates back to the Foundation's origins and includes biographical details of every child admitted to its care. Cataloguing work began in February and the project will form part of the Office's promotional work in 2017/18.

Coleshill Estate

Our second funding success came via one of North Berkshire's historic estates. Although Coleshill House - once one of England's finest 17th century homes - was lost to fire, both it and its Model Farm make the archive another of significance beyond the county boundary.

Because of this, the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust considered the collection worthy of investment. Their grant, incorporating monies from the William Delafield Trust, will allow us to appoint a conservator for 10 months to repair a wide variety of books, maps and papers. The project has also been designed to incorporate a volunteer element and give the postholder some experience of supervision. It will begin next year.



Fragments of a map of Great Coxwell, from the Coleshill estate archive

Accreditation

Last, but most certainly not least, this was the year that we submitted our application to become an accredited archives service. This is the peer award that shows we meet national standards for service delivery. The process of audit and drafting spanned 15 months: testament to the detailed accountability and reflection required of us. Some 15,000 words later, we were absolutely delighted when the year ended with the news that we had been successful. Indeed, the awarding panel described us as a 'well-managed and effective service', which is high praise indeed.

In practical terms, this success has two benefits. The first is that we have been re-appointed as a 'place of deposit' under statute for public, manorial and tithe records - key parts of the collections. The second is that we are now the proud owners of an important quality mark that will be noticed by grant-giving bodies.



Our new, additional logo

With Thanks to Our Staff

Accreditation is just one acknowledgement of the staff and their efforts. The Record Office could not be 'effective' without them. Periods of this year have been especially demanding on frontline staff, too, as there was a significant period of time when we were a whole person down.

That person was archivist Rosie Everitt, who left us for a promotion opportunity at Imperial College. As the year ended we also said goodbye to Alison Pritchard, who had looked after our finances, post, diaries and all manner of administrative necessities for over 12 years. Although not a public figure, Alison was well-known within the Office as the person 'who will know what to do'; we are bereft but wish her a very happy and long retirement.

In contrast, we said hello to our two current project people during the year: Jas, who joined us straight from the conservation course at Camberwell College of Arts, and Louise Woof, who joined from Strathclyde University to become archivist for the Royal Merchant Navy School project.

As usual, staff gave up some of their time for a variety of local and professional interests. I continued as a visiting research fellow in the University of Reading's History Department and was also appointed as a Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society; Sue Hourigan carried on as assessor for the Archives and Records Association conservation course; Lisa Spurrier sat on the editorial committee of the journal *Berkshire Old and New*; and Ellie Thorne was elected to the council of the Berkshire Record Society.

And with Thanks to Our Volunteers

The volunteers are another important part of being effective. We are consistently grateful and appreciative for all the time they donate to us.

This year's 'Discovering Archives' undergraduates were Jodie Larkin and Rosie Marsden, who were here in October and November. Other student volunteers interested in a career in archives were: Jaclyn Eckersley, who listed a collection of sale catalogues; Thomas Clarke, who did similar work for a collection of Sunninghill Park deeds; Lillie Ryan, who was responsible for the additions to the Reading Guild of Artists archive; and Matt Pearson, who sorted a new collection from Dolton and Son, agricultural merchants in Hermitage.

Peter Durrant continued to give up his Mondays for book conservation work. His most notable project over the past year was guarding and resewing an 18th century parish register for Ashbury before replacing it within its original cover: a complex and skilled piece of work which is by no means easy to undertake. And the teams from the Berkshire Women's Institutes and Wokingham Theatre spent another year on their Wednesday morning work-ins, helping to sew, remove sellotape and affix loose papers. Thanks for this are due to: Wendy Backhouse, Eva Collinge, Greta Dixon, Francesca Heffernan, Ann Knee-Robinson, Christina McCann, Susan Main-Morris and Marion Searle.



The WI Wednesday team at work

The research team for the schools gazetteer comprised Diana Barker, David Cliffe, Ewart Davies, Jan and Rob Goddard, Iris Hunt, Jill Hutchinson and Glennis Wade; while Judith Attar has been transcribing an 18th century Reading alderman's record of meetings.

I would like to express our thanks to all our volunteers for making a difference to what we can achieve in the course of any year.

Key Numbers

Visitors and enquiries

Visitors to the search room	2380
Written and telephone enquiries	4793
Documents produced	5911
Microforms consulted	6536
Copies supplied	6357
Visits to online resources	70126
Talks and visits: number	35
Talks and visits: attendance	716

Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	231
Accessions received: volume	9.733m ³
Catalogues completed: volume	2.658m ³
Accessions catalogued: number	177
Items catalogued	1987

Conservation and preservation

First aid	283
Tipping-in	159
Sewing	457
Packaging	168
Encapsulation	167

Staff resources

Headcount of permanent staff	18
Number of full-time equivalent posts	13.95
Headcount of project staff	2