



# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

## ***The Berkshire Record Office***

### **Annual Report**

***For 2021-2022***

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

T 0118 937 5132      [arch@reading.gov.uk](mailto:arch@reading.gov.uk)  
F 0118 937 5131      [www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk](http://www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk)

Berkshire Record Office, 9 Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF





*A significant investment: after 21 years of service by our old air-conditioning chiller, a new one (left) arrives to replace it (see page 20)*

## Introduction

Looking back through the last year has been a surprisingly positive experience. Despite having only two months free from pandemic restrictions, the annual report reads like a typical twelve.

In large part this is testament to the staff, who have continued helping people to the maximum possible but with the minimum of fuss. They are natural practitioners of the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' spirit. I remain hugely grateful to them for providing seamless care throughout changing rules and procedures.

We have stayed safe and kept our visitors safe. That feels the most important thing and I am very pleased about it. Of course, we are hardly alone in this achievement - so many businesses and services have gone above and beyond in these two years - but considering how many times something could have gone wrong, it is reassuring to note that it never did.

Most things in the post-pandemic world remain as before it. The notable change is the acceleration towards delivering content online more so than in person. At some point, cultural venues will find that online growth plateaus and there is a new equilibrium with the face-to-face experience; in the meantime, we seek to meet demand.

So online content is a sign that we have grown - even while conditions have been unfavourable. And there is more, besides, with plenty of public engagement, exciting new collections to look after, and a couple of new projects to start.

It is in that spirit of growth that this year's report has been written. We look forward to the coming year with confidence. And we very much hope too that all twelve months are typical.

Mark Stevens  
County Archivist  
June 2022

## Welcoming Visitors and Enquirers

After three lockdowns in the previous twelve months, it was lovely to reopen to visitors again from 13 April and even better, to maintain that opening throughout the year.

Restrictions remained: there were masks, test and trace, cleaning and social distancing, all of which made visits more cumbersome for customers and staff than we would like. The staff amended these 'covid-safe' procedures regularly as guidance changed. But people came once more to see real things and research them. And hurrah for that.

We also had a completely 'normal' year for remote enquiries, with staff managing their restricted onsite time brilliantly to maintain a speedy and personal service. Their success was measured in this year's UK distance survey of archive users, which was run by the Institute of Public Finance. We were delighted that 98% of our users rated our overall service as good or very good, which is a truly splendid result considering the challenges staff faced. Appreciation for their work can be found in the many positive comments received, a few of which are included below.

### The customer experience

*Amazing customer service!*

Wow, thank you so much. I was informed that you would be very helpful and you certainly have not disappointed.

*As long as you have people like [x] working at the centre you don't need any more improvements to the system*

Really helpful and efficient service and staff that went above and beyond

*It is a remarkable resource - one of the few Berkshire institutions left. We are very lucky to have it - long may it last*

One improvement that customers wanted to see was an online payment portal. This had been delayed by lockdown, so we were delighted to finally launch it in October. We have already felt the relief of international customers, who are now

able to pay at a sociable hour in their time zones, and hopefully this will encourage more people to take advantage of our research and copy services.

We also had a soft launch for the Archives Card. Visitors can replace their old County Archives Research Network cards and register for the new one, which allows easy access to many archives around the UK.

Our customer guarantees stood as follows:

- 91% of visitors got their first choice of visit time
- 99% of written enquiries were answered within 5 working days
- 99% of all copies were supplied within 10 working days

## Engaging the Curious

Face-to-face engagement for groups remained severely restricted. Only in the last few months did this change. Instead, activities built on the online content we had delivered during lockdowns.

Social media content continued to grow. We made over 750 posts across three platforms: Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. We have 1600 Twitter followers, 1300 Facebook friends and 300 Instagram followers and many of these supporters engage actively with our content by sharing or reposting.

The reach of the most popular posts goes far beyond those numbers. And, although the majority of our content is collections-based, the greatest number of shares were for glimpses into our daily life: helping colleagues in records management complete a move of 30,000 boxes; re-staging the ‘Belle in the library’ scene from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*; and a local squirrel peering in the front door.



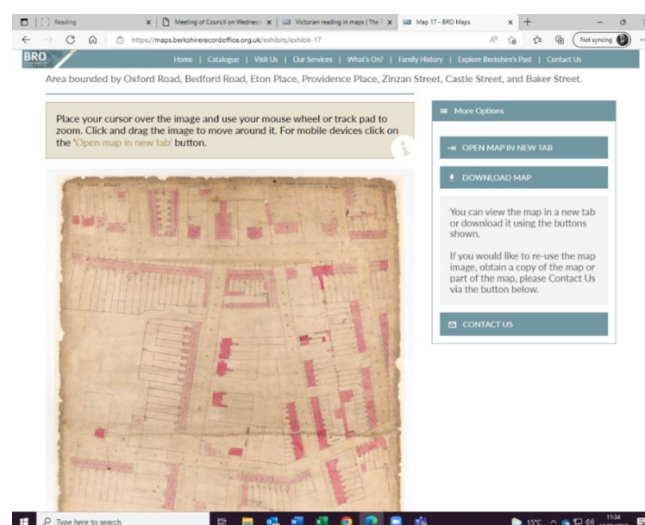
*‘We must go deep into the forest, Bambi - follow me...’*

We added to our range of YouTube videos. We made a short about the morning routine before we open the door. For the Heritage Open Days, Ivone baked a Berkshire Pie (pork, sugared apples, onions and seasoning) and recorded a ‘how-to’ video for anyone tempted to do the same.

Nearly all our talks were delivered online. ‘Life in the Victorian Asylum’ was given to public audiences for Phyllis Court in Henley-on-Thames, the Berkshire Family History Society and Wokingham Libraries; the latter also hosted our Broadmoor talk, as did the Friends of Reading Museum. ‘A Brief History of Reading Gaol’ featured at virtual events for Bridge House Nursing Home, Twyford, the History of Reading Society, Woodley U3A and the Woodstock Society, while it was also our first post-pandemic talk in-person, kindly hosted by the Woodley Over 55s Club. We also contributed to a live panel event to discuss Oscar Wilde, held after one performance at Reading Rep of *Dorian*, the stage adaptation of Wilde’s novel.

The enforced homeworking through lockdowns had one happy outcome: the input of many more entries into our online catalogue. This is a great example of how staff worked positively in a difficult situation to continue making a difference. There are now fewer than 150 of our catalogues available only onsite. Our catalogue software provider also resolved the problem that stopped data appearing in Google searches, boosting the prospect of people finding us by chance.

Two image collections went online during the year. Firstly, our tithe map collection - those Victorian property surveys drawn when tithe payments were abolished. Such maps exist for around 85% of Berkshire parishes. Some years ago the collection was scanned and we are delighted to say that the images have now been attached to their catalogue entries and made freely available. Secondly, thanks to funding from Reading’s High Street Heritage Action Zone grant from Historic England, we scanned large scale maps of the town created in 1853 by its Board of Health. A total of 29 maps were digitised and made available on our website at [BRO Maps \(berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk\)](https://berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk).



Reading Board of Health maps online

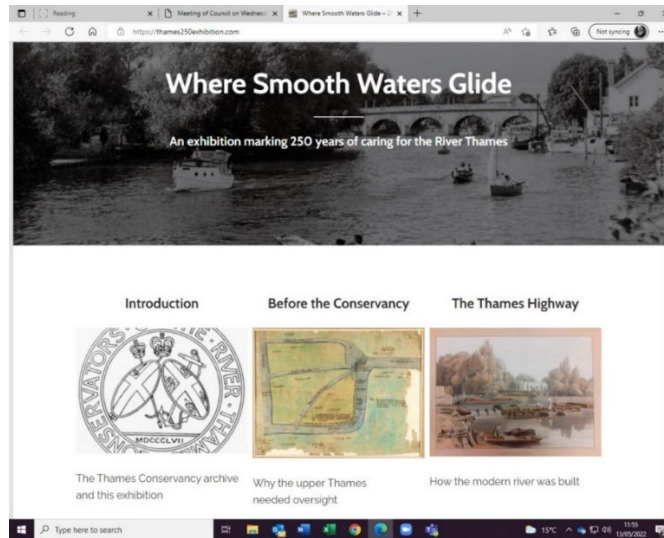
The website also gained a gallery of items relating to Reading Abbey. This was created for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the abbey's founding. Though the abbey formulary, purchased around a decade ago, is our sole item from the monks' own archive, the interaction between town and religious house is seen in a number of other documents, starting with the 1254 agreement that demarcated who had rights to what income from the market and contested properties. The gallery also includes the will of an abbey baker; the gift of almshouses from one of the abbey stewards, the appropriately nick-named John A'Larder; and papers relating to an early 16<sup>th</sup> century dispute when the abbot was accused of failing to keep order in the town.



*Reading Abbey pages*

The most promoted piece of online content was the Thames exhibition, which was curated for our Thames Conservancy cataloguing project. This can be found at [Where Smooth Waters Glide - 250 years of caring for the River Thames \(thames250exhibition.com\)](http://thames250exhibition.com). The exhibition marked both the conclusion of our project and the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first meeting of the Thames Navigation Commission, which was the body that built the river as a Georgian superhighway.

So much literary and artistic work about the Thames is concerned with its final element: the tidal stretch that flows through London and out into the North Sea. Yet the non-tidal river is the longer part and used by hundreds of thousands of people every year for walking, boating, fishing and swimming. Our exhibition sought to acknowledge the non-tidal Thames and reaffirm its value. There are pages about leisure use, floods, pollution and the Thames in wartime. There is also detail about the works undertaken by the Navigation and the Conservancy to build that superhighway, and about the people who looked after it.



Our Thames 250 exhibition

The exhibition was picked up by local media and I spent a morning at Caversham Lock for a piece by ITV Meridian. We also featured in the national magazine *Waterways World*. Radio Berkshire highlighted the Board of Health maps and used us for a piece on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Broadmoor Hospital sirens.

Finally, online publication has consumed our newsletter. *The Berkshire Echo*, a quarterly of nearly 30 years' vintage, was retired honourably in favour of a monthly e-bulletin comprised of updates from the website. The *Echo* bowed out celebrating the Thames exhibition, Reading Abbey and food - the latter being the theme of this year's Heritage Open Days. The e-bulletin began in February and is circulated to all subscribers who sign up via our website. The first issues have featured the Royal Berkshire Hospital, knitting, and Belgian refugees from the First World War.



We didn't quite make the hundred - a page from the 97<sup>th</sup>, and last edition of the Berkshire Echo



Learning support resumed in a mix of face-to-face and remote sessions. I delivered a seminar on grant funding to the University College London MA archives students, while for the University of Reading, we spoke to the history undergraduates about dissertation sources, to history MA students about how the office works and creating popular history, and to a doctoral students' workshop about gaps in the archives. We hosted our usual two Reading students for the undergraduates' 'discovering archives and collections' module. This year the students worked on the Reading-Dusseldorf Association archive.

## Developing Collections

Encouragingly, offers of material quickly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The most significant collections received are surely the archives of two Anglican religious communities, both of which had charitable reaches spanning the globe. They are the Community of St John Baptist (CSJB) and the Community of Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd (CJGS). For most of its life, the CSJB was based in Hatch Lane, Clewer. The CJGS had a more nomadic existence until it shared quarters with the CSJB in 1996. Now, the few remaining sisters in both orders have entered sheltered accommodation and ended their work.

We already have archives from both communities and the latest deposits complete the transfer of surviving material. Their records are of great importance for the history of welfare around the world; the CSJB archive, in particular, is a superb resource and a wonderful legacy for what the community achieved.

Their history began in Clewer, in 1849, after the establishment of a House of Mercy to care for 'fallen women'. These women were not necessarily sex workers but were at risk of exploitation or abuse due to their position or surroundings. The house's driving force was Mrs Mariquita Tennant, a well-to-do Spanish exile and widow of an Anglican priest. Mrs Tennant's success was such that she soon required help, and the CSJB was created in 1852 to run the house and later, its extended works. The order's first Mother Superior was Harriet Monsell, an Irish aristocrat and follower of the Anglo-Catholic Oxford Movement.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were a range of institutions in and around the Clewer complex, each reflecting the different aspects of social work developed by the sisters. Alongside the House of Mercy, there were short and long-stay rest homes for the elderly, orphanages for boys and girls, elementary and secondary schools, and a teacher training college.



*Probably the infirmary at St Lucy's Home, Gloucester, a girls' home run by the Clewer Sisters, late 19<sup>th</sup> century*

This range of help was taken further, first into other areas in the UK and then overseas. The UK institutions included several other Houses of Mercy, the Pimlico House of Refuge, and the House of Charity and Mission Home in Soho. Substantial, similar works were instituted in Barbados, India and the USA.



*A group of girls with sitars at the St Elizabeth Mission School, run by the Clewer Sisters in Kolkata, India, 1930s*

The CJGS had its first base in Wantage, where it was founded in 1920. Its core mission was education. A principal school, St Gabriel's, moved to Newbury in 1942 and became settled at Sandford Priory. Although working on a smaller scale than the CSJB, and somewhat peripatetically, the sisters forged substantial works in Borneo, where they ran a school, a hospital and a nurses' training centre; and in Guyana, where they ran a mixed school, girls' hostel and a communion wafer bakery.

The latest deposits for both communities include personal records of the sisters, the records of both orders' executive bodies, and numerous items from their overseas works. As the existing deposits are already comprehensively catalogued, we hope to fit in the new material as part of our usual tasks.

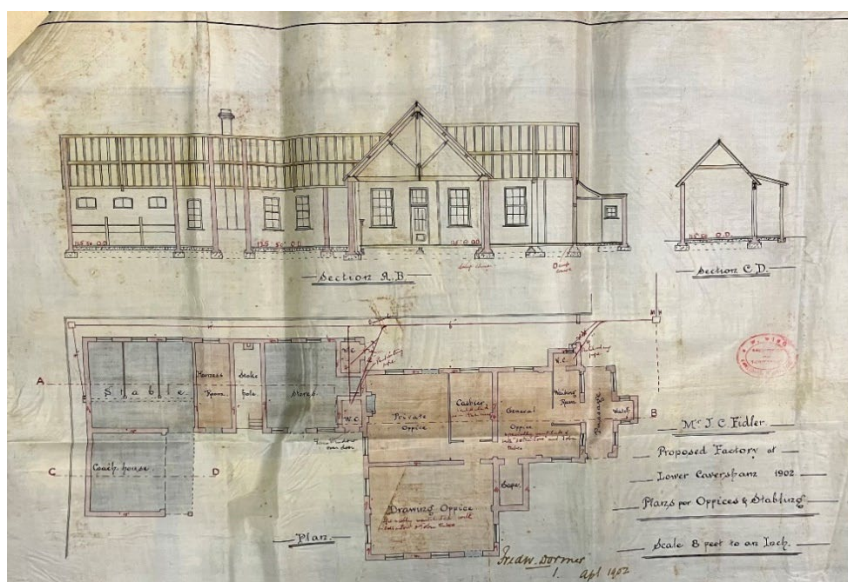
Health, welfare and education featured in other new arrivals too. We had a further tranche of Broadmoor patient files, a Victorian admissions register for Hurst Primary School, and early 20<sup>th</sup> century managers' minutes for Wraysbury Council School. Three Georgian volumes were discovered for the parish of West Hendred, including accounts of the poor law overseers and the vestry minutes. The estate of Maureen Pointer, a midwife from Caversham, donated her registers of cases from the 1960s and 1970s. And we received a cache of material from King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor, including the written record of its construction, 1905-1909, and many photographs of subsequent events.



*Aftermath of a fire: salvaged equipment outside King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor, April 1928; one of the fire brigade's hoses can be seen running across the grass*

Increasingly, modern items of public administration arrive in electronic form. This year we became the first local archives in England and Wales to begin accepting coroners' records electronically, after the transfer of some 6GB of inquest files for 2020. Council agenda papers, minutes and electoral registers are also now being received routinely as data files.

Other public bodies were represented by the parish councils of Cold Ash and Midgham, and by a clutch of publications from the National Transport Research Laboratory in Crowthorne. The move of Reading's Records Management Unit resulted in a physically large transfer: a mass of drainage plans for the old borough, incorporating what appears to be the planning archive for the old Caversham Urban District Council until its abolition in 1911. There were also architects' plans for structures built by the County Borough of Reading and Berkshire County Council, detailed plans of the town's inner distribution road and a host of developmental planning records. The total is almost certainly as much of Reading's planning records as still survive in their original form.



*Drainage plan for offices at Samuel Elliott and Sons (Reading) Ltd, Caversham, 1902*

Buildings and places also featured in records of land use and property. We gained more material for the Wise family, farmers of Wokefield, who featured in last year's report. Papers arrived relating to Woolhampton House (now Elstree School), when it was owned by the sugar-importing Blyth family. From the Reeves family of Farnborough and West Hendred came a series of 19<sup>th</sup> century field and harvest books. We purchased an 1874 conveyance of Farley Hill, Swallowfield, and, via Wallingford Museum, received a number of 18<sup>th</sup> century deed bundles for properties in the town.

Place was additionally reflected in material relating to 1980s activism at Greenham Common. As with our existing, similar, collection these came from a local resident

who provided support to protestors at the Women's Peace Camp. The new deposit includes a personal Peace Camp collection, some earlier papers from the Newbury Campaign against Cruise Missiles, and the post-airbase Commons Again campaign, which sought to re-establish rights of access to the military areas. The new collections came with seed funding, kindly donated by campaign members, towards cataloguing all our Greenham Common collections.



*The beginnings of the Women's Peace Camp at Greenham Common, 1981*

Campaigning was too the focus of the Glebelands Association, Wokingham, a residents' group formed to oppose development; while community pursuits were reflected through the village halls of Beedon, Mortimer and Shaw cum Donnington. The Windsor Self-build Housing Association offered its archive, as did the Berkshire Historic Churches Trust, the Berkshire Archaeological Trust and Churches Together in Windsor.

Other local groups to make deposits included the Reading-Dusseldorf Association and Wokingham Theatre. Women's Institute branch records came in for Bisham, Greenham, Maidenhead, Mortimer, Theale, Twyford and Ruscombe, and Welford and Wickham. And two sporting collections were received: a large collection of programmes spanning decades of Maidenhead United Football Club, and a splendid early photographic album for the Reading Athletic Club.



*Reading Athletic Club's entrant triumphs (far right) in the 100m at the Maidenhead Conservative Club sports day, 1909*

We were delighted to receive additional papers from the Aldermaston Pottery. Sadly, Alan Caiger-Smith, founder of the pottery, died early in 2020. His family have carefully gathered many documents that help illustrate the pottery archive, including preparatory drawings for commissions and notes by Mr Caiger-Smith on glazes and pigments.

Business records came also from the firm of Huntley, Boorne and Stevens, tin box manufacturers of Reading. It was founded in 1846 by Joseph Huntley II and its principal business was making biscuit tins for Huntley and Palmers. Within the collection are the original partnership deed; photographs of the works, products and employees; and a wealth of papers spanning mostly from the Victorian period to the mid-twentieth century. Smaller business collections comprised workshop manuals by Autodata of Maidenhead, ICI paints ephemera from Dulux at Slough, and some Georgian records from Spenlove of Abingdon, brewers.



*The service-appropriate heritage range from Dulux, undated but early 21<sup>st</sup> century*

From the employee side came records from the Berkshire branch of NALGO, the 'white collar' local government union; the Reading TUC; the County Association of Trades Councils; and the Reading Centre for the Unemployed. People were represented also in those church service records that are so useful for family history: parish burials for Childrey from 1884, for Letcombe Regis from 1863, and for Sparsholt from 1865; Kingston Lisle baptisms from 1894 and burials from 1898; and West Challow baptisms from 1814 and burials from 1858; while early 20<sup>th</sup> century marriage registers were received from the two Methodist churches in Caversham.

More specific family papers included the detailed personal diary for 1919 of Harriet Loyd-Lindsay, Baroness Wantage; the journal of a walking holiday for Berkshire teachers through Nazi Germany in 1937; and a photograph album of mostly Thames views.



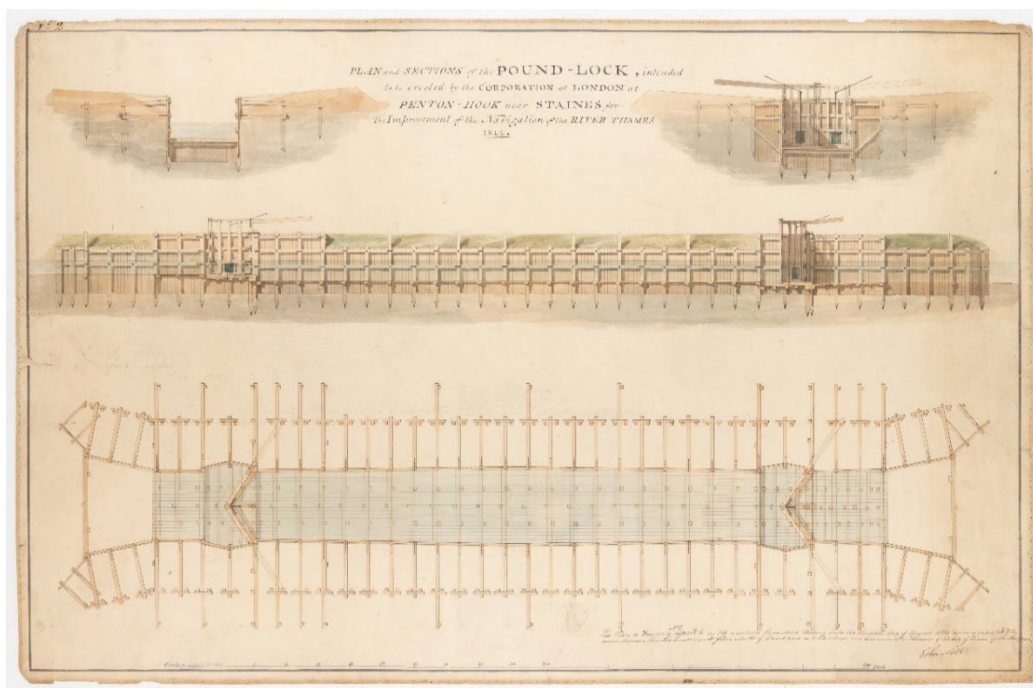
*Sonning bridge, as seen from the Oxfordshire bank, from the photograph album of Thames views, undated but possibly 1870s*

## **Making the Collections Available**

Cataloguing work has still been impacted by restricted staff numbers. Nevertheless, colleagues became highly efficient at using their allocated days in the office to take notes from collections and then edit these from home. The output figures demonstrate how well staff adapted to the challenge.

The largest catalogue resulted from our Thames Conservancy project. Some 1300 items were given detailed descriptions and a thorough context. The result is a pleasure to read and a revelation of the collection's richness. We are very grateful to Archives Revealed for funding the work.


It is now clear that the Conservancy archive is one of our star collections. Incorporating the records of the Thames Navigation Commission, as established in 1771, it spans over two hundred years of history for the upper, non-tidal river - originally defined as being from its source to Staines and later, to Teddington Lock. The collection has been discussed earlier in this report but it is worth repeating the broad range of building, maintenance and regulation of the river that was the Conservancy's responsibility and for which records survive.



*A plan of the pound lock at Penton Hook, Middlesex, 1814: originally the farthest lock upstream under control of the Corporation of London, it was passed to the Thames Conservancy in 1857*

Locks, weirs and ferries; water levels, pollution and land drainage; boating, bathing and fishing: every imaginable topic relating to the navigable Thames is included in the archive. We very much hope that the new catalogue inspires much more research into the river's history and how it informs the Thames Valley today.



**THAMES**  **CONSERVANCY.**

# BATHING.

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Conservators of the River Thames have appointed the following places in the River Thames where persons may bathe at the hours stated:-

<p>At the four streams, Oxford . . . . . Throughout the day.          At Long Bridges, Oxford . . . . . do.          In the weir pool at Sandford . . . . . do.          At the Corporation bathing place at Abingdon . . . . . do.          In the weir pools at Sutton Courtney . . . . . do.          In the Clifton weir stream . . . . . do.          At the Barley Mow, Gifford Bridge . . . . . do.          Below the weir at Day's lock, Little Wittenham . . . . . Before 9 a.m. and after 6 p.m.          At the Swan Inn, Shillingford Bridge . . . . . Throughout the day.          On the Oxen side at the upper end of Benson Lock island . . . . . Before 9 a.m. and after 6 p.m.          Wallingford bathing place at Chalmers Hole . . . . . Throughout the day.          In the weir pool at Goring . . . . . do.          At the back of the weir at Whitechurch . . . . . do.          At the back of Fry's island, Reading . . . . . Before 9 a.m. and after 6 p.m.          In backwater at Eyote below Barley Point . . . . . do.          At the back of the lock island at Shiplake . . . . . Throughout the day.          At Solomon's Hatch, Henley . . . . . do.          At the back of the lock island at Hurley . . . . . Before 9 a.m. and after 6 p.m.          In the weir stream at Marlow . . . . . Throughout the day.          In the Oldsey weir pool at Cookham . . . . . do.          In the mill stream at Clewer . . . . . do.          In the weir pool at Newey lock . . . . . do.</p>	<p>At the Albans bathing place, Eton . . . . . Throughout the day.          In the Cuckoo weir stream at Eton . . . . . do.          In the weir pool at Remsey . . . . . do.          In the backwater opposite Cooper's Hill College buildings, Egham . . . . . do.          At Askerwycke Point . . . . . Before 8 a.m. and after 9 p.m.          From towpath immediately below Stone Eyot . . . . . do.          From the centre of Church Island, Staines, to Wheatheaf and Figeons Lane . . . . . Throughout the day.          In the backwater at Penton Hook from the new weir to the mouth of the Abbey River . . . . . do.          In the backwater at Shepperton, from the tumbling bay to and including Denton's bathing place . . . . . do.          In the backwater at Sunbury between the tumbling bay and the weir . . . . . do.          At the back of Platt's Eyot, Hampton . . . . . Before 8 a.m. and after 9 p.m.          In the backwater below Molesey weir before 8 a.m. and after 9 p.m. during June, July and August, and before 8 a.m. and after 8 p.m. during remainder of year . . . . . do.          At Steven's Eyot, Kingston . . . . . do.          At the back of the Trow lock, Toddington . . . . . Throughout the day.</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**NOTICE is also hereby given** that bathing is **ENTIRELY PROHIBITED** at the following places:-

<p>In any of the locks or lock cuts or from the weirs.          In the pool behind the lockworks at Ebbey.          From the towpath between Marlow lock and Bennet End.          From the towpath between the upper end of the Varnish works and Egham Six Weirs.          From Short Lane to a point 200 yards below Laleham Ferry.          From the danger board above Chertsey lock to Chertsey Bridge.          From the Boat House above Shepperton Range to Green Lane.</p>	<p>From the lower side of Dockett Point to the lower side of Manor House, near Shepperton.          From Halliford Point to the site of Coway Stakes.          From Walton Bridge to 200 yards below Walton Wharf.          From Sunbury weir to the Cherry Orchard.          From the Molesey Rowing Club's boat-house to the Pavilion, Hampton Court.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In all other parts of the River bathing is **PROHIBITED** between the hours of 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. during the months of June, July and August, and between the hours of 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. during the remaining months of the year, except in rowing costume in the River above Molesey Lock.

Any persons Bathing in a place where or between any hours when bathing is prohibited, or bathing without proper dress or drawers, render themselves liable under the provisions of the Thames Bye-laws 1898 to prosecution and a penalty not exceeding £10.

By Order, **R. PHILIPSON,**  
Secretary.

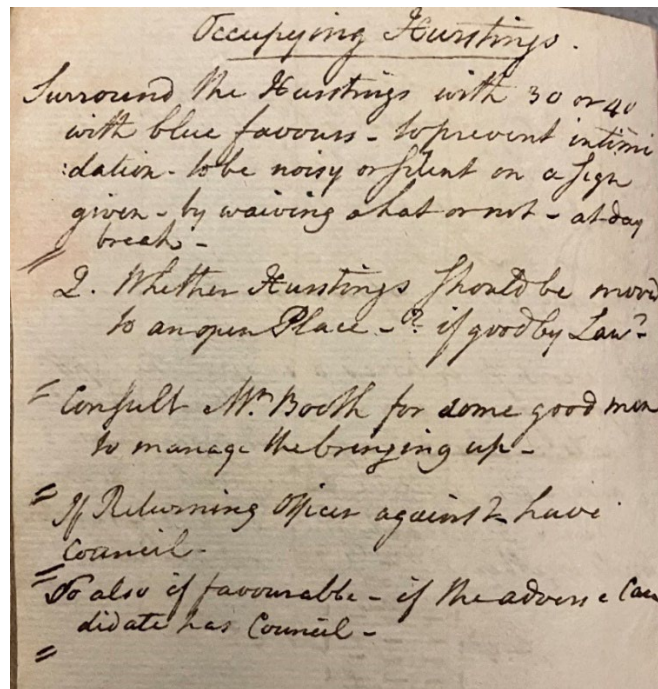
THAMES CONSERVANCY OFFICE,  
Victoria Embankment, London, E.C.

28th May, 1900.

*Notice to bathers, 1900*

Away from the water, arguably the most interesting new catalogue relates to the Simeon family. The Simeons are remembered locally for the monument in Reading's Market Place, designed by Sir John Soane, and the papers go a long way to putting the monument into context. There are records from the City insurance business of the monument's funder, Edward Simeon, a director of the Bank of England. And there is a larger quantity of material for the political career of his brother, Sir John, for whom the monument is usually seen as a way of buying favour within his constituency.

Sir John owned an estate in Grazeley and was MP for Reading between 1797-1802 and 1806-1818. His papers give a revealing insight into electioneering at the time. There are detailed accounts of the 'treats' given during campaigns for 1802, 1806 and 1807: food, drink and tobacco in many public houses, and donations made to electors' charities and clubs. The 1802 notes also offer instructions for providing carriages on voting days and how to 'bring up' reluctant voters by force.

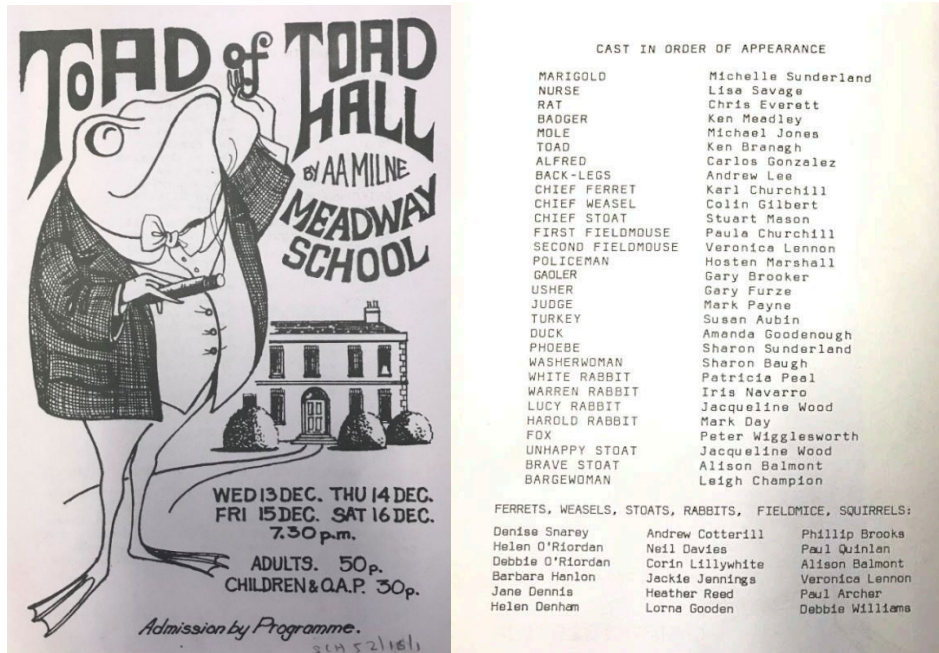


The Georgian approach to political hustings: surround the stage with your own supporters 'to prevent intimidation', have them ready to cheer at a given signal, sort some heavies to 'bring up' your voters and keep a lawyer by your side: it worked for Sir John Simeon

Alongside these manuals of political organisation are letters from key figures in Georgian politics. Those include two Prime Ministers, Henry Addington and Spencer Perceval, as well as William Wilberforce, the noted evangelical and abolitionist. The latter was a personal friend of Sir John and advised on the secession of St Mary's, Castle Street from the Reading parish of St Giles.

Collections of local interest include papers from Bill and Joan Baker of Tidmarsh. The couple lived at Old Rectory Cottage in the village and created a garden of national renown, which was regularly opened for charity events. They were involved with local gardening associations and Bill was a holder of the Veitch Memorial Medal, awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society to those who have made an outstanding contribution in its field. The papers include an almost complete set of gardening diaries, detailing work at the cottage, and a wealth of photographs and slides of the garden.

A smaller collection was received from what became The Meadway School in Reading. The collection itself is typical for a school but what stands out is the programme for its production of *Toad of Toad Hall* in 1972. In this, the part of Toad was played by the young 'Ken' Branagh, now Sir Kenneth and Academy Award-winner, in what is believed to be his first acting role.



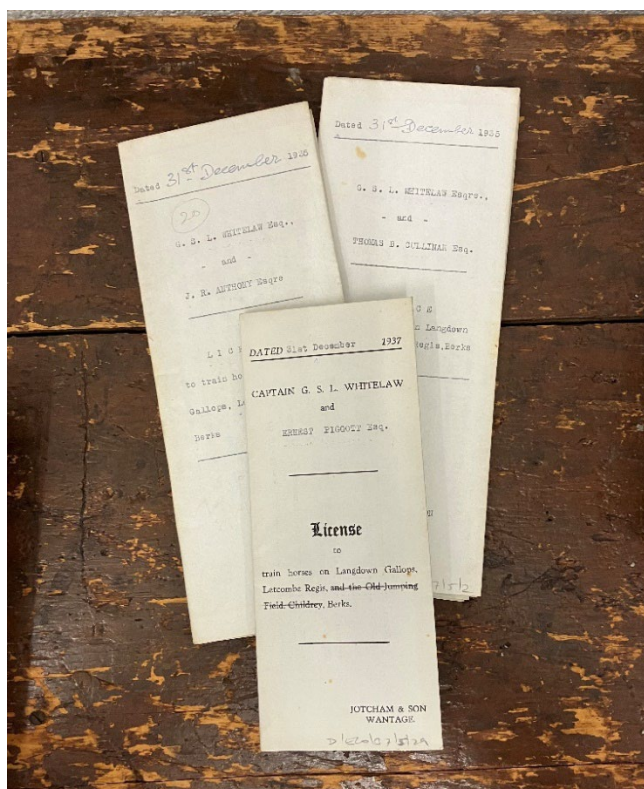
The Meadway School's production of 'Toad of Toad Hall', 1972

We have processed two client collections from old North Berkshire solicitors. The first, from Crowdy and Rose of Faringdon, includes the archives of the Fyfield Turnpike road, the Shellingford tithe award, and 19<sup>th</sup> century papers from the Crowdys' time as county Under-Sheriffs (the official appointed to enforce legal writs).



Map of the Pucketty Farm estate, Faringdon, 1841

The second, from what was Jotcham and Company of Wantage, includes various items relating to its partners' clerkship of local enterprises. There are legal papers for the Wantage Engineering Company, an agricultural machine-maker, whose principal archive is at the Museum of English Rural Life; licences to train racehorses at the Old Jumping Field in Childrey and gallops at Letcombe Regis; and early records from the Wantage Cottage Hospital.



*Licences to use gallops: Ernie Piggott (grandfather of Lester) and John Anthony both won the Grand National three times and were Champion Jockeys; Tommy Cullinan was the first jockey to win the National, Cheltenham Gold Cup and Champion Hurdle in the same year*

## Spreading the Impact of the Collections

Information from our collections found its way into local history activities in Binfield, Bray, Garford, Wantage and Wytham. Several social media posts were incorporated into resources for *History Begins at Home*, a national campaign to start conversations and tackle loneliness. A separate campaign, for disability arts, made use of mental health occupational practices as illustrated through our archives.

We featured in completed PhDs on apprenticeships in medieval England and ‘mad’ criminal women in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Letters from our collections were transcribed and published online for Elizabeth Montagu, the ‘bluestocking’ supporter of women’s education and sometime resident of Sandleford Priory, and John Tyndall, the Irish physicist whose research confirmed what became known as the ‘greenhouse effect’ of planetary warming, and who was correspondent to Edward Vansittart Neale of Bisham Abbey.

Texts held here also featured in the *History of Parliament, 1640-1660* (in biographies of various Berkshire Lords and MPs) and the Berkshire Record Society’s publication of *Hungerford Overseers* transcripts. The Clewer House of Mercy was discussed within *Material Setting and Reform Experiences in Institutions for ‘Fallen’ Women*; William Hallam’s diaries formed a chapter in *Lifescapes*, a study of how we experience the landscape; Fair Mile Hospital was found within *Public Mental Health Facilities in Post-war Britain*; and Wexham Park Hospital appeared in a podcast for the Society of Architectural Historians.

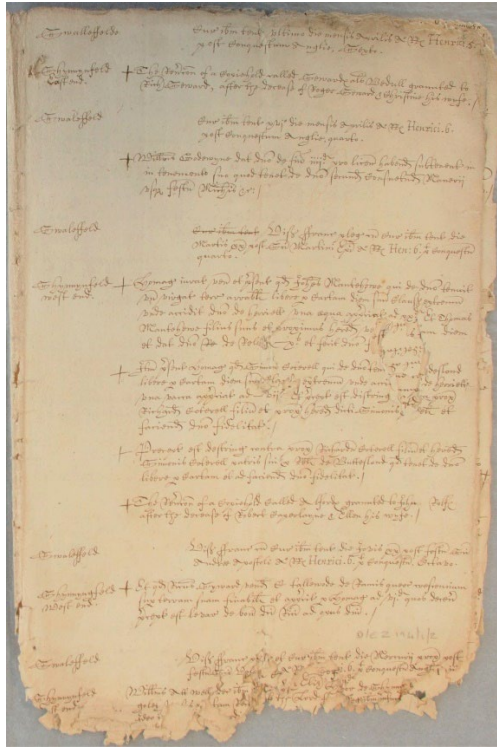
Popular history books to make use of our collections included a reissue of Matthew Sturgis’s *Oscar Wilde: A Life*, while the prison archive will also feature heavily in Peter Stoneley’s forthcoming history of the gaol. Broadmoor cases could be found in Kim Thomas’s *Broadmoor Women* and John Woolf’s *Black Victorians*. Our collections were used also in ITV’s *Agatha and Poirot: Partners in Crime* and in *Michael X*, a programme that included his 1967 Reading trial, for Sky Documentaries.

## Caring for Collections

This big event was the replacement of our original chiller, which was highlighted in the image at the start of the report. The new model is a significant investment by the six Berkshire councils of around £100,000. This should have a positive impact on maintaining the correct storage conditions and on energy consumption.

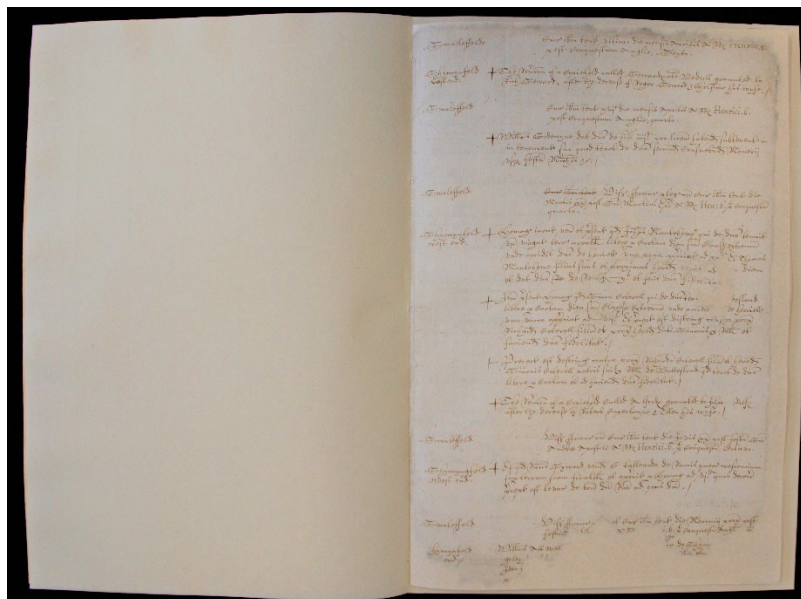
Conservation output was impacted by staff limitations onsite, though a full range of preventative and remedial work was undertaken. Two of the items treated this year are detailed below.

Described in our catalogue as ‘abstracted details from the court rolls of Swallowfield manor’, spanning 1378-1604, this first item presented as a single small volume that had come apart into two sections. Of these sections, each folio of paper had losses around the edge and also through the centre.



One of the pieces of the Swallowfield manor abstracts, before repair

Paper repair was completed to each folio by leafcasting - the process of making paper pulp, blending with water and using gravity to attach the pulp to the missing areas. A mix of hemp and cotton pulp was used and the folios cast on both sides, a delicate process that involves turning the folio during treatment. Finally, the repaired folios were trimmed and sewn together into a paper cover.



And after repair, within its new cover

The second item is one of our oldest parish registers, that for Letcombe Regis, which probably dates from 1547 but has some earlier entries included. This had been very tightly bound with linen thread into a 17<sup>th</sup> century parchment cover, and the pages would open at an angle of no more than 45 degrees, making it very difficult to access.



A lovely cover but a challenging book: Letcombe Regis's first register

To improve this, the linen thread was removed from the folios of the textblock. The latter was humidified to gently relax the folios, allowing the folds to be flattened for resewing in such a way that they could completely open.

Because the original cover was too delicate to risk reattachment, a new paper cover was fashioned for the book, but with the original cover stored beside it.

## Special Projects

In lieu of project work during 2021/22 - an impracticality, given restrictions onsite - preparation was made for work in the coming year.

### ***Thames Conservancy conservation***

Now that the Conservancy collection is available for research, we have sought to address those items that need repair. We have identified nine months' worth of professional time required to complete specialist treatments to various volumes and plans.



*Meeting minutes of the River Purification Committee: just some of the Thames Conservancy items that will be treated*

And we are delighted to report that we have found funders prepared to support the work. Thames Water, the William Delafield Charitable Trust, the Englefield Charitable Trust and the Earley Charity have all kindly awarded grants. Their generous help will enable us to complete the repair work in the coming year.

### ***Bracknell New Town***

Our second impending project is to catalogue the archive of the Bracknell Development Corporation.

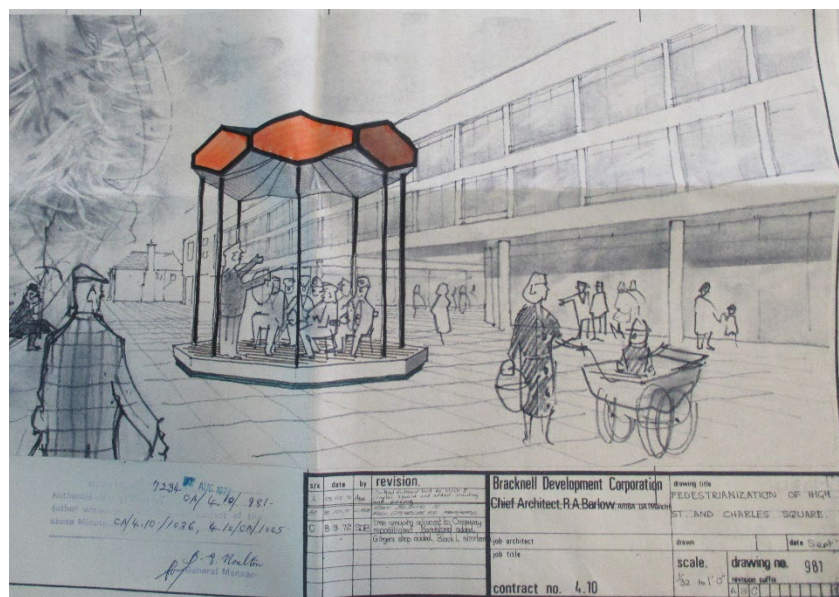
Bracknell was designated a new town in 1949. It was one of the first wave of such developments, which were intended to provide the modern housing seen as necessary to build the post-war 'New Jerusalem'. The new towns, with their emphasis on public health and wellbeing, subsequently had a large influence on



urban design across Europe, and this influence is being revisited in the wake of the pandemic and the move to hybrid working.

Recognising this, we took the lead to frame a project with eight other services holding new town collections. The partnership, under the umbrella of the Association of New Towns Archives and Museums, made a bid to the Wellcome Trust and was awarded just over £415,000. That will be used to catalogue and conserve the archives of eleven new towns: Basildon, Bracknell, Crawley, Cwmbran, Newton Aycliffe, Peterlee, Redditch, Runcorn, Shannon (in the Republic of Ireland), Stevenage and Warrington. West Sussex Record Office (Crawley) has agreed to act as banker.

Bracknell is one of the most successful new towns and it doubled in size within two generations. The Development Corporation archive includes well over a thousand drawings, contracts and design files that illustrate the town's growth, including strategic plans for its series of neighbourhoods and how these plans changed over time. Our share of the funds is £40,000 and our work will take twelve months.



Architect's plan for the bandstand in Bracknell High Street, 1970

### Victorian schools

This project remained largely on hold during the year, though plans were made to resume research from April 2022. In the meantime, the project team has worked to shape how the finished product will look - a series of illustrated case studies for school building in Berkshire, 1870-1914, with a gazetteer of all completed works during the period.

## With Thanks to Our Staff

I wrote in the introduction of my great gratitude to staff and I should like to repeat my thanks. Hopefully this report bears witness to what they have achieved during another difficult year.

We have been fortunate to enjoy much stability throughout the pandemic. We said goodbye to one of our archives assistants, Laura Luca, who left us for a record-keeping job with the United Nations. Michaela Garland, our Thames archivist, stayed temporarily to hold the fort until she began working on the Bodleian's archive relating to the AstraZeneca covid vaccine. Subsequently, we had an in-house reshuffle and Laura's hours were filled by James and Hannah, two of our existing staff.

There were no changes to external positions held, though the Wellcome Trust reorganised its funding committees and so I attended my last meeting for the Research Resources stream. Otherwise, I continued as visiting research fellow in the University of Reading's History Department and as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society. Ellie Thorne completed her term on the council of the Berkshire Record Society and has been replaced by Lisa Spurrier, who also remained on the editorial committee of *Berkshire Old and New*. Ellie is now communications secretary for the Pangbourne Heritage Group. Sue Hourigan is still an assessor for the Archives and Records Association's conservation certificate and has also acted as mentor for Jane Mac Tarling's certificate studies.

## And with Thanks to Our Volunteers

It has been lovely to see some of our volunteers in person. From April we welcomed back Peter Durrant and Deborah Jenkins. Peter has recommenced bookbinding and one of Deborah's catalogues was the Simeon papers mentioned earlier in the report. Frank Quick has continued working remotely to transcribe visitors' books for soldiers training in Pangbourne during the Second World War.

We also safely hosted another two 'discovering archives' students from the University of Reading. This year, Ellie Dyer and Eve Roberts both did valuable preparatory work for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reading-Dusseldorf Association.

We expect to welcome back more volunteers during the coming year.

## Key Numbers

### Visitors and enquiries

	2021/22	2020/21
Visitors to the search room	1157	303
Written and telephone enquiries	6922	4675
Documents produced	4305	1199
Microforms consulted	507	0
Copies supplied	11538	2840
Visits to online resources	83827	80676
Talks and visits: number	19	11
Talks and visits: attendance	672	398

### Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	176	70
Accessions received: volume	6.021m <sup>3</sup>	3.486m <sup>3</sup>
	12.69GB	76.79GB
Catalogues completed: volume	11.883m <sup>3</sup>	20.019m <sup>3</sup>
Accessions catalogued: number	208	58
Items catalogued	4712	1917

### Conservation and preservation

First aid	18	6
Tipping-in	32	0
Sewing	444	25
Packaging	33	33
Encapsulation	12	4
Cleaning	240	172

### Staff resources

Headcount of permanent staff	18	19
Number of full-time equivalent posts	13.40	13.40
Headcount of project staff	0	1