



# BRO

The Berkshire Record Office  
The Archives of the Royal County

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

### **Annual Report**

***For 2022-23***

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





*The Lord-Lieutenant for Berkshire, James Puxley CVO, hands over the Royal County's loyal address to His Majesty the King at Buckingham Palace, 9 March 2023 (see p21)  
[credit: Ian Jones Photography]*

## Introduction

And so here is the last annual report to carry the name of the Berkshire Record Office.

It will take some effort initially to stop saying ‘the Record Office’. For 75 years the term has been preferred. The singular title (never a plural) noted that we are an ‘office of record’ - a place that provides documentary evidence of public legality and accountability.

These offices of record had sprung up around the English counties between the Wars. Berkshire County Council agreed to us initially in July 1939. Our name mirrored that of the Public Record Office, which was the Government’s office of record, and was common across local archives.

But times change. Record offices today are viewed less as a link to the law and more as a hub for community collections. Today, half our holdings might be described as pertaining to the public record; the other half is very much created by local people and kept because it tells us something of the county’s history.

Reflecting the change in community perception, the Public Record Office became The National Archives some twenty years ago. Many local record offices followed suit and now it is our turn. In August, we will become the Royal Berkshire Archives.

What is in a name? That is very hard to conclude. And one name is not necessarily better than another. Essentially, in August nothing will change: all the good things that the Record Office has tried to do for the county will be continued by the RBA. We leave nothing behind us and take everything forwards.

I have one thought about how things might alter. That is perhaps a new name will give us a new experience. Very much in the same way that two artworks from the same studio, but with different signatures, can live contrasting lives. We shall see how that thought plays out in practice.

With that, it is goodbye to the office of record in Berkshire. So thank you, BRO, for the 75 years of service. You have provided a fantastic base and anything that the new name achieves could not have been done without you. Enjoy a well-earned retirement.

Mark Stevens  
County Archivist  
June 2023

## Welcoming Visitors and Enquirers

It was in April 2022 that the last pandemic restrictions were lifted. We dispensed finally with limits on the number of visitors and made masks no longer mandatory.

Our full re-opening came with one change. We offered Thursday evenings on a monthly, rather than weekly basis, and that is a basis that we have chosen to continue. The time released has been put into content-making for our increasing number of remote interactions, rather than visitors or enquirers *per se*.

We have found that enquiries have dropped from the heights of lockdown. This is probably the result of people resuming a wider range of activities than was open to them during the pandemic. It might be that the current model, with fewer direct users but many more online consumers, is the pattern for the immediate future.

The impact from the pandemic was felt also in customer feedback. In the absence of visitors to many archives, in 2021 the Institute of Public Finance had repeated a satisfaction survey for distance users. We were pleased to report that our results were good and that even in the heart of the pandemic and its impact on the speed we could respond, we received another excellent endorsement of our service offer.

### The customer experience

*Always unfailing helpful*

Thank you for your extremely comprehensive response. You have truly excelled.

*You are worth your weight in gold!*

It is my pleasure to pass on praise when it is deserved and on this occasion it was. If I were nearer I would bring cream cakes to have in your staff meeting.

*An absolutely stunning resource*

We had headline scores of 98% satisfaction with our website, enquiry response and provision of copies. There was a new question this year about social media, and 83% rated our content as good. These results reflect very well on staff and their success can be measured by reclamation of top spot in our unofficial satisfaction league table of county archives. Although this table is subject to statistical margin of error, and should be treated with much caution, I note that this is our third 'title' in the last four distance surveys. I feel very proud to have a hat-trick.

Our customer guarantees stood as follows:

- 97% of visitors got their first choice of visit time
- 99% of written enquiries were answered within 5 working days
- 100% of all copies were supplied within 10 working days

## Engaging the Curious

It has been lovely to welcome back more face-to-face engagement with the collections, even if, after a bumper crop of remote talks, the number of these dropped off. It seems certain, though, that remote events are here to stay.

The Association of Genealogists and Records Agents southern region brought its members on a tour, as did the Middle Thames Archaeology Partnership, and staff from the Museum of English Rural Life. We had educational visits from University of Reading history undergraduates and MA students, while year 5 from Kennet Valley Primary in Calcot looked at maps for a lesson on urban sprawl.



*Some of the MERL staff during their visit*

Heritage Open Days were in person once more, and for the first time we presented an onsite tour and an online video. The latter gave a ‘behind-the-scenes’ look and focus on this year’s theme of inventions. It included features about Jethro Tull, the Basildon agriculturalist, and the Plenty’s of Newbury lifeboat. The video can be seen on the Record Office’s YouTube channel: [Heritage Open Days 2022: BRO Behind the Scenes Tour](#), where it received well over a hundred views.

We were also delighted to host a physical exhibition again, with 'Happy and Glorious' providing a look at the late Queen's Berkshire connections. It was on show during the Platinum Jubilee, and later became a place for quiet reflection after the Queen's death. The exhibition included examples of celebrations for the Queen's earlier jubilees, items relating to the Queen's visits to the county, and from those bodies with whom the Queen was associated.

Rosie Everritt produced a talk to accompany the exhibition and delivered this for public audiences at Bracknell and Wokingham libraries. The exhibition also featured on That's TV, BBC Radio Berkshire and Greatest Hits Radio.



*Poster for the Platinum Jubilee exhibition*

Our talk about Plenty's of Newbury was given to the Thames Valley Traction Engine Club and the Berkshire Family History Society. The BFHS also received our Reading Gaol talk, while the Reading Humanists heard about Broadmoor. I reprised my grant application lecture for University College London's archives MA students.

The other notable speaking activity came via a joint event staged by the Berkshire Family History Society and the Berkshire Local History Association. Both groups arranged the first 'Berkshire Heritage Online Fair', which made use of Zoom

breakout rooms for question and answer sessions with local groups, including us. Over 200 people attended from across the world.

Online content included the new, monthly e-bulletin, with the blog and highlight pages from which it is drawn. The bulletin has 460 subscribers. Amongst the monthly highlights were a short history of telephone services in Berkshire, a feature on VJ Day, and a biography of Edith Mellor, a pioneer braille translator. Blog posts included historical coffee tastings, a virtual jigsaw of the Windsor Swimming Club, and Berkshire's response to refugees from the Spanish Civil War.

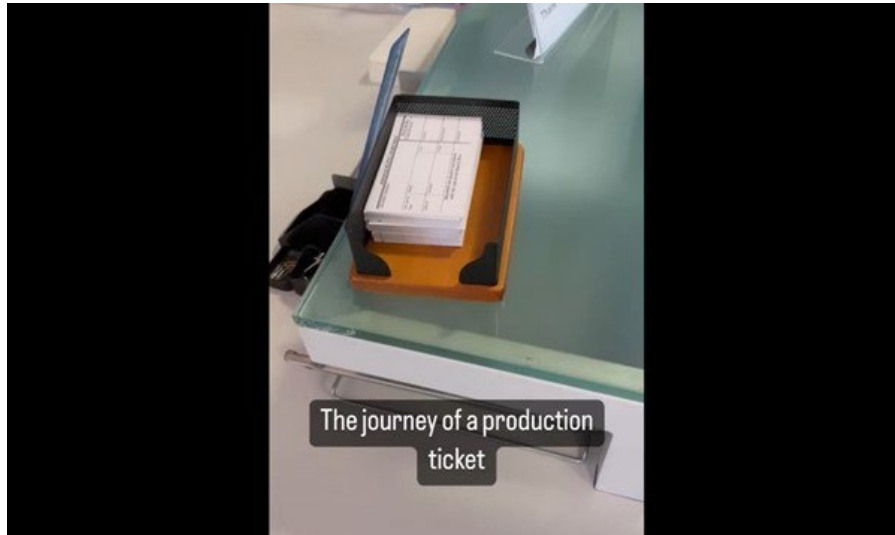
One of the blog posts was about Eliza Chattaway, Edwardian head teacher of Redlands Infants School, and later Alfred Sutton Infants in Reading, who was an early adopter of the benefits of outdoor learning. We partnered with the University of Reading to have a student, Leah Rashid, work for six weeks over the summer to find out more about Eliza's life and work. The results can be seen at: [Eliza Chattaway | The Berkshire Record Office](#).

As mentioned earlier, the number of social media postings continue to grow. These are made to an audience of 1700 Twitter followers, 1500 Facebook friends and 400 subscribers on Instagram. Posts maintain a spread of focus on collections, Berkshire people, and what is going on in the building. This year's soaraway success, a contribution to the Twitter handle 'cats of yore', maintained the popularity of animals in the archives.



*Kitten in a basket: this pair belonged to Dorothy Kaminski, née Wernham, of Chieveley, whose archival legacy includes a whole album of cat photographs*

We had an increased focus on moving content. Staff have been experimenting with filming and editing, producing pieces that double as Instagram reels and YouTube shorts. As well as the Heritage Open Day video, the other notable output was the journey of a production ticket, tracing a document request from the reading room to the strongrooms then back again.



*From bean to cup - in an archival sense*

Our biggest new online resource was in partnership with Ancestry. This created digital versions of 500 items relating to the Second World War on Berkshire's home front. The most significant element is over 200 attendance registers from schools, mostly in Docklands and the East End of London, that were evacuated to the county during the war. These form part of the County Council's archive. Supplementing them are the Council's files on managing the evacuation scheme, its provision of emergency air raid shelters, nurseries and maternity homes, and its incident logs for enemy air raids.

The resource was launched in February to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the most significant wartime raids in Berkshire, when 41 people were killed in Reading and 15 in Newbury. The launch was picked up by the local press and national family history magazines.

## **Developing Collections**

After two disrupted years, it is a pleasure to report that many depositors, including the six Berkshire councils, have returned to regular transfers of material.



Several new collections have an international reach. The first relates to a Reading institution, which is Simonds Brewery. H & G Simonds Ltd traced its history back to 1785 and for centuries was a fixture in the town centre. It was taken over by Courage in 1960, and brewing continued in south Reading until 2010.

The official company archive is found mostly at London Metropolitan Archives, where it survives within the Courage collection. Our collection comes kindly deposited by the Simonds family and has passed down through its generations. It includes an assortment of stray papers and photographs from the company, as well as a complete set of the staff magazine, the *Hop Leaf Gazette*, and many beer labels from the company's products.

The uniqueness of the collection, though, is found within the family's personal papers. The Simonds' reach extended to the fields of art, politics and, most notably, the armed forces. The archive includes many letters from British military campaigns in India and the Crimea, from the Boer War, from Gallipoli and the Western Front during the First World War, and from North Africa and the Atlantic convoys during the Second World War. Its whole provides a look across several generations of an important Berkshire family.



Beer bottle labels for Old Reading Golden Dry, a Simonds lager [nd, mid 20<sup>th</sup> century]

Items from another celebrated local family, the Trumbulls of Easthampstead Park, formed perhaps the year's most unexpected acquisition. The Trumbulls held high office during the Stuart and Georgian periods and their archives once contained a treasure trove of diplomatic papers, all of which were withdrawn from the Record Office for sale in 1989. Many were purchased by the British Library, but the residue was auctioned at Sotheby's and sold to private buyers.

It was a wonderful surprise, shortly before Christmas, to receive a message from an antiquarian bookseller in Maine saying that he had some Trumbull rolls for sale. These transpired to be accounts of Edward Russell, a cousin of the Trumbulls, in his role as treasurer to the Royal Navy between 1689-1699, and were one of those items sold in 1989. They were massive: ranging in length from 20 to 40 feet, and including every transaction approved for expenditure by each branch of the Navy pay office - for men, victuals and shipbuilding.

The dealer was hugely generous, offering us the chance to buy them back for a fraction of their commercial worth. And the Friends of the National Libraries were delighted to offer us a grant to cover the cost. So, some 30 years after they were thought lost to researchers they are now back in the UK, back in a public collection, and back in the county where they had spent the previous three centuries. It was an excellent outcome and I would like to offer enormous thanks to all parties who facilitated it.



*From Berkshire to the USA and back again: Edward Russell's account rolls as Treasurer of the Navy Royal and Marine Causes and Affairs, 1689-1699*

Russell's role was political, and played out in the public eye, which is in total contrast to the secret military role played by a Slough and Windsor bank manager. Maitland Underhill, who died in 1983, was latterly an antiquarian. We have long held papers relating to his work with the Berkshire Archaeological Society, Windsor Guildhall and Hambleden Museum, amongst others.

The material deposited this year relates to his role in MI4, a branch of military intelligence that was responsible for interpreting maps and photographs. Underhill worked during the Second World War as part of a small team known as the British Bombing Survey Unit. They were based at RAF Medmenham.

The Unit's principal task was to review Allied bombing campaigns against Nazi infrastructure to better inform future raids. Underhill's papers form a detailed record of its work and research.

The papers include local records from German authorities compiled in the immediate aftermath of raids, as well as Underhill's own diaries from his post-war tour of the country. There is a set of aerial photographs of Allied action in Germany and Italy. Most remarkably, there are lantern slides, presumably acquired through the intelligence network, that depict bombing raids during the Chinese and Spanish Civil Wars.



*Nuremberg, September 1945: one of Underhill's photographs from the BBSU post-war tour of Germany*

Post-war life features also in a collection relating to the Women's League of Health and Beauty, which was one of the first organisations to promote exercise to music. Our papers come from Doris Dewar, who was a pioneer within the League.

The League had begun with problematic overtones. It had links to eugenics and fascist ideology and saw women's exercise as part of promoting racial health for

white motherhood. After the Second World War, it dropped this part of its philosophy to become a successful part of the burgeoning keep-fit movement. Today, it runs mobility classes for all ages that are branded as Flexercise.

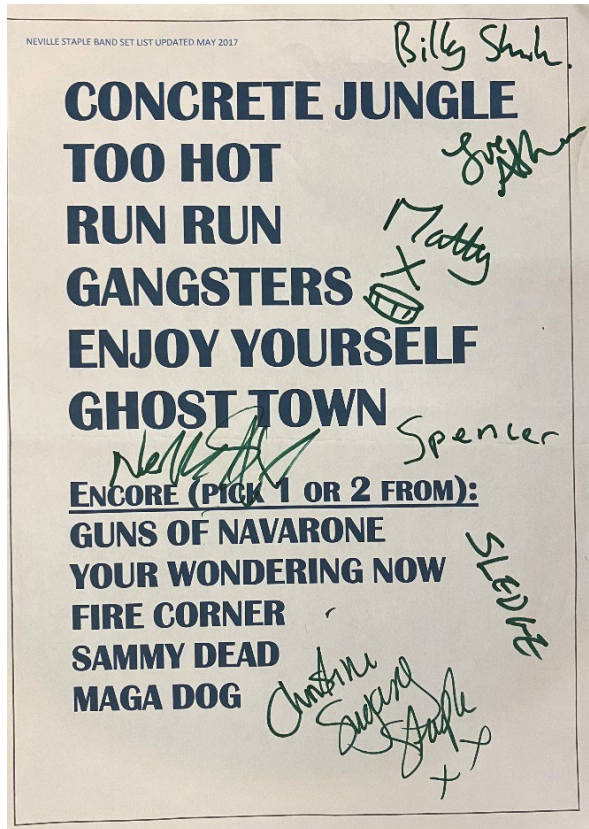
Doris's papers straddle this period - she joined the League after the War and featured in much of its early publicity events. She later located to Maidenhead, where she remained an active teacher until the early 2000s.



*The League of Health and Beauty parade down Oxford Street in central London - Doris Dewar is third from right in the front row [undated, but probably taken during the Second World War]*

Exertion featured too in a large programme collection for Maidenhead United FC, additional papers from Cookham Reach Sailing Club and ephemera from the Royal County Scottish Country Dance Association. A local resident also brought in two handwritten notebooks that detail matches played by Finchampstead United FC between 1922 and 1924.

There was more physical activity in the archive of the Southcote Gardeners' Association, additional records from Wokingham Theatre and photographs from the Reading Central Club drama group. Cultural activities were represented elsewhere in papers from the Berkshire Architectural Records Committee and Local History Recording Scheme, ephemera from recent Readipop festivals and a schedule for the Windsor Championship Dog Show in 1956.



*Signed Readipop setlist for the Neville Staple Band, 2017*

The Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes added to their archives. Branches for Cookham, Frilsham, Moneyrow Green (Holyport), Swallowfield and Yattendon were represented. We were also delighted to receive a collection from the Windsor Conservative Association that took the local party back to 1897. Although there are some gaps, the Association's records span over a century of political activity across much of the eastern county. We are very grateful to Standing Conference member, Cllr John Story, for ensuring the items were rescued during an office move.

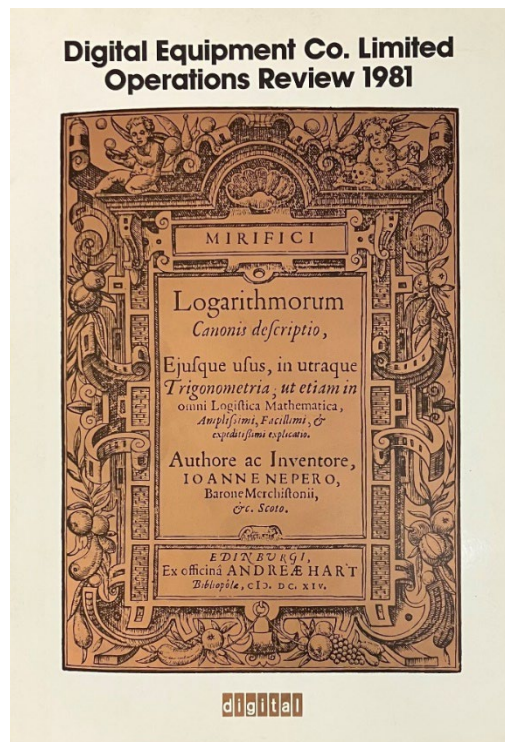
Business was represented by material received for the Reading TUC together with related 1980s material from the Reading Centre for the Unemployed. Discovered in Dorset was a detailed volume of jobs undertaken by builder John Hussey from Twyford in the 1880s. This had moved south with an employee of the firm and was repatriated by Bridport Museum.

*Piggott School Continued* 112

	31	Carpenter 16 hours Reprng floors } & Desks &c	"	9	4
		13 ft 1 1/4 floor board 13 ft of 1 in D. Shadl	"	6	"
		Reprng 1 Chair & 1 long form	"	2	6
		Reprng Lower bolt	"	"	9
Sept	9	Man 10 hours Reprng Windows generally	"	5	10
		16 squares of Glass	"	3	"
		Carpenter 1 Day putting in new lines } & Reprng 2 Doors	"	5	6
		46 yds of Sash line	"	3	6
		New Rail for Cloo hats 15 ft long } 26 new hooks & screws	"	5	6
	14	Carpenter 2 Days putting new woodwork } to Wash sinks, Reprng Skirting &c	"	11	8

Maintenance work by John Hussey at the Piggott School, on its previous site in the centre of Wargrave, before the start of school year, 1885

We also received new collections relating to Jackson's, a Reading department store, and for the UK part of Digital Equipment Corporation (later Digital and Compaq), which was based by junction 11 of the M4. The latter was an important part of computing history and represents our first archive relating to Berkshire's modern IT industries. We are grateful to Reading Museum for making the contact.



Digital Equipment Corporation's annual report, 1981

As well as the Simonds, family papers came from the Lovedays of Caversham Court, the Lowsleys of Hampstead Norreys and the Wises of Wokefield. The Wokingham Society kindly arranged the deposit of a richly-decorated album of pedigrees and heraldry for the Lucas family, compiled by Louise Lucas in the 1880s. We were delighted also to take in Georgian baptism and burial registers for the parish of Combe, as well as 20<sup>th</sup> century registers of marriages in the Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit, and a baptism register from Heatherwood Hospital, Ascot.

Other public authority records included modern minutes and agendas from West Berkshire and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and a plan of Reading's surface water sewers that was compiled in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We took in more Broadmoor Hospital patients files, and an album of photographs showing the hospital's redevelopment during the 1980s. Parish council material was received from Burghfield, Crowthorne, Hampstead Norreys, Hermitage, Woodley and Yattendon.

We successfully bid at auction for a couple of items. One was an estate map, 1689, for Feenes House, White Waltham - now known as Fiennes. The other was a 17<sup>th</sup> century volume of proctors' accounts from St Bartholomew's Hospital, Newbury. For the latter purchase, we are much indebted to another generous grant from the Friends of the National Libraries. The account book is currently being treated for iron gall ink corrosion and should be available shortly.

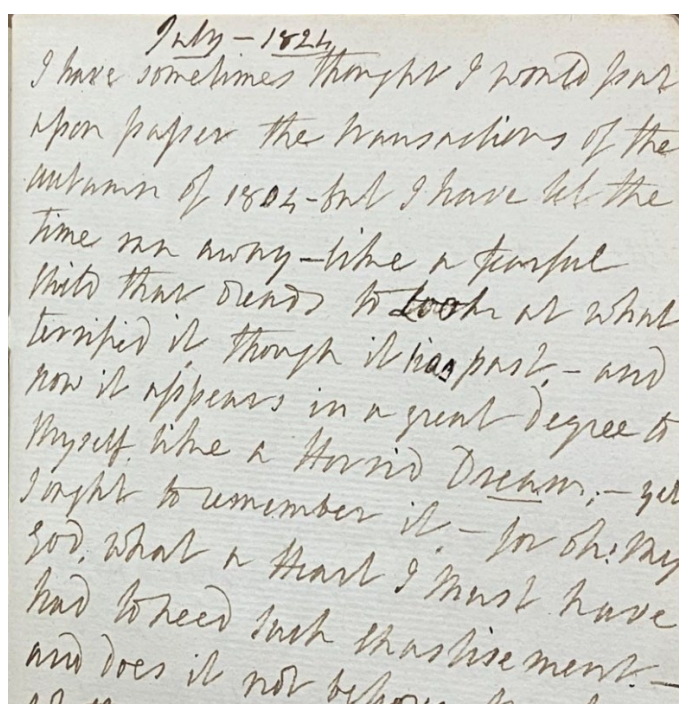


*Feenes House estate with due north, and the Bath Road, on the right, 1689*

## Making the Collections Available

Last year's report featured the House of Mercy in Clewer. This year, we have listed the family papers of one of its chaplains. Alec Baynes was a Berkshire cleric, who served at St Mary's in Reading in addition to the House. The Baynes, like the Simonds, passed their papers down the generations and Alec, who was born in 1887, inherited a wealth of history.

Theirs was historically a military family. The papers date back to the memoirs of Margaret Baynes, whose husband was Surgeon of Gibraltar. Margaret details an infamous outbreak of yellow fever, in 1804, which killed a third of the Rock's population. She recounts a story remarkably similar to the coronavirus pandemic - a quarantine (for the traditional 'quarante' or 40 days), the mass deployment of face-coverings and, for Margaret, the loss of almost her entire family. The story ends with her and her grandchildren securing passage on a boat to London.



July - 1824  
I have sometimes thought I would put  
upon paper the transactions of the  
autumn of 1804 - but I have let the  
time run away - like a fearful  
child that dreads to look at what  
terrified it though it has past - and  
now it appears in a great degree to  
myself like a Horrid Dream; - yet  
I ought to remember it. - In Oh! May  
God, what a Heart I must have  
had to need such chastisement -  
and does it not behave to

*'I have sometimes thought I would put upon paper the transactions of the autumn of 1804 - but I have let the time run away - like a fearful child that dreads to look at what terrified it' - the start of Margaret Baynes' recollections of the Gibraltar yellow fever*

Margaret's timeline corresponds to the Napoleonic Wars, which are represented also in letters from her daughter-in-law's brother, Thomas Dyneley. He was an Army general. There are later papers relating to the death of his son in the Crimea, at the siege of Sevastopol. There is also material relating to the Baynes's



part in suppressing the Tredegar Ironworks riots in Merthyr Tydfil, in 1816, as well as to the family's stay in 19<sup>th</sup> century India.

Other family material has been made available for the Blyths of Woolhampton House (now the Elstree School). They were shipping merchants who made their fortune from logistics work that included the slave trade. Elsewhere, farming featured for the King family in Hurst; we catalogued ephemera for the interests of Admiral John Eustace, sometime mayor of Wokingham and Berkshire county councillor; and Victorian plans of Calcot Park and the Forbury, Reading, which were produced for the Chancery case of Blagrove vs Blagrove. That case features several times in our collections and was a long-running inheritance dispute.

There are another two personal collections worth noting. The first is from the Reverend Eric Norman, a priest who retired to Swallowfield Park and was a composer and arranger, mostly of religious music. His most famous work was the *Children's War Hymn* in 1918. His collection includes many musical arrangements.

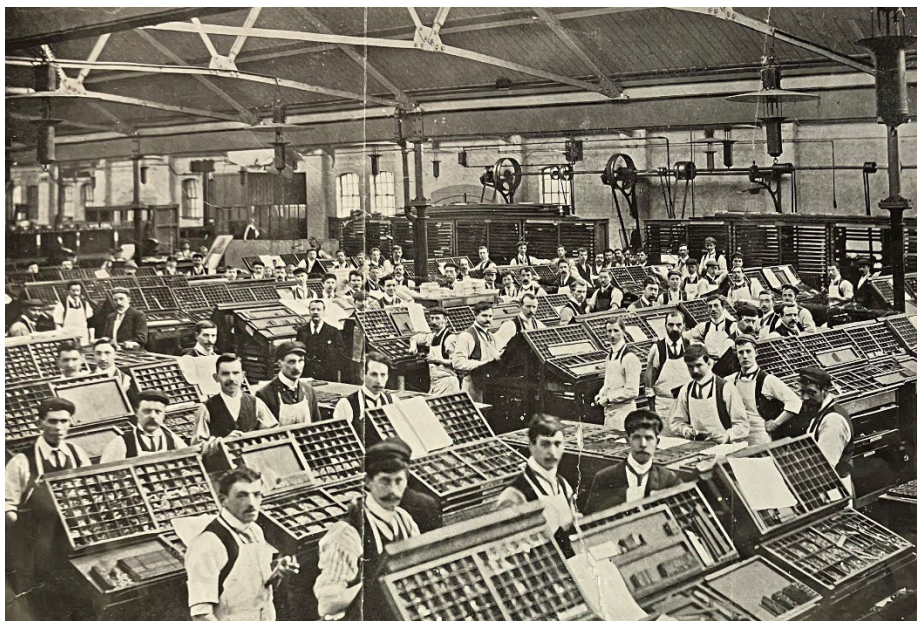
The second is that of Reading midwife, Maureen Pointer. I remember Maureen very fondly as for many years my next-door neighbour. I was aware that she had kept her midwifery case registers, which include home births across the town as well as deliveries at Battle Hospital and the Dellwood Maternity Home, and we had always planned for me to bring them into the Office. Although time eventually beat us, after her death I curated a little archive that included those and other items from her life. There are photographs from her nursing training in Windsor and items from her father's newsagents in Caversham. I am pleased that something of Maureen survives here.



*Maureen Pointer and friend, 1953*

Business was reflected also in a new catalogue for Huntley, Boorne and Stevens, the box manufacturers and subsidiary who made Huntley and Palmer's biscuit tins. The new collection was mostly of legal and financial papers - beginning appropriately with the earliest company partnership agreement - though includes some photographs of staff and Royal visits.

Other premises in Reading were represented by Cox and Wyman and Reading Gas Works. Cox and Wyman were a printing company that began in London. Amongst other sites, they were in Reading for a hundred years before the site closed in 2015. Though their buildings have been replaced by housing, various photographs and ephemera were rescued from the site and are now accessible to the public.



*The print room floor at Cox and Wyman's, Cardiff Road, Reading [nd, possibly taken when the premises opened in 1901]*

The surviving archive of the Reading Gas Company and later, British Gas's Southern Gas Board, is particularly strong in some areas. These include the details of onsite gas production, architectural and technical plans of the associated structures, and site photographs. The last gasholder on the Reading site was recently demolished though its details can be found amongst plans dating back to the 1920s. The Southern Gas Board's work post-nationalisation, meanwhile, stretched across the county, and includes photographs of laying gas mains as well as its appliance showrooms in Newbury and Wokingham.



*'I like it, but do you have something even more boxy?' - considering fires in the Southern Gas showroom, Wokingham, 1984*

Leisure pursuits were manifested most notably by the Berkshire Automobile Club. This was founded in 1903 and was one of the oldest motoring clubs in the country. It was for driving enthusiasts and was dedicated to the pleasures of the motor car. Much of its early history is taken up with race meetings, including the gymkhanas held at Brooklands. As driving became regulated, and car ownership less unusual, its membership dwindled and it transformed into a social club, finally voting to fold in 2019. The newly catalogued material covers the entire timespan of the club, including membership records from its start.



*Before the driving test existed: a Berkshire Automobile Club certificate, 1925  
[The Clyno 11.9 was a mass market vehicle made in Wolverhampton]*

Additional material was processed for Berkshire County Ladies' Golf Association, including meeting records from its foundation in 1922. Similar items were part of the Reading Rambling Club, formed in 1931 and with a membership area extending far beyond the town and into rural Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. Amongst its papers are detailed walking logs from the 1950s onwards.

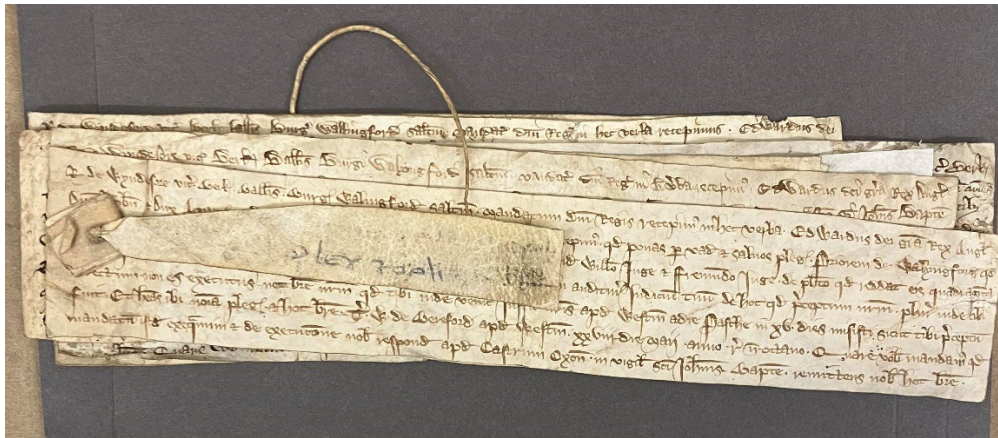
We catalogued a small collection for the Windsor Labour Hall Ltd, which as its name suggests provided Labour Party space in the town. And we listed a much larger archive from the Reading-Dusseldorf Association, the town-twinning group set up in the aftermath of the Second World War. The RDA celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and parts of the archive were on display at Reading Museum.



Two pages from 'Drei Monate [three months] in Reading', a scrapbook compiled in 1949 by Hildegard Stephan, one of the Dusseldorf children who made up the first exchange visit between the towns

For public bodies, we catalogued additional records from the King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor. They include lots of detail about purchasing the site and building the new hospital, which was a successor to the Victorian infirmary at Bachelor's Acre, as well as many photographs, and items relating to the hospital's Royal visits.

From old North Berkshire, we processed some material received from Wallingford Borough in 1974, at the point of local government re-organisation. The borough's medieval archive is one of the Office's treasures and the new material included a stray from it - a file of writs from Richard de Wyndsore, the county sheriff, to the Wallingford bailiffs. Undated, but approximately from 1315, it remains secured with an original parchment tag.



The oldest item catalogued this year: a file of writs issued to the bailiffs of Wallingford, mostly by Richard Wyndsores, High Sheriff of Berkshire, c1315

Other additions to the borough catalogue includes a fine series of leases for town property, 1606-1831, the Wallingford bridge accounts from 1649, as well as those from the Streatley and Goring bridge commissioners, who ran the bridge before it was owned publicly. There are also records from the town's cemetery and gas companies, and its mechanics institution and free library.

## Spreading the Impact of the Collections

Most re-use of material from the collections is now certainly in personal social media feeds and very hard to trace. However, it remains possible through formal requests for re-use to give a flavour of how word spreads about our collections.

Images featured in local history books on Sudbrook in Monmouthshire (where the local shipyard made use of Plenty's engines, made in Newbury) and the Earls of Craven, on community display boards in Wootton, and in a BBC documentary about Agatha Christie. Broadmoor cases were described in the books *Broadmoor Women*, *The Mad Sailor of Petersfield*, and *The Armistice Day Killing*.

Heritage Open Days in Abingdon and at Fobney Pumping Station, Reading made use of images, while material was borrowed for display at Easthampstead parish church and St Luke's in Reading. Other original items went on show at Reading Museum, for the Reading-Dusseldorf Association's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and at Shaw House in Newbury for a public open weekend.

Academic work drew on our collections via the *Architecture MPS Journal*, which featured Fair Mile in an article on psychiatric reforms and architectural design in post-war England; *British Art Studies*, which wrote about the legacy of the Greenham Common Peace Camp; and the *Journal of British Cinema and Television*,

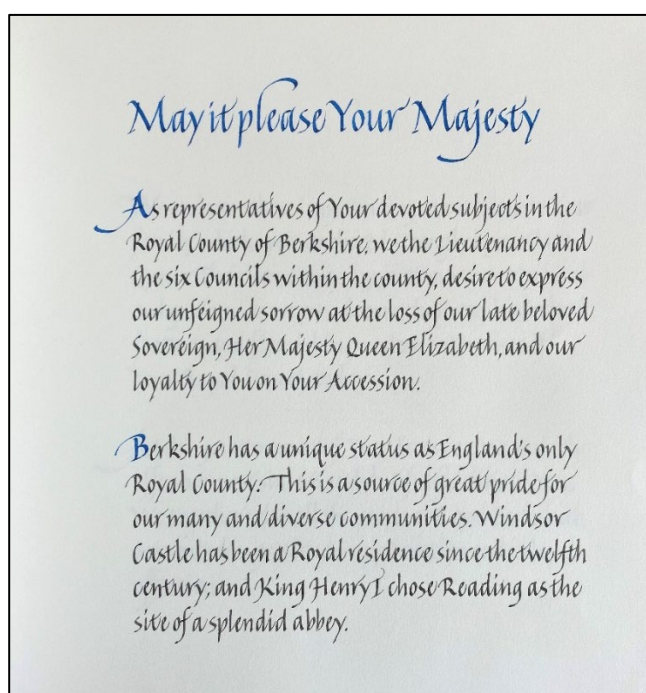
which carried letters from Berkshire town clerks within a study of local film censorship. Jackson's retail archive featured in a study of dress-making, and Dr Marian Arkwright, Newbury musician and member of the English Ladies Orchestral Society, formed part of research on violin culture in Britain. More locally, *Berkshire Old and New* published an article on the history of the Reading Assize Courts, and the Berkshire Record Society has prepared an edition of our Tudor churchwardens' accounts for Stanford-in-the-Vale.

## Caring for Collections

The highlight of our conservation year was something we made, rather than something we repaired.

As one of 27 'privileged bodies', the Royal County of Berkshire was given the opportunity to present a loyal address marking His Majesty the King's accession to the throne. We were delighted to offer our support to the Lord-Lieutenant, whose job it was to deliver the address in person at Buckingham Palace.

With the text of the address written, then crafted beautifully by Colin Dunn, a local calligrapher, it was the job of Sue Hourigan, our conservator, to make a cover for the finished item. She produced one in blue cloth with a Victorian marble endpaper. The finished result can be seen on the first page of this report and is now in the Royal collection - though a duplicate is available for people to see here.

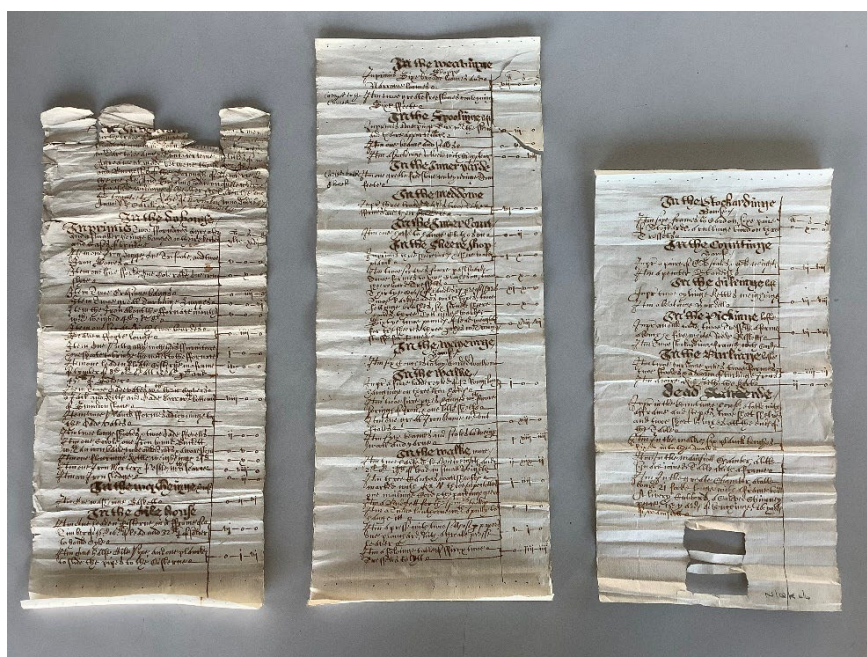


*The first page from the Royal County's loyal address, 2023*

A more traditional piece of conservation was through repairs to an inventory of Kendrick's workhouse in Newbury. This was treated by our preservation assistant, Jane Mac Tarling, as part of her practical study towards the Archives and Records Association's certificate in conservation.

John Kendrick, wealthy clothier and member of the Worshipful Company of Drapers, had been born in Reading and did much trade with Berkshire towns. In a huge act of philanthropy, by his will of 1625, some £19,000 (roughly £96m today) was bequeathed to Newbury and Reading jointly. A substantial part of this was used to provide two cloth workhouses for the poor, with Reading's known as The Oracle and the Newbury one in Cheap Street, where a small part of it is now West Berkshire Museum.

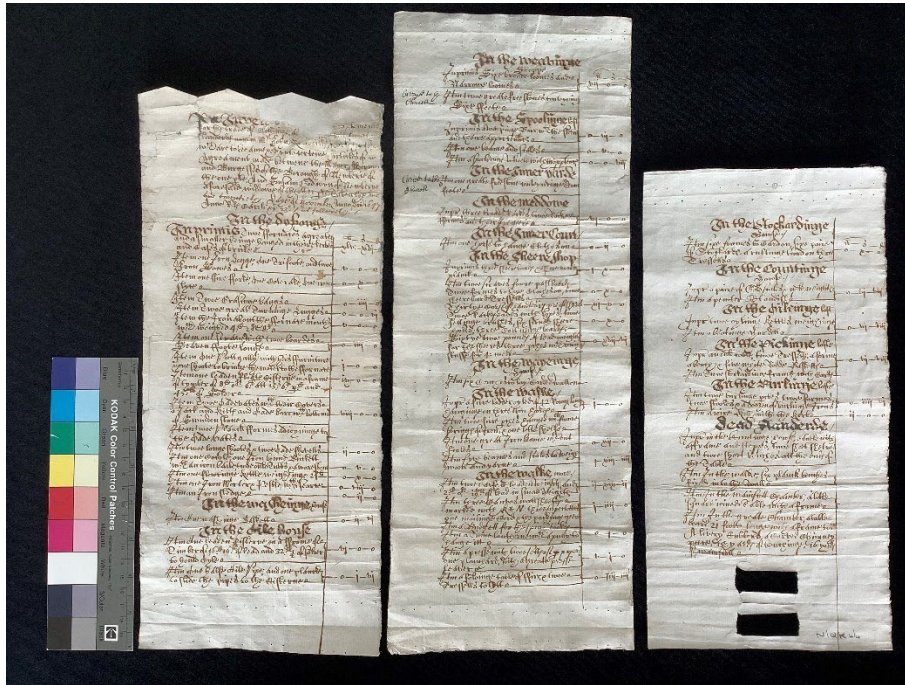
The inventory lists the contents of the workhouse in 1647. It is in the form of a roll, comprising three sheets of handmade French paper, which have been sewn together. There were minor tears along the edges of each sheet and a larger piece missing on the top of the first. More significantly, the roll is written with iron gall ink and the recipe was such that the ink was corroding the paper. If left, the damage would get worse over time.



*The three constituent parts of the Kendrick inventory, separated but before repair*

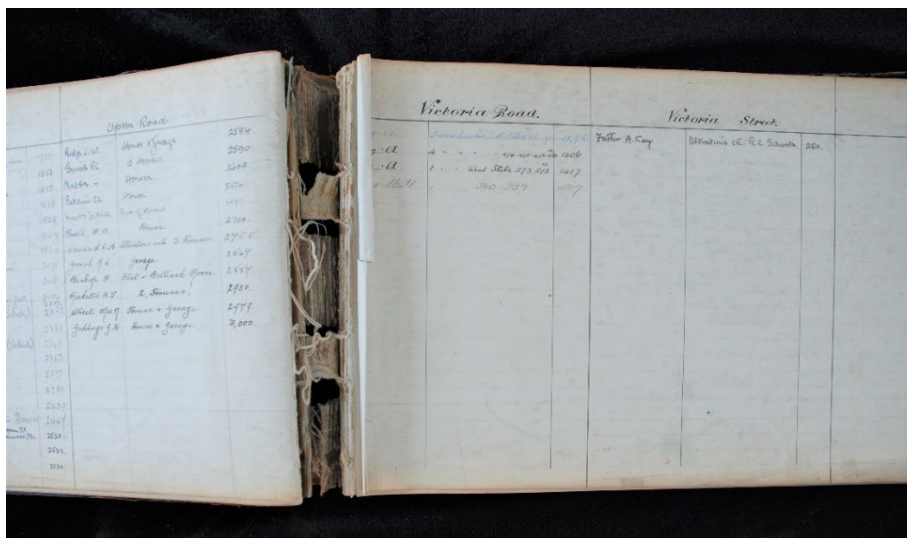
After pre-treatment tests to check that the ink was stable, Jane separated the three sheets to make handling easier during treatment. She then washed each paper to remove the soluble acids from the iron gall ink and to prevent future corrosion. The sheets were lined with a very fine Japanese tissue on the back, and the missing areas of text and tears filled with a mixture of tiny paper particles

known as nanocellulose. The jagged missing area on the first sheet, known as a “tooth”, was repaired with a custom-made paper. Once repairs were complete, the three sheets were resewn back together to form a roll once more.



The same three sheets after repair, before resewing

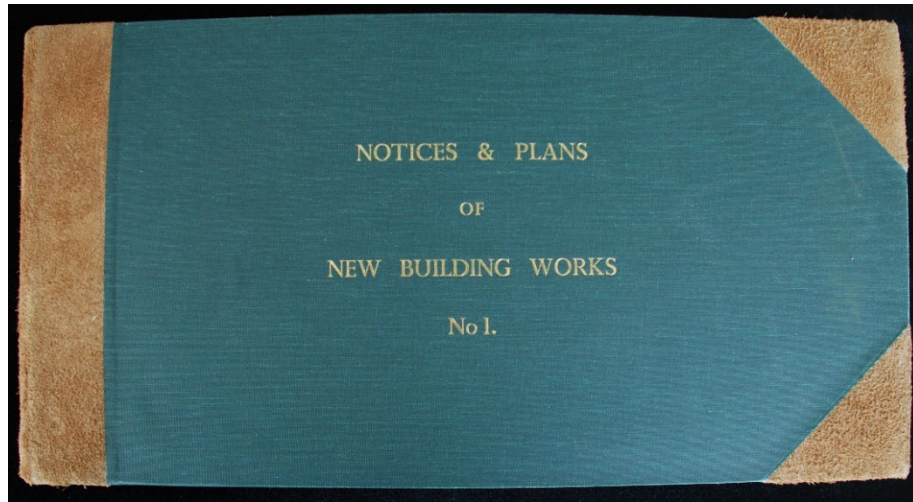
Book conservation included the earliest registers of building plans from the old Slough Borough. These registers, spanning 1880-1931, pre-date planning laws but form an effective log of building permits after Slough adopted the Public Health Act 1875.



Slough buildings register before repair



The registers had been heavily used during their working life. Their sewing was heavily compromised and each had several loose sections. This meant that both volumes had to be taken apart entirely in order to be re sewn. At the same time, each page was surface cleaned. Finally, as both the original covers had deteriorated, they were replaced with a new binding in half reverse calf, with green cloth sides, marble endpapers and tooled titles onto the front boards.



*Then re sewn, and in its new cover*

## Special Projects

### *Thames Conservancy conservation*

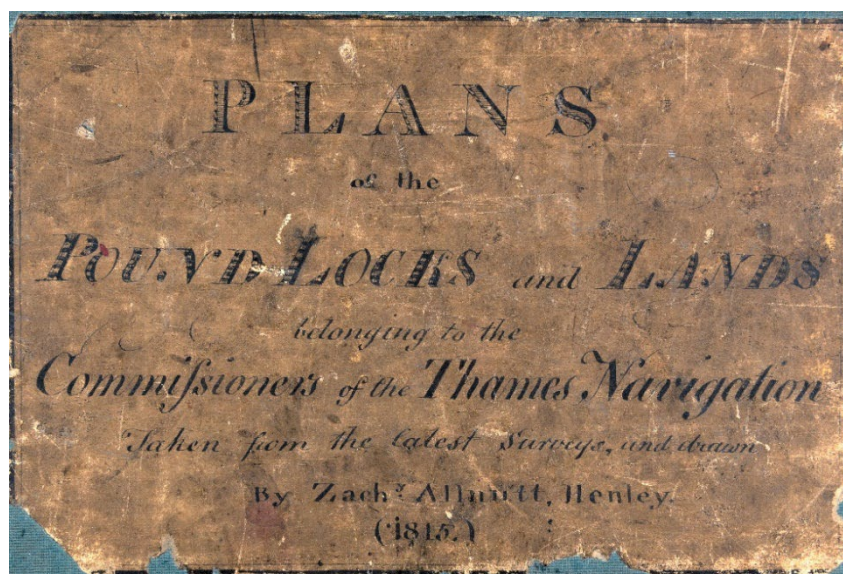
Sarah Baily, our Thames Conservancy conservator, started work in July. Her post was initially funded until April 2023, but we were delighted to receive an additional grant of £17,000 from the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, which has allowed us to fund another five months' conservation time.

Sarah's list of items to treat originally numbered 37, which were mostly Victorian committee books and plans of locks, weirs or other features built by the Conservancy. It also included some of the Georgian records from the old Thames Navigation Commission. These items were all too damaged for researchers to use, and remedial work included cleaning, fixing tears and making paper infills, as well as re sewing and recovering volumes.



*Sarah at work on one of the Thames Conservancy plans*

With work on those tasks nearly complete, by year-end Sarah prepared to tackle another 22 items via the NMCT grant. These are almost all single sheet plans, augmented by a wonderful book of lock plans compiled by Zachary Allnutt of Henley, who held the title of surveyor to the Navigation. Zachary's book dates from 1815 and is currently housed in an unsympathetic mid 20<sup>th</sup> century binding. By the project's end, its contents will be cleaned and repaired, and it will be replaced with a cover more in-keeping with what was, presumably, Zachary's homemade protection for when he took the book on site visits.



*One for next year's report: Zachary's book of plans*

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

The early part of the year was spent finalising a partnership agreement for the Wellcome Trust's 'New Jerusalems' project, of which this is a part. West Sussex County Council (Crawley) has kindly agreed to be the administrative lead. Once that was sorted, we recruited for our project archivist and Evangeline Mills started work in November.

The new towns were part of the same policy drive that founded the NHS and social security payments. Bracknell was designated in June 1949, with 1800 acres being passed to the Development Corporation to create housing, employment opportunities and green space for 25,000 people. Arguably, it is the most successful post-war new town. It doubled in size within 20 years and has become one of the first to significantly update its retail centre.

The hundreds of architects, surveyors and engineers who designed Bracknell have left behind a considerable archive, which stretches across the Development Corporation's life until it was wound up in 1982. Evangeline has already catalogued over 1500 items, including large numbers of contract drawings and other plans that encompass the breadth of fulfilling the town's Master Plan, and there is more to come.

Work will continue until November 2023. Evangeline has also met with Bracknell officers to discuss next year's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of designation, and with planning academics at the University of Reading about ways to use the archive in teaching.



*The Bracknell Development Corporation engineer's department, c1957*

## ***Eliza Chattaway***

We continued our research partnership with the University of Reading through another summer undergraduate placement. This year, Leah Rashid worked on a biography of Eliza Chattaway. Eliza was head teacher at Redlands Infants School in Reading, lecturer at the University and, most interestingly, a pioneer of outdoor learning. A book, *School Nature Rambles*, is Eliza's principal legacy.

Leah was able to discover more of Eliza's life beyond Redlands, including her network of friends, her interests and the educators that she travelled to hear from. Leah produced a blog page for us, a longer one for the university and was also interviewed on Radio Berkshire about her discoveries.



*Eliza Chattaway, foreground, with hat, infants, horse and impressive haystack [not dated but c1910]*

## ***Diversity in Georgian Berkshire***

We received funding also through the University to have a PhD student, Graham Moore, begin scoping a potential project around Georgian rural diversity.

The starting point was a spreadsheet of entries collected - mostly by Berkshire Family History Society volunteers - of parish register entries relating to people of ethnically diverse backgrounds. This was constructed about 15 years ago for the now-defunct Black and Asian Studies Association.

Graham's work was the first step in what we hope will be a much larger project, and on which more work is planned next year. He checked the existing spreadsheet entries for accuracy, considered how representative and complete

they were likely to be, did some proof of concept work on where researching the entries might lead to a fuller biography. He focussed the latter work on a boy known in England as George Freeman, who was removed from a Portuguese slave ship off the coast of Sierra Leone and brought to the parish of Remenham.

There is more scoping work to do. Next, we will look at the potential for storytelling and about how we can hand over or involve community groups in the project.

### ***Victorian schools***

We were delighted to resume research this year, though with slightly fewer volunteers than we had before the pandemic. By year-end, we had completed most of the proposed case studies and begun work on a gazetteer of all school building work between 1870-1914.

## **With Thanks to Our Staff**

I am appreciative, as ever, to staff for completing so many achievements. They have successfully reopened the service fully after the pandemic. They also dealt with more sick leave than for the past three years, as mixing freely brought them again into contact with viruses.

Apart from our project staff, we have gained Lara Garrett and Amber Lindley as archives assistants. They formed a jobshare to replace Magz Dinham when the latter became Reading's records manager. Magz also successfully gained her postgraduate diploma in archives and submitted the dissertation for her MA. Sarah Lobley left her post as strongroom cleaner to pursue a horticultural qualification and we welcomed Jane McEwen in her stead.

I continued as visiting research fellow in the University of Reading's History Department and as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society. I was also appointed to the Documents Working Party that forms part of the government's Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art.

Ellie Thorne completed her term on the council of the Berkshire Record Society and has been replaced by Lisa Spurrier, who 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 continued to act as mentor for Jane Mac Tarling's certificate studies.

## And with Thanks to Our Volunteers

We were delighted to welcome back Paul Gardner and Tony Place, who are helping us list Reading Borough town clerk's files and drainage applications respectively, and also Greta Dixon and Heather Young as conservation volunteers. They join Peter Durrant and Deborah Jenkins, who had returned to site a little earlier. Peter is back to bookbinding and Deborah to cataloguing (with the Baynes family collection being part of her output).

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, we had Jessica Campbell and Laura Martin with us for 10 days, which they spent investigating items from women in the Archer-Houblon family, of Welford Park, who wrote home from Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We are very pleased to report that Laura has decided to pursue a career in archives. She has subsequently returned and helped us list the Broadmoor reference library, which we have transferred to the Royal College of Psychiatry, and material from the archives of the Theatre Royal, Windsor.

## Key Numbers

### Visitors and enquiries

	2022/23	2021/22
Visitors to the search room	1331	1157
Written and telephone enquiries	5451	6922
Documents produced	4117	4305
Microforms consulted	2190	507
Copies supplied	13067	11538
Visits to online resources	75167*	83827
Talks and visits: number	15	19
Talks and visits: attendance	226	672

### Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	191	176
Accessions received: volume	4.511m <sup>3</sup>	6.021m <sup>3</sup>
	4.12GB	12.69GB
Catalogues completed: volume	4.458m <sup>3</sup>	11.883m <sup>3</sup>
Accessions catalogued: number	261	208
Items catalogued	2321	4712

### Conservation and preservation

First aid	134	18
Tipping-in	1088	32
Sewing	125	444
Packaging	41	33
Encapsulation	122	12
Cleaning	192	240

### Staff resources

Headcount of permanent staff	19	18
Number of full-time equivalent posts	13.40	13.40
Headcount of project staff	2	0

\*we have slightly adjusted downwards what we are counting - to show interactions on social media rather than views