

**BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2013-2014**

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of budget pressures and staff shortages, the Record Office enjoyed another successful year, with several positive achievements to celebrate. The first highlight occurred at the very beginning of the year, when our online catalogue finally went live after many months of preparation. As a result catalogue descriptions of many thousands of records are now searchable worldwide, opening up our collection to new audiences across the globe. In April we hosted a very successful symposium to mark the conclusion of our Enemies of the State project. May saw the completion of our Broadmoor conservation project (bringing to an end our seven-year partnership with the Wellcome Trust) and also the 150th anniversary of the foundation of Broadmoor Hospital, and at the end of the month we held a reception to mark these events and also to celebrate the success of a project that has opened up to research an archive of international importance. Later in the year we welcomed the publication of an edition of one of our finest Tudor church records, the churchwardens' accounts of St Laurence, Reading. During the year we accepted 4.7 cubic metres of records and catalogued nearly 3 cubic metres - both figures a little down on the previous year, but a considerable achievement in view of the staffing situation and the need to maintain our other core work in the public research and enquiry service, in preservation and conservation, and in supporting community use and enjoyment of records.

One notable event during the year not mentioned above was the move of the office of the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire from the Civic Centre in Reading to the Berkshire Record Office. Staff, files and equipment arrived one sunny morning in July, followed by the Lord Lieutenant herself bearing a cool-bag full of ice creams which she distributed to grateful helpers. The arrangement has proved very successful, and has been welcomed by all parties.

Throughout the year I have been supported, as always, by an able and committed staff, by colleagues in Reading Borough Council and the other unitary authorities in Berkshire, by members of Archives Board, and by many volunteers and friends of the service. The achievements noted above and recorded in more detail in the pages that follow would not have been possible without this support, and I am glad to have this opportunity to acknowledge it and to express my thanks.

This will be my last annual report. Looking back over the past twenty-five years I see much that has changed. There has been a revolution in communications, offering new opportunities for access to information and in many cases to images of documents, and allowing remote research in a way that was scarcely imaginable a quarter of a century ago. This has presented archivists themselves with new challenges as well as new opportunities. In Berkshire perhaps the biggest change resulted from the abolition of Berkshire County Council and the establishment of the Record Office as a joint service of the new unitary authorities. The new Record Office building that came with that change provides facilities undreamed of when the

Office was founded in a basement of the old Shire Hall just after the war, and through its quality it makes a powerful statement about the importance that Berkshire attaches to its archives. Yet at the same time I see much continuity. The service that we provide, in acquiring and caring for records, cataloguing and making them available, encouraging use and promoting research, may be done differently but is still at root the same task, based on enduring values of respect and understanding. Historical research at its best should challenge prejudice and promote understanding, and through an understanding of the past help to explain the present. But if it is to achieve this it must be based on evidence. Archives provide that evidence- and that is why I believe they are not just important but essential to a healthy society.

I have enjoyed being County Archivist of Royal Berkshire, and in many ways I am sorry that the time has come to leave. The job has not always been without its difficulties, and I look with great sadness at the cuts in budgets currently being demanded of services across the country which will inevitably weaken them. However, I am confident that Berkshire Record Office will come through this difficult period and will continue to thrive and prosper. It has been a privilege to lead one of the country's top record offices for so many years. I am proud of what we have achieved here in Berkshire, and I am pleased to have been able to play a small part in making Berkshire Record Office the place it is today.

Peter Durrant  
County Archivist  
June 2014

## PUBLIC SERVICE

### Visitor and enquiry services

Visitor numbers remained almost exactly unchanged on 2012/13, in contrast to the trend from the previous year. The provision of three new public computers, together with free access to Ancestry and Find My Past has almost certainly provided a boost to the figures. The number of copies supplied was static too when compared to 2012/13, though the number of items produced for visitors showed a 20% increase and was at a three-year high. This continues the trend for visitors to look at a greater number of items during each visit.

There was a modest increase in the number of telephone and email enquiries received, bringing that figure also to a three-year high. This is despite - or possibly because of - more basic information about our collections and services being placed online. At present, we know very little about our remote customers, but towards the end of the year we took part in the second national survey of enquirers to UK archives and we hope this will tell us a little more about them.

We ran three introductory sessions for new researchers, and also completed our series of guides to school records by producing editions for Reading and old North Berkshire. However, we decided to temporarily halt the joint family history evenings that we provided together with the Berkshire Family History Society. This was a reflection of both our reduced staffing and diminished attendance at these events.

The 2012 survey of visitors to UK archives, undertaken by the Institute of Public Finance - and which measures customer satisfaction - became available during the year. The results further demonstrated the good experience that most visitors have of our service: 99% of respondents thought the service overall was good or very good; while a similar figure thought that the staff were friendly and their advice good. Our poorest satisfaction score (at 76%) was for our onsite computer facilities, something we have attempted to address through the new resources mentioned above.

Our redesigned customer comment form also led to an increase in the number of comments received during the year. The nature of the comments themselves has not changed. Virtually all are thank-yous from customers who have enjoyed their time with us, and wish to tell us about it. Some of this year's comments include:

*Fantastically knowledgeable team of people, ridiculously kind and friendly*

*What a wonderful place - a real pleasure to use it*

*Everyone has been unfailingly helpful - an excellent service*

*BRO by far the best record office we have visited recently*

*I can't thank you enough and won't forget your kindness and helpfulness*

*Wonderful friendliness and welcoming staff*

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

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time
- 97% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 100% of all copies are supplied within 10 working days
- 99% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

### **Remote access**

We are very pleased to report that our online catalogue became available in April 2013; the outcome of many years' work to improve our online resources. The catalogue itself is displayed via 'Calmview', a proprietary product that is linked to our in-house cataloguing database. At the time of launch the online catalogue had around 90,000 entries (although some of these are explanatory notes, rather than descriptions of individual archives) and a further 10,000 entries have been added since as we have sought to add items to the database.

The new availability of the catalogue has undoubtedly had a positive effect on visits to the Record Office websites. Visits to the main site were up 10%, while visits to the New Landscapes site (for which a complete set of entries is available in the online catalogue) were up 27%; we also gained a further 70 Facebook friends. A substantial quantity of our catalogues also remains available via the Access 2 Archives site, though the number of catalogue views on A2A fell slightly during the year.

Apart from the new catalogue, the principal addition to online content was the usual twelve monthly highlights, which were added to the main Office website. These highlights included features about a Windsor aviation pioneer, Clifford's Dairies, the Slough Food Flying Squad, and a 'life on benefits' Georgian style. We were also able to create a new online gallery from our 'Enemies of the State' display about Irish patriots interned in Reading gaol. The gallery includes the text and images from the boards and copies of the documents exhibited in the display.

### **Outreach and audience development**

Our principal outreach activity has continued to be offering talks and visits to a variety of community groups.

We hosted visits for the Shrivenham Heritage Society, Ascot Heath Mother's Union, West Berkshire Libraries, Reading Museum, Berkshire Family History Society and Slough Libraries. We also provided our usual behind-the-scenes tours for the Heritage Open Days. We gave local history talks to Reading Unison, Craven Road Retired Group, Reading Civic Society and Goring and Streatley Local History Society; and we took up our usual stall at the Bracknell Family History Fair. Additionally, Ellie Thorne's talk about Plenty's Ltd, the engineering company in Newbury was delivered to

Thatcham Historical Society and Newbury Historical Society; while Prospect Park Hospital's learning disability forum, West Berkshire Community Hospital's mental health team, Purley Local History Society and the Newbury and District Field Club heard Mark Stevens talk about Victorian Fair Mile, Berkshire's county asylum. Mark also delivered a new version of his Victorian Broadmoor talk to the Berkshire Family History Society's Newbury branch, the Friends of the Royal Berkshire Medical Heritage Centre, Wokingham History Group, 'Visits' of Reading, and at public events at Crowthorne Library, Reading Library (twice) and Wokingham Library. Two separate addresses were also given at Broadmoor to over a hundred patients, staff and guests in July 2013 and February 2014, as part of the first and final events to commemorate the hospital's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

A number of events were held in the Record Office. Our own Broadmoor reception formed part of the hospital's 150<sup>th</sup> events and acted as a celebration of our Wellcome-funded project; while an evening event was also part of our 'Enemies of the State' project. In addition, we were delighted to welcome the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust for a reception, and the Berkshire Record Society for the launch of their edition of churchwardens' accounts for Reading St Laurence.

We presented two in-house exhibitions in the course of the year. The first derived from our work on the 'Enemies of the State' project. This was replaced in September by a display based on the archives of the Vansittart Neales of Bisham Abbey. Entitled 'A real-life Downton Abbey', the exhibition illustrated aspects of family life for members of the Victorian and Edwardian gentry. Above stairs, the masters and mistresses worried about their parenting skills and suffered personal tragedies, while below stairs there was an almost constant struggle to keep the house going as a viable concern. The exhibition marked the completion of our catalogue of the collection, which is discussed more fully below.

During the year we published four editions of *The Berkshire Echo*. These highlighted stories relating to local taxation (particularly tolls on Cookham Bridge), Irish patriots interned in Reading gaol (as part of 'Enemies of the State'), family life and relationships, and an 'Explore Your Archive' edition to coincide with The National Archives', and Archives and Records Association's national publicity campaign. Pieces on the Broadmoor 150<sup>th</sup> were included in *Mental Health Matters* (the newsletter of the West London Mental Health NHS Trust) and *The Broadmoor Chronicle* (the patients' magazine). We also made our usual, regular contributions to the newsletters of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire family history societies and local history associations, while Natalie Burton's award-winning article on the establishment and organisation of civil defence in Berkshire, 1936-1945, was published again by the British Association of Local History in their national journal, *The Local Historian*.

Newspaper coverage included pieces on the 'Enemies of the State' project and the closure of Reading Prison, both of which stories also led to a number of staff appearances on Radio Berkshire and BBC South news. Staff

also spoke on Radio Berkshire about the Coronation in 1953 and the First World War centenary in 2014, as well as Broadmoor's anniversary year. Mark Stevens additionally recorded interviews about the hospital for three documentaries: 'A History of Criminal Insanity', broadcast on the Crime Investigation Network in July; 'Inside Broadmoor', broadcast on Channel 5 in September; and 'Great British Railway Journeys', broadcast on BBC2 in January. The Sunday People, Daily Express and Daily Mail featured articles based on Victorian Broadmoor and its archives; Mark also wrote blog pieces on the subject for the Huffington Post and Old Bailey Online, as well as contributing to an audio slideshow about Broadmoor for the BBC website, and a Wellcome Trust video highlighting its funding for archival resources.

## Learning

Two day schools were provided through the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education: one on quarter sessions records, and the other on sources for the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century villages. We also hosted a visit for the University of Reading's MA in Early Modern Literature and delivered our usual lecture to history undergraduates about to embark on their final-year dissertations, as well as arranging study visits for Newbury U3A Calligraphy Group and Wantage and Grove U3A Family History Group.

## ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

### Accessioning

The most notable acquisition during the year was the family papers of the Spencer family of Cookham, purchased with the generous support of the Friends of the National Libraries, the Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund, and the Louis Baylis Trust (Maidenhead). The collection includes correspondence, photographs and ephemera of various members of the family, but the great bulk consists of letters written by William, Percy and Sydney Spencer, three of the brothers of Stanley Spencer, the artist, mostly to their sister Florence. Percy and Sydney wrote extensively of their wartime experiences on the Western Front. William, who lived in Germany and Switzerland, where he worked as a music teacher, wrote on a variety of artistic and spiritual topics. His correspondence continued until his death in 1954. Altogether some 500 letters are included, amounting to in excess of 200,000 words. These are supplemented by smaller groups of letters and papers of Stanley Spencer himself and of his father, William senior, together with occasional writings by other siblings and by Stanley's daughter Unity. The collection offers fascinating insights into the life of the family, as well as vivid depictions of life in the trenches during the First World War.

Other accessions received ranged in date from the mid-seventeenth century (a draft of the warrant of appointment of Richard Fielding as Lieutenant General in the King's Artillery in 1643) to the early twenty-first, and came from all parts of Berkshire (and occasionally beyond), representing a very wide range of individuals and organisations. We continue to welcome the records of local clubs and societies. During the year we received additional deposits from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes, Wokingham Theatre, the Wokingham U3A, and the Friends of Reading Abbey. The archives of the BFWI and the Wokingham Theatre are now extensive, and offer valuable insights into the work of these two organisations. We also welcomed first-time deposits from Crowthorne Natural History Society and Hampstead Norreys Horticultural Society (both following the winding-up of those societies), and from the (still very active) Wokingham Horticultural Association and Radstock Women's Institute, Lower Earley. We were pleased to receive a deposit also from the Community of Jesus the Good Shepherd, an organisation with activities across southern England, but with significant links to Berkshire (it managed St Gabriel's School in Sandford for a number of years). It is now based in Cuddesdon, where it shares premises with the Community of St John Baptist (formerly of Clewer), whose extensive records we also hold.

As usual we received a good number of deposits from Berkshire churches (41 from Anglican parishes, including 21 sets of recent parish magazines, and 19 from the Methodist church). Most of the records were modern in date, reflecting our past success in acquiring the older records of these churches, but there were a few notable exceptions, including a plan of the district assigned to the new church at Lambourn Woodlands in 1838, and papers relating to the building of the (now-closed) church at East Hanney, 1856-

1857. Among the Methodist Church records were property deeds from Colnbrook dating back to 1710, a certificate licensing the chapel at Cookham Dean as a place of worship, 1860, and a series of scrap books from the Ledgers Road Church in Slough, starting in 1900, that chronicle the activities of the church over some eight decades.

Business archives received during 2013/14 were represented by small accessions from Jacksons of Reading, the family-owned department store than ceased trading in 2013 after almost 140 years activity in the town, from the family of the late Michael Bayley of Maidenhead, architect, from the Aldermaston Pottery and (via the Brewery History Society) of plans of Berkshire public houses formerly owned by Wethered's Brewery, Marlow.

We seldom commission records, but this year we made a small exception, when we joined forces with the then High Sheriff of Berkshire, Professor Suzanna Rose, to arrange a group photograph of some 16 recent holders of that office. We have portraits of most of the High Sheriffs of Berkshire between 1877 and 1958, at which point the series stops. We hoped to be able to fill this gap, and the group photograph went some way to achieving this. Subsequently several past High Sheriffs donated copies of portraits of themselves. Although some gaps remain, we are very pleased with the success of this venture.

Of the remaining accessions, only a few can be noted here. They included deeds of land in Beenham and Aldermaston, 1636, Wootton, 1711-1871, and East Ilsley, 1717; photographs of (an unidentified) works outing on the 'Queen of the Thames', c.1930-1939; a report on the impact of evacuation in north Berkshire, 1940; subscribers' tickets to the Windsor Rose and Horticultural Society shows, 1893-1896; an architect's drawing of the main elevation of the Albert Institute, Windsor, 1878; photographs of the soon-to-be demolished Metal Box building, Reading, 1987; a log book of the Wantage Volunteer Fire Brigade, 1921-1930; and a historic building report on the former Presentation Convent building in Easthampstead Road, Wokingham, 2014.

## Cataloguing

Among the many catalogues completed during the year, three in particular deserve mention - the Reading Abbey formulary, the Spencer papers, and the archives of the Vansittart Neale family of Bisham.

The Reading Abbey formulary featured prominently in last year's annual report as the most significant acquisition of the year. In view of its importance, it was given a high priority in our cataloguing programme, and work started shortly after it arrived. The technical nature of the formulary presented an unusual challenge, but the finished catalogue does ample justice to the document it describes. A summary description of the book is followed by a calendar of contents running to some twenty pages, which reveals in detail the wealth of material contained within its covers, including evidence of national as well as local events, of appointments, and

of the Abbey's management of its properties, and which makes it fully available for study.

As reported above, the Spencer papers were acquired at the beginning of the year. The importance of this archive was heightened by the fact that so much of it related to the experience of the family during the First World War, so it too was given priority in our cataloguing programme. The statistical report (145 units) rather conceals the work involved, which required detailed investigation of several hundred letters as well as numerous other papers. However, the finished catalogue now offers full access to the wealth of fascinating material in the collection.

Whilst the Reading Abbey formulary and the Spencer papers are both recent acquisitions, the papers of the Vansittart Neale family of Bisham arrived in instalments over a period of nearly forty years. That we have them is largely due to the enthusiasm and dedication of the last owner, Miss Margaret Dickinson, the great-great-great grand-daughter of the George Vansittart who bought the estate in 1780. Originally on long-term loan, the archive was converted into a gift on her death in 1996. For a long time the collection languished as a part of our backlog, but with the arrival of a small additional deposit in 2010, we decided that the time had come to tackle it. The completed catalogue is the result of work carried out over the four years since. The archive covers the period 1468-1996 and fills some 85 boxes. Its particular strength lies in the accumulation of nineteenth and twentieth-century family papers, including diaries, letters and other personal items as well as several photograph albums, which offer a vivid picture of family life in a country house in the period. As mentioned above, we used some of the material as a resource for our Wroughton Room exhibition in the autumn.

Whilst these three catalogues dominated our output, we also completed work on a number of smaller collections during the year. Numerically, the most significant were the catalogues of records of Berkshire churches (47 Anglican parishes, 14 Methodist churches and three circuits, and two non-conformist congregations). Of particular note are the records from Englefield, which included the eighteenth and early nineteenth century churchwardens' and overseers' papers discovered last year in the attic of the Englefield Estate Office. The records of St George's Church, Tilehurst, included a nineteenth-century parochial diary, while the catalogue of East Ilsley Baptist Church records covered the entire archive of the church, dating back to 1832, and touching on the history of several other chapels in what was once known as the 'Ashampstead Group', as well as chronicling the story of the East Ilsley church itself.

Voluntary organisations also featured in our cataloguing programme during the year, and we completed catalogues of the records of some twelve local clubs and societies. Among these were, the Hurst Bowling Club, 1899-c.2010, the Kintbury Cottage Garden Society, 1902-1924, the Kintbury and Inkpen Branch of the League of Nations Union, 1933-1941, Cookham Reach Sailing Club, 1948-2011, the Hampstead Norreys Horticultural Society, 1961-

2012, the Crowthorne Natural History Group, 1967-2013, and perhaps most notably the Reading Philanthropic Institution, 1859-1967. This last body was founded in 1822. Records for its early years are missing, but the surviving records show a body concerned with caring for the elderly and infirm, providing relief for the poor and needy and endeavouring to reform criminals. Funded by subscriptions and membership fees, which were augmented by donations from the well-to-do, the Institution acted as a kind of Friendly Society. At times of special need it used to prepare and distribute food parcels. Though Reading-based, it worked throughout Berkshire, and its activities were not exclusively philanthropic: the minutes of 1927 include a plan of the football match between the 'Phil' and The Ancient Order of Druids. Faced with dwindling membership and rising costs, the Institution closed in 1980 after more than a century and a half of public work: its records provide a memorial to that endeavour.

Records of Berkshire's local authorities featured rather less prominently in our output this year, but notable among those that we did catalogue are the deeds of the Reading Board of Health, 1690-1871. These throw new light on the transformation of Broad Street in the mid-nineteenth century, when the buildings in Middle Row, between Cross Street and High Street/Minster Street were torn down and Broad Street widened. Numerous small properties were acquired by the Local Board of Health between 1855 and 1862 to make this possible, and the deeds, some including plans and one including an inventory of fittings, show not only how this project was achieved, but also much of the previous history of the area. In addition to this, the collection includes deeds of the waterworks in Broad Street, 1696-1861, and of the waterworks at St Giles's Mill on the Kennet, 1697-1841, the latter including a plan showing the engine house and water tower, and both throwing light on the provision of a safe water supply to the town.

## Research and Publication

Family history, with its wide appeal across the community, remains the most popular subject of study in the Record Office, though local and community history, the history of individual houses and other buildings, academic studies and research for legal or administrative purposes continue to account for a substantial minority of our users. Once again the Broadmoor archives proved extremely popular, providing material for several student dissertations and other studies. The archives of Reading Gaol provided material for a Radio 4 play, 'The Last Ballad of Reading Gaol', broadcast in March and telling stories from the history of the prison. Other subjects of study included medieval charters, the English civil war, the Society of Friends, aspects of the history of gardens, the 'Swing' riots, trades unions, and women in agriculture. Unsurprisingly the local impact of the First World War featured prominently. Local topics included the poor law in Wantage, brickmaking in California, Windsor Forest, aspects of medieval Wallingford, and the House of Mercy, Clewer.

Among a number of publications that appeared, the Record Office was delighted to support the Berkshire Record Society's publication of *Reading*

*St Laurence churchwardens' accounts, 1498-1570*, which were edited by Joan Dils. These wonderfully detailed Tudor accounts, perhaps the finest to survive in Berkshire, offer a vivid insight into the impact that the reformation had on a local town. The entries range from repairs to the church fabric and furniture to providing all the necessities for celebrating the liturgy; from the wages of individual workers to payments for parish entertainments, plays and feasts. The effect of religious change is also apparent in the sales of forbidden objects and texts, and the purchases of new books.

Also published during the year was a revised edition of Mark Stevens' *Broadmoor Revealed*, timed to coincide with the hospital's 150<sup>th</sup> year. More patient stories were included and the introductory chapter on Victorian Broadmoor was expanded. The new edition was favourably received and positive reviews were given in, amongst others, *Family Tree* magazine, the *Local Historian*, the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, the *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

## Library

Some 195 titles were added to the Record Office library during the year, covering the usual range of local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference books and professional literature. Several of them were based on research carried out in the Record Office. We were grateful to the Berkshire Family History Society for the gift of several editions of Kelly's Directories of Reading, published between 1926 and 1937, to Professor Brian Kemp for copies of his *English Episcopal Acta: Salisbury 1078-1297*, and to the authors of *Working Class Suburb* (a study of Whitley) and *John Ruskin, Henry James and the Shropshire Lads* (which notwithstanding its title has an important section on Easthampstead). We were pleased also to receive a copy of Harriet Mahood's BA dissertation comparing Reading and Paisley Abbeys, which was the winner of the Berkshire Prize for the best dissertation on a local topic submitted by a final-year undergraduate at Reading University in 2011. A number of other titles were acquired as gifts, both from authors and friends, and we are grateful to the donors for their generosity.

## **SPECIAL PROJECTS**

### **Broadmoor**

Our Wellcome Trust-funded project on the hospital archive ended in May. This brought to an end seven years' work to list and repair the archive, and also the current support from the Trust for collections here.

The details of the project's achievements have been documented in previous annual reports, but it is worth repeating the fact that thousands of items from Broadmoor have been listed and repaired during it, and as a result this internationally-important collection is now available for researchers to study. The project has also significantly raised awareness of the Record Office within the medical history community.

I would like to place on record once again our thanks to the Wellcome Trust not just for their financial commitment to the Broadmoor archives - and those of Fair Mile, Berkshire's local mental health hospital - but also the Trust's promotional help to increase our profile, as well as the co-operative, engaged way in which their staff assisted us with our projects and the applications for funding. The Trust's common sense approach to managing grants has made it a pleasure to work with them. In line with a previous request from Standing Conference on Archives, we have written to the Trust to express the gratitude of the county.

### **Enemies of the State**

This short project investigated the stories of Irish patriots interned in Reading gaol after the Easter Rising in 1916. It was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and also finished in May.

The project was a partnership between the Record Office and the University of Reading's English Literature Department, and the AHRC grant allowed us to employ a project officer for three months to undertake a variety of tasks. During her time here she was able to make some improvements to our catalogue of Reading Prison records, as well as organise a display about the gaol and the internees, and a public event which featured two distinguished guest speakers and was augmented by an Irish band. This event was hugely oversubscribed and a packed Wroughton Room heard lectures about the gaol, the Easter Rising of 1916 and about modern legal arguments concerning detention without trial. The project was used as a model by the AHRC in its annual report, while we also spoke at about its success to an academic seminar at the University of Oxford.

### **Oscar Wilde and Reading gaol**

Although the AHRC decided not to renew the relevant funding stream for similar activities, the success of 'Enemies of the State', together with local interest generated by the closure of Reading Prison encouraged us to join with the University of Reading once more on another short project. This

will focus on the Victorian gaol and will be based on the story of its most famous inmate as well as those imprisoned alongside him. The project has been awarded a grant by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and its events will begin this autumn.

### **Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century**

Our volunteer research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833, run in association with the Berkshire Record Society and the Berkshire Local History Association, continues to make good progress. The majority of parish and charity records have now been investigated. Our volunteers are completing research on a few of the larger collections. Work on the archives of the boroughs of Abingdon, Newbury, Reading and Wallingford will follow, as all four towns had schools with close connections with their corporations. Further research is planned in the Salisbury diocesan archives in the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, in the records of the National Society in London, in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in Aylesbury (for schools in the former south Buckinghamshire parishes), and in local newspapers. However, we have reached an important milestone in that sufficient evidence has now been amassed for us to start work on parish entries for the gazetteer and to consider an introductory essay. Our editor, Dr Sue Clifford, has prepared some drafts for consideration by the project board.

## CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

### Conservation

The work of the Conservation Unit, though seldom seen in action, and often (except in the case of high-profile repairs) hardly noticed subsequently, is nevertheless an essential part of our programme of preserving and making available the archival heritage of Berkshire. Through that work we are able to provide access to documents that would be otherwise too fragile to handle, and to provide protection for all our documents for their long-term safety.

The majority of reports to the Unit emerge through the cataloguing process, as we seek to ensure that all newly-catalogued documents are fit to handle. But while this is the more usual route, it remains the case that some documents are identified as needing repair only when they are requested for use in the searchroom, coming as they do from our still-extensive backlog.

During the year the conservation team (significantly depleted in numbers during the final quarter) provided first aid (mending tears and the like) for over 800 documents, secured nearly 1000 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and sewed with cotton thread (having first removed the ferrous staples) over 2100 pamphlets, periodicals and parish magazines. Some 700 items that had previously been 'mended' with self-adhesive tape were gently separated from this noisome substance, and made ready for better repair. Nearly 200 items were provided with specialist protective packaging, and a further 650 were encapsulated in melinex.

Among the items requiring more detailed work were a medieval seal, two seventeenth-century manorial surveys and a nineteenth-century sale catalogue. We also made a special box for our prize purchase of the previous year, the Reading Abbey formulary.

The seal was appended to a certificate issued by the Bishop of Salisbury, dated 1574, giving a list of the incumbents of Englefield and Brimpton from the mid-fourteenth century, and was one of those considered (though in the end not selected) for inclusion in our summer 2014 exhibition 'Small Objects of Power'. It was cracked, and much had been lost, though that part of the image that had survived was remarkably clear. The first task was to clean out the dirt that had accumulated in the crevices of the design, and this we did very gently using warm water and the brush (wielded manually!) from a child's electric toothbrush. Any moisture remaining after cleaning was quickly absorbed using cotton buds. We then reconnected the two surviving fragments of the seal using beeswax which we had coloured with watercolour to blend with the original. We did not attempt to rebuild the lost parts of the seal, so its original oval shape has to be imagined, but what remains is now bright and clean and secure. For its protection, we provided it with a wrap made of plastazote.

The earlier of the two manorial surveys was actually a copy (on paper) made around 1603 of an original (and now lost) survey of Sonning made over half a century earlier. It was in two sections, with some loose sheets, and had been 'stab-stitched' all through. The outer pages were very torn and creased, with large sections missing, while the inner leaves were creased and dirty. We cleaned each leaf using a graded eraser before gently washing it. Whilst it was still damp we stretched it out on a metal surface, holding it in place using magnets. Finally we repaired the damaged leaves using a technique known as leaf-casting (which uses paper pulp to fill lost sections) prior to re-sewing.

The second survey was also a copy, this time on parchment and beautifully written, of two surveys, one of the manor of Sonning made in 1611 and the other of the manor of Diapers in Binfield made in 1617. The copy itself appears to date from 1617. Parts of the survey have been lost, and the remaining folios had lost their cover. We made new endpapers from beige hand-made paper and then sewed the sections of the volume together with their new endpapers on to white goatskin strips, which we then used to secure the new vellum cover.

The sale catalogue, of the Beaurepair and Brocas Lands estates in south Berkshire and north Hampshire, was a typical nineteenth-century production on poor quality paper which had degraded and cracked. The lower edge of all the pages had suffered significant damage. As usual we had first to clean all the pages before repairing each one individually using the leafcasting technique. Large parts of the lower edges had to be replaced completely. To facilitate sewing we paired pages together and guarded them on Japanese paper, which we then gathered together in a new plain cover and sewed through the folds. The original cover could not be repaired properly as there is no suitable paper available, so, having cleaned it and washed it, we pasted it on to the plain cover that we had made. From being too brittle to use without serious risk of further damage, the catalogue is once again fit to handle.

Finally, mention should be made of the new box we created for the Reading abbey formulary, since this was no ordinary box but one, befitting its contents, made with special care. It is what is known as a drop-back clam shell box. It is covered with vellum (no easy matter given the need to keep the vellum relaxed while folding it carefully around all the edges of the box), and lined with hand-made marbled paper. Plastazote cushions inside the box keep the formulary secure.

## **Volunteers**

In recent years the contribution made by volunteers to our preservation work has been considerable, and the past year has been no exception. During the year our team worked on three main projects - an early twentieth-century valuation list, some property registers from Bracknell Development Corporation, and a large series of files from the former Berkshire County Council Clerk's Department.

Valuation lists are notorious for their poor condition, a result chiefly of being in regular use for many years, and sometimes decades, at a stretch. This one, covering the parish of Cookham, arrived with most of its hundred pages crumpled and torn. Each one had to be carefully flattened and repaired with heat-set tissue. The property registers, by contrast, were sound - but the plans, which had been attached with sellotape, had mostly fallen out and had become creased and dog-eared. All these needed to be reattached after the old sellotape had been removed. To date some 1500 plans have been refixed. The Clerk's files presented a different problem, comprising for the most part poor quality paper (frequently torn) inside indifferent manilla covers, all fixed with ferrous and often rusting fastenings - yet containing much valuable evidence about life in pre-war Berkshire. Our team flattened creased pages and repaired torn ones, reinforced numerous filing holes, removed all metal fastenings and replaced them with plastic ones, and provided new manilla covers and/or wraps where the old ones had disintegrated. This project is linked to our cataloguing programme, and will ensure that when the catalogue is complete there will be no restrictions on access due to the state of the records.

## **Outreach**

During the year Conservation staff presented two training sessions, the first for a team of volunteers at Windsor Museum, and the second, held at the Record Office, for museum staff from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire as part of the Southeast Museums Development Programme. Following talks on the main causes of damage to museum collections, those attending gained hands-on experience in identifying and cleaning of historic photographs, cleaning volumes and paper documents, removing sellotape and making remedial repairs to book covers. They left the day with new skills and with greater confidence in the handling of fragile museum items.

## **Microfilming**

Microfilming remains important to us as an economical and effective way of providing substitute copies of documents as a necessary precaution against over-use. This year we completed some 60,000 frames, with parish registers and electoral registers again accounting for a significant proportion of the total.

## STAFFING

During the year we said goodbye to Christine Dobson and Lin Eggleton, our two preservation assistants, to Linda Hennessy, microfilm operator, and to two temporary members of staff: Alex McGuire, conservator on the Broadmoor project, and Cleo Hanaway-Oakley, cultural engagement officer on the 'Enemies of the State' project. We were delighted to offer congratulations to Ellie Thorne on achieving registration with the Archives and Records Association. We are sorry to record that Sabina Sutherland's continuing ill-health meant that she was unable to return to work during the year.

Several members of staff contributed significantly to professional matters nationally and to the promotion of historical and archival concerns locally. I continued to serve as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society, as General Editor of the Berkshire Record Society, as President of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association, as a member of Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee and as a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust, and I was elected Chairman of the Friends of Reading Abbey. I also continued as an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History at Reading University. Sue Hourigan gave a paper at the national conference on the Archives and Records Association, drawing on her recent experience of conserving and re-housing a number of important medieval seals from the archives of St George's Chapel, Windsor. Lisa Spurrier continued to serve on the editorial board of *Berkshire Old and New*, and Ellie Thorne served as Minutes Secretary of the Pangbourne Heritage Group.

Finally, mention should be made of our volunteers, old and new, and too numerous to name individually, who have given generously of their time. In addition to the groups who have worked in the Conservation Unit and on the education research project, we have benefitted from voluntary assistance in gathering data on the impact of the First World War in Berkshire, and have been pleased to offer short-term work-experience placements to recent graduates and undergraduates interested in finding out about work in archives. We are grateful for their contribution.

## STATISTICS

### Public service

Visitors to the search room	3538
Written and telephone enquiries	6066
Enquiries answered within 5 days	97%
Documents produced	7502
Microforms consulted	12149
Copies supplied	8057
Visits to online resources	130279
Outreach events: number	35
Outreach events: attendance	1321

### Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	188
Accessions received: volume	4.69m <sup>3</sup>
Catalogues completed: number	148
Catalogues completed: volume	2.92m <sup>3</sup>
Accessions catalogued: number	179
Producible units catalogued	2731

### Conservation and preservation

First aid	829
Tipping-in	976
Sewing	2114
Packaging	160
Encapsulation	895
Microfilming: number of frames	61519