

INTRODUCTION

Following the abolition of Berkshire County Council on 31 March 1998, Berkshire Record Office became a joint service of the six unitary authorities in Berkshire. West Berkshire Council became the 'archive authority', taking ownership (in trust for all six authorities) of those records previously owned by Berkshire County Council, and assuming responsibility for the new Record Office building. Reading Borough Council became the managing authority for the service. Berkshire Record Office is now part of the Archives and Museums Service in the Arts and Leisure Directorate of Reading Borough Council.

The joint agreement for the Record Office provided for the continuation of the Standing Conference on Archives as a forum for the discussion of issues affecting the archives service and as a means of communication with depositors and users of records, with experts in the field, and with others having an interest in the service. Its membership comprises one elected member and one officer from each unitary authority, and representatives of the University of Reading, the Diocese of Oxford, the Berkshire Local History Association, the Berkshire Family History Society, the Berkshire Record Society and the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Incorporated Law Society. The joint agreement also provided for the establishment of an Archives Board, comprising a senior officer from each unitary authority. The Archives Board has responsibility for budget and planning issues. A separate agreement provided for a two-year joint modern records service.

In a year of adjustment and change, two events stand out, symbolic of the past and of the future. In 1998 Berkshire Record Office celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Set up in 1948, the Record Office has provided over half a century of service to the people of Berkshire and half a century of care for its records. Considerable changes have taken place since the early days of the Office in the Old Shire Hall, and it has a distinguished record of achievement. An exhibition and reception for invited guests was held in December in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, Mr Philip Wroughton.

Also in 1998, work began on the construction of a new record office building. Situated in the grounds of Yeomanry House, Castle Hill, Reading, this building will provide over 2000 square metres of space for the service, compared with approximately 1000 square metres at present. Even allowing for the fact that the new building must incorporate services, such as plant and toilet facilities, which are provided communally in Shinfield Park, this represents a considerable expansion. Storage space for documents increases by fifty percent (allowing for an estimated fifteen years of growth), and the public search room will be twice the size of the present one. The architects are WS Atkins of Oxford. The building is due for completion in December 1999, and is expected to open to the public in April 2000.

Inevitably, much time was spent by staff in preparing and planning for the new building. In the early months of the year, senior staff continued to be involved in the final stages of the transition to unitary local government. In spite of this, however, the review of the year reveals significant achievements. If the Annual Report provides the place to record these achievements, it also provides the opportunity to acknowledge

those who made them possible. As usual, therefore, I would like to express my thanks to all who contributed to the work of the Record Office during the year: to colleagues in Reading Borough Council and in the other unitary authorities in Berkshire, to members of the Standing Conference on Archives, to our depositors and volunteers, and, last but not least, to the Record Office staff themselves.

Peter Durrant

June 1999

REVIEW OF THE YEAR 1998/1999

PUBLIC SERVICE: search room and enquiry services

Demand for the service continued during the year at a high level, with significant increases in the number of documents produced for consultation (to 7715) and the number of copies made to public order (to 6465). Public satisfaction also continued, as is evidenced by the number of favourable customer comments received. This was despite some inconvenience and disruption following the withdrawal of the County Council from Shire Hall. Some teething troubles were experienced with the new telephone system, and at various times during the year visitors found themselves surrounded by building works on their way to and from the Office. However, Foster Wheeler staff, and in particular their reception staff, were uniformly helpful, and the effects of such difficulties were minimised as much as possible.

Several improvements were made in the public search room, most notably the revision of the parish catalogues, which were copied on to A4, making them easier to handle and clearer to read. Presentation of microfiche indexes was also improved during the year, though the main problem associated with these, that of overcrowding, will not be solved until the move to the new building has been completed.

Important new sources on microfiche were acquired during the year, of particular value to the family historian. These included General Register Office indices of army returns of births marriages and deaths, and Consular and High Commission returns. The Record Office is grateful to the Berkshire Family History Society for a contribution towards the cost of these.

Visitors came from a wide area. Most visitors were from Berkshire, but many came from other parts of the country and from overseas, reflecting the wide interest in the history of Berkshire and its people. Postal enquiries came from all over the world, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. Besides family history, these enquiries embraced such subjects as the writer S R Jones; records of the National Farmers' Union; Thomas Yeoman, Thames engineer; eighteenth-century theatres; popular politics, 1688-1832; Caesar's Camp, Bracknell; and entries in the British and Canadian Dictionaries of National Biography.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

After a slow start to the year, a busy programme of talks and visits got under way. Groups from all over Berkshire (by no means all of them local history societies) were visited, or paid a visit to the Record Office, for talks on a variety of subjects ranging from the work of the Record Office to sources for the history of buildings. Students from Reading University were among the groups who benefited from this service: talks on medieval records, sources for the history of childhood, sources for the history of the organ (Department of Music), and the use of Record Office for final year dissertations were all presented during the year.

In January the Record Office took a stand at Bracknell Family History Fair. This was a huge event, attracting over a thousand people, many of whom were relative newcomers to the business of tracing ancestors. As at similar events in previous years the Office was able to make contact with a number of potential users, as well as to meet old friends, and found the occasion a valuable opportunity to publicise its services.

Adult education continued to find its place in the Office's programme. The County Archivist ran day schools on probate records and on sources for the history of schools. Elizabeth Hughes contributed a paper on records of landed estates at Berkshire Record Office to a day school organised jointly by the Berkshire Local History Association and the University of Reading Centre for Continuing Education and ran a weekend school on sources for landscape studies.

A completely different audience watched a presentation on bookbinding when bindery staff visited Newtown Primary School, Reading, as part of the project 'What is a Book?', managed by the Reading Education Business Partnership. This successful event was repeated later in the year at Ridgeway Primary School, Reading. Earlier in the year the bindery had been the venue for a workshop on 'Write and Make your own Book', a children's event promoted by Reading Adult and Community College.

Librarians from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire visited the Record Office in February for a workshop on book care presented in association with the local branch of the Library Association. Guidance was given to a very appreciative audience on such matters as the make-up of books, handling, and elementary repair.

With the exception of the exhibition prepared for the fiftieth anniversary reception, no displays were mounted by the Record Office during the year. However, assistance was given with exhibitions outside the Office at Aldermaston, Kintbury, Sunningwell, and at two venues in Reading.

ACCESSIONS

The most exciting and unexpected accession of the year was a boxful of more than fifty medieval deeds relating to Binfield, Wokingham and Finchampstead, the earliest dating from 1293. These had been acquired in Paris by a collector from Essex. Anxious to find an appropriate home for them, he offered them to the Record Office, which purchased them with the assistance of a donation from the Wokingham Society History Group in memory of the late Dennis Ayres. They form a coherent group, and are particularly welcome because they clearly complement documents already on deposit in the Record Office.

The most visually appealing of the accessions received during the second part of the year was a collection of architectural drawings and sketches received from a former senior partner in a firm of Newbury architects, and acquired with the assistance of staff of the West Berkshire Heritage Service. Most of the drawings relate to buildings and design projects in West Berkshire, though from time to time members of the firm secured commissions elsewhere: the most exotic project is for an orphanage in Yugoslavia designed in the early years of the century. In addition to the drawings the collection also includes a number of sketches of buildings, and (for more recent projects) photographs. There is also a small quantity of business records of the firm. Unfortunately, due to poor storage in the past, many of the documents are damaged and in a fragile condition, and a good deal of work will be needed before they can be produced for research. Nevertheless, in time this will become a useful collection for local and architectural historians.

Earlier in the year the Office was saddened to learn of the death of another of its regular searchers, David Tomlinson, but grateful that, under the terms of his will, his notes and papers relating to the Binfield area were to come to the Record Office as a bequest. The collection includes many of his own pen and ink sketches, notes and documents assembled by himself and his father, original photographs and postcards and even the stamp used to frank the letters in Binfield Post Office.

A large deposit of miscellaneous papers, mainly from the offices of London solicitors but relating to Berkshire clients, was received through the British Records Association. The majority of the documents were, as might be expected, legal in nature, such as deeds and marriage settlements, but one unexpected item was a scrapbook compiled by Harold Brooks, unsuccessful as a Liberal candidate for South Berks in 1929, but successful in the libel action brought by Princess Irina Youssouppoff against Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, the makers of the film *Rasputin*.

A further addition to the Office's growing collection of non-conformist records came with the deposit of additional Methodist records from east Berkshire: these included records from churches in the Thames Valley circuit (among them documents from Maidenhead High Street Methodist Church, 1832-1989, Maidenhead Bridge Street Methodist Church, 1839-1859, Cox Green Methodist Chapel, 1875-1918, and Littlewick Green Methodist Church, 1887-1962) and in the South-East Berkshire Circuit (including Bracknell Methodist Church, 1941-1998).

Parish records, including parish magazines, were received from some 15 parishes in various parts of the archdeaconry. Most of these were relatively recent, reflecting the Record Office's previous success in securing the deposit of earlier records. However, nineteenth-century records were received from four parishes (Cold Ash, North Moreton, Pangbourne and Tidmarsh) and records dating from 1799 were received from the proprietary chapel of St Mary, Castle Street, Reading. New light was thrown on the building of the village church and school at Beech Hill, thanks to the deposit (received via Reading Museum Service) of a small bundle of documents on this subject.

Other accessions included a fascinating memoir written in 1946 by Charles Hazell of Littlewick Green describing his experiences working on the land before the age of mechanisation; records of Butler and Son of Reading, wine and spirits merchants (purveyors of a range of drinks including such splendidly named products as Old Reading Abbey Scotch Whisky and Old Reading Abbey Old French Brandy); school records from Farley Hill Primary School; records of the Newbury Waterside Townswomen's Guild; and an eighteenth-century copy of a seventeenth-century map of Kintbury (bought with the help of the Friends of the National Libraries). Finally, even if not in the strictest sense an archive, mention should be made of the miniature brick, fired to mark the occasion of the opening of the new library in Binfield in 1998.

CATALOGUING

The largest collection catalogued was that from King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor. Records dated back to 1818 and included annual reports from the early nineteenth century as well as several volumes of minutes and registers. In volume terms this collection measures almost half a cubic metre, and represents almost 10% of the Record Office's average annual intake of records. In historical terms it is important because it documents the work of the hospital's forerunner, the Windsor Royal Dispensary from its foundation in 1818 as well as of the hospital itself. Also catalogued during the year was the slightly smaller collection of records from Upton Hospital, Slough (the former Union Workhouse), 1945-1988.

Two important collections of charity records were catalogued. The larger of the two collections was that from Reading Municipal Charities, dating from 1431, and including medieval deeds of charity properties, an account book and rental of John a'Larder's charity, 1510-1607, a deed of John Blagrove containing an important late sixteenth century map of Southcote manor, and a large quantity of minutes and financial records from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The other group of charity records catalogued was a collection of deeds and leases of the property of St Bartholomew's charity in Newbury, valuable both because they complement the already-catalogued records of that charity, and because they help to document the way in which the trustees managed their resources.

An important archive for both social and business history in Reading was that of the Reading Co-operative Society. The Society was founded in 1860, and its surviving

records date from 1875. They include minutes of committee and general meetings, 1875-1974; records of the employees' association, 1939-1960, and of the women's guild, 1961-1983; records of Thames Valley Co-operative Laundries, 1940-1952; photographs from the 1920s to the 1980s; and miscellaneous papers, 1908-1974.

Among the many records of voluntary organisations catalogued during the year were those of the long-established Reading Swimming Club (records, including minutes, annual reports and programmes for events, 1903-1983) and of the more-recently-founded Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Amateur Swimming Association, 1963-1990. Records of a rather different organisation from Maidenhead were also catalogued: those of the Maidenhead Constitutional Club, 1892-1985.

The major collection of non-conformist records catalogued during the year came from Thatcham Congregational Church. Records include membership records dating from 1807, accounts from 1849, Sunday School records from 1872, minutes from 1887, and property records, including plans, from 1904. This adds yet more material to the substantial corpus of evidence available for the history of non-conformity in Berkshire.

Among the deeds and estate records catalogued were the papers of the Mount family of Wasing, 1597-1874; deeds of the Frankum family of Woolhampton, 1627-1973; records of the manor of Chamberhouse in Thatcham, including fifteenth-century manorial records and a charming seventeenth-century survey of the manor entered into a little pocket book; and the medieval deeds of Binfield, Easthampstead and Wokingham, already described under accessions.

Numbered among the smaller collections catalogued were those of Wargrave Parish Council (including the parish copy of the inclosure award dating from 1818, records of the parish surveyors of the highways, 1829-1889, vestry minutes, 1845-1895, and a delightful volume of plans and elevations for artisans' dwellings 1900), a managers' minute book of Ashampstead School, 1901-1933 (once thought to have been lost, but rediscovered in the papers of a former head teacher and presented by her family), and a small bundle of documents relating to the building of Reading Gaol.

Cataloguing is a key, if often underestimated part of the work of the Record Office, making more documents available for study, and enlarging the range of evidence open to researchers. The year 1998/99 has been another productive period for cataloguing, with records of widely varying nature from all parts of the county now open for inspection.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

The most popular subject for research was, not surprisingly, family history, which accounted for approximately 80% of visits. However, a significant number of researchers were pursuing topics unconnected with this. Local and regional studies remain important, while on a number of occasions researchers sought local evidence as part of a national survey. The motive for research is varied. Some is carried out for personal interest, some as part of a community project, and some for educational and academic purposes. In addition, the Record Office fulfils its role as a place for the deposit of documents of record by providing facilities for research carried out for legal and administrative purposes, in particular in connection with planning and highway matters.

Among the subjects studied were inclosure in Berkshire, recusancy in the Thames Valley, eighteenth-century nonconformity, the nineteenth-century architect Henry Woodyer, Victorian Wantage, and the medieval account rolls of Reading Corporation.

Publications added arising out of recent research included *George Edmund Street, a Victorian Architect in Berkshire*, edited by John Elliott and John Pritchard; *Agatha Christie, the Eleven Missing Days*, by Jared Cade; *The History of Gordon Road School, Maidenhead, 1907-1974*, by W Rose; *The Slades: Paper Making in Berkshire and Hampshire*, by Julian Tyson-Woodcock; and an article 'Village to Suburbs: the Expansion of Reading, c.1840-1914', by Joan Dils.

Theses completed during the year based extensively on Record Office resources included Dorothy Lowe, *The Contribution of the Church of England to Elementary Education in the Diocese of Oxford, 1833-1914*, (London PhD) and *Public Health in nineteenth-century Reading: the Social Response to Cholera*, by Catherine Esland.

The major publication with which the Record Office was involved was *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire*, edited by Joan Dils and published by the Berkshire Record Society. This contained nearly sixty short essays, written by some forty different contributors on various aspects of Berkshire's history since Saxon times. Each essay was accompanied by an illustrative map. Subjects covered include the geology and topography of Berkshire, place names, boundaries and administrative divisions, domesday Berkshire, manors and boroughs, population, vernacular buildings and country houses, deserted medieval villages, agriculture, ecclesiastical history and church architecture, local industries, crime, the Victorian poor law, education and recreation. Much of the research for this volume was carried out in Berkshire Record Office. Six of the essays were contributed by the County Archivist.

In addition to this, the Record Office produced a short leaflet on *County Portraits in Berkshire Record Office*, prepared by Sabina Sutherland, and Lisa Spurrier contributed an article, *Just One Long Holiday, With Pay*, based on the recollections of Charles Hazell, to the *Berkshire Family Historian*. Four members of staff are currently editing material for eventual publication by the Berkshire Record Society: the County Archivist (parish overseers' papers from Newbury and Hungerford), Sabina Sutherland (the visitation notebook of Archdeacon James Randall), Lisa

Spurrier (licences for non-conformist places of worship) and Elizabeth Hughes (minutes of the visiting justices at Reading Gaol).

Access to records is made much easier if they are transcribed and indexed, and the Record Office is (and its users are) indebted to the many volunteers who undertake this task. Members of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies are prominent among those who transcribe parish registers, and we are grateful to the Societies for presenting copies of these transcripts for general use. Members of the Berkshire Family History Society and other friends of the Record Office continued with the Berkshire Overseers Project, a scheme to transcribe and index all the (nearly ten thousand) surviving case papers preserved in parish collections: another two Saturday 'work-ins' were held, and two further instalments of the calendar were produced, covering the parishes of Finchampstead, Hurst, Sunninghill and Old Windsor and the borough of Newbury. The Record Office is particularly grateful to Brian Hunt for acting as the co-ordinator of this project. Other documents transcribed during the year and presented to the Office include workhouse registers of births and deaths (presented by David Disbury) and miscellaneous documents relating to the parish of Barkham (presented by David French).

CONSERVATION

The most dramatic repair project undertaken during the year was undoubtedly the Sandhurst parish register, 1759-1800. This volume had suffered severe damp damage at some time in the past, with the result that the paper pages had both lost most of their strength and had become firmly stuck together. The loss of the information contained in these pages was felt particularly keenly because the Bishops' Transcripts for this period had been lost. For many years the volume was thought unreparable. However, advances in repair techniques allowed the pages to be separated - perhaps curiously through the application of more moisture. Following separation, the pages were dried, photocopied and transcribed. The original pages, still extremely fragile, have now been packed away, but the painstaking work by the conservation staff and the careful transcript by a member of the archival staff have at last made the information in the register available again.

This project, however, was but one of several completed during the year which brought damaged documents back to life, including a plan of Winkfield churchyard, a medieval court roll, a deed of Denford Mill in Kintbury, a seventeenth-century Quaker minute book, and several other maps and plans.

The Winkfield churchyard plan - important evidence for locating graves - presented another challenge. It was hand-drawn on glazed linen, with red pigment and yellow wash. The surface of the map was badly damaged, and in places was flaking away, whilst the colours were fugitive. It was too fragile to clean by normal methods, so it was delicately cleaned with a cotton wool swab dampened with a weak solution of detergent and methyl cellulose. Areas that were missing were infilled with hand-coloured tissue. Following repair, the plan was photographed.

Preservation

Besides the repair of damaged documents the Conservation Unit also undertakes work to ensure that documents at risk can be safely handled. There are many documents which, though not so fragile that they must be withdrawn from use, would clearly suffer if handled regularly. One such item which received attention during the year was the album of photographs of the inmates of Reading Prison at the end of the nineteenth century - of interest not only for the individual portraits but also as evidence of increasing sophistication in prison photography: the early portraits were simply taken face-on, while the later ones used a mirror so placed that full face and profile could be captured simultaneously. This album was taken apart, the pages encapsulated in melinex, and the whole re-affixed in a post binder, which secures and protects the pages but allows them to be separated easily if required for exhibition or reproduction.

In general, preservation work is unglamorous, involving packaging, box-making, encapsulation and even putting protective socks around seals, yet it plays a vital part in protecting records for the future.

Binding

The Record Office is fortunate in that it has not only a conservation unit but also a well-equipped specialist bindery, thus increasing the range of repair work that can be undertaken. During the year a number of volumes from the Record Office's reference collection received attention, while the binding of minutes of the former Berkshire County Council continued. In addition, the binder rebound or repaired thirty-eight archival volumes including a gamekeepers' account book, a volume of vestry minutes, two chemist's prescription books, two school log books and an admission register, and an early nineteenth-century poor rate book.

Local Studies Conservation

As part of the joint agreement covering the service, the conservation unit and bindery undertake a certain amount of work each year on the local studies collections in Berkshire libraries, repairing damaged material and undertaking preservation work to protect other material in heavy demand. During 1998/99 some 315 maps were encapsulated, and over eighty books or pamphlets bound or rebound. Visits to each local studies centre were made during the year, to select material for repair and provide advice as necessary.

Microfilming

One important method of protecting documents from damage through overuse is throughout the provision of substitute copies. The Record Office's microfilm unit works closely with archivists and conservators to identify records that might be at risk. During the year some 400 documents were filmed, including parish registers, amounting to nearly 78,000 frames of film.

MODERN RECORDS

Following the abolition of the County Council, a county-wide modern records service was set up under a joint agreement between the six Berkshire authorities to provide for those records of the former County Council which could not be disaggregated to one of the six new authorities. The service is now based at 2-4 Darwin Close, Reading, though for the first three months of the year it remained in Shinfield Park whilst the new premises were being prepared. As might be expected of a refurbished building, Darwin Close has not been without its teething problems. Significantly it took some months to establish security in the Records Centre storage areas, the office area was without central heating from December to February, and the storage areas were without heat of any sort throughout January. These factors have made working conditions difficult throughout the year, and the staff deserve tribute for bearing all these problems with good grace.

The records held in the modern records centre are for the most part non-current records of the former County Council which could not be disaggregated. They are stored because they are required for reference for administrative purposes, or because the law requires them to be kept for a certain period. Many of these will eventually be destroyed. A small proportion will be preserved permanently as a historic record.

845 enquiries were received. Virtually all enquiries have come from lead authorities on joint arrangements, which would seem to indicate a large-scale success of the disaggregation prior to April 1998.

During the year some 1500 cubic feet of records was transferred to Darwin Close. Nearly two thirds of this came in the first month, following the final clearout of Shire Hall. The remainder was transferred during the year, principally by CSL, the Joint Social Services Legal Team, and the Close-Down Team. Nearly 900 cubic feet of records were destroyed during the year.

The main task of the year was the review and scheduling of records, to enable retention periods to be assigned. The review has been broken down into two parts: material for which retention schedules exist (to ensure that the recommendations are still valid), and review of unscheduled material. Because of the move, accruals, destructions, enquiry work and staff vacancies, work on the review did not begin until mid-November. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made since then: some 1500 cubic feet of scheduled material has had an action date confirmed, 7000 cubic feet of unscheduled material has been listed for review, and 600 cubic feet of unscheduled material has been reviewed.

It is currently predicted that the review process will not be complete until March 2002. Even then there will continue to be an on-going storage requirement for a number of years.

STAFF

During the year we welcomed one new member of staff and said farewell to one other. Bill Stavely, Senior Archivist: Official Records left in July (though in fact he was able to return later in the year to help out in the Modern Records Centre). His successor, Mark Stevens, arrived in November. Ian Wintersgill transferred from the Records Centre to the Record Office in July, taking up the vacant post of Record Office Supervisor. Linda Barlow gave valuable assistance in the Records Centre on a short-term contract between April and July, in particular helping with the move of the Records Centre from Shinfield Park to Darwin Close, Reading.

Many members of staff continue to contribute significantly to professional matters nationally and to the promotion of historical and archival concerns locally. The County Archivist served as vice-president of the Berkshire Family History Society, as general editor of the Berkshire Record Society, as secretary of the Historical Association Reading Branch, and as a member of the council of the Berkshire Archaeological Society. He continued to hold the post of Honorary Visiting Fellow in the Department of History at the University of Reading.

Elizabeth Hughes, Senior Archivist, served as secretary of the British Records Association. Sabina Sutherland, Senior Archivist, served as a member of the council of the Berkshire Record Society and as a committee member of the Historical Association Reading Branch. Mark Stevens, Senior Archivist, served as a member and latterly as secretary of the Society of Archivists' Legislation Panel and also as the Society's careers officer. Tony Ward served as chairman of the Society of Bookbinders.

As mentioned above, the County Archivist lectured for the extra-mural departments of the Universities of Reading and Oxford; Elizabeth Hughes also lectured for the latter. Mark Stevens delivered a paper at the annual conference of the Society of Archivists.

STATISTICS

Public use	1998/99	1997/98
Visitors	6554	6848
Enquiries	884	977
Reprographics	7194	6360
Items consulted: originals	7715	6822
Items consulted: microform and transcript	9392	11181
Talks and visits		
Number of talks	27	28
People attending	611	791
Accessioning and cataloguing		
Accessions received	199	213
Accessions catalogued	174	183
Items catalogued	1643	3155