

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2008-2009

INTRODUCTION

The two highlights of the year 2008/2009 were our sixtieth anniversary and the completion of the catalogue of the Broadmoor Hospital archives. Both gave us welcome publicity as well as opportunities to celebrate with and to acknowledge the work and support of staff, colleagues and friends over a number of years. They are described more fully in the following pages. At the same time we achieved a record number of catalogue completions; we received and accessioned over seven cubic metres of new material; we continued to make excellent progress on our two existing externally-funded projects and secured funding for a third; and we completed our service review, and prepared and began to implement an action plan arising from it. All this was carried out alongside the core work of maintaining the public research and enquiry service, of preservation and conservation work, and of supporting educational and community use and enjoyment of the records. During the year also we secured excellent results in both the national visitor survey and the third national archive self-assessment exercise.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the hard work of staff and the support of our colleagues in Reading Borough Council and the other Unitary Authorities in Berkshire, members of Archives Board, our depositors, our volunteers, and our many friends. It is, as it always is, a pleasure to record my thanks to them all.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
September 2009

THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

10th August 2008 saw the beginning of the 60th anniversary year of the Berkshire Record Office's genesis. On that day sixty years earlier Felix Hull began work as the only member of staff in the new service, which had been created by the old Berkshire County Council to look after its accumulated records.

The current BRO began the celebrations with a birthday cake and a small party with invited guests from the Berkshire districts. This attracted media coverage from ITV Thames Valley Tonight, Kick FM and the local press. The main event was an exhibition in the autumn, entitled *Prisoners, Ghosts and Glass*, featuring documents which reflected different aspects of life in the county, such as love and death, and work and play. The launch of the exhibition received substantial press coverage. The event was hosted by the Lord Lieutenant for the Royal County of Berkshire, the Hon Mrs Mary Bayliss, and featured speeches by her and the County Archivist. Finally a two-part history of BRO was published by the *Berkshire Family Historian*, and told the stories behind the exhibition title.

The final event in the 60th anniversary celebrations was a personal one - the award of the MBE to the County Archivist for services to local archives in Berkshire. The timing of the award meant that it became a further reflection on the achievements of BRO during its first sixty years.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Searchroom and enquiry services

We pride ourselves on delivering a public service which makes customers feel important and also puts them at their ease. Staff present a friendly face and take pleasure in helping people find the information they need. During the year one member of staff - Lindsay McCormack - was nominated for one of Reading Borough Council's customer excellence awards. We receive comments on our service throughout the year, and recent written examples include:

We found all your staff unfailing helpful and enthusiastic.

We were very impressed with how extremely helpful and friendly staff were in assisting my daughter's search for her school project.

We found all of the staff kind, helpful and nothing seemed to be too much trouble.

Everything is so well-documented and easy to find. This is a really good service. If only all archives were like this!

It is a great facility but even a state of the art facility can be useless without kind and helpful staff. We were greeted and assisted at every stage and it was an excellent experience.

Quite the nicest record office we have visited. Facilities are excellent and the staff most helpful.

This year we also received the results of the last Survey of Visitors to British Archives, conducted by the Institute of Public Finance during late 2007. The survey showed that our visitors are very satisfied with their experience of BRO. A staggering 98% of visitors in the sample rated our overall service as very good or good, and most of the results for different aspects of our service were above the UK average. These results indicate that the overwhelming majority of our visitors take away a positive message from their experience of BRO.

As well as customer comments, we also measure our efficiency through our service guarantees. Over the year these stand at:

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time
- 95% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 99% of copies are supplied within 6 working days
- 86% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

Both our quarterly 'Introduction to the searchroom' sessions and family history evenings have continued during the year. Another schools guide has been made available, this time for Slough Borough, and we have completed the revision of our various information leaflets. A standalone PC has been purchased for the searchroom which allows access to our library of CDs.

Overall usage figures continue to grow. For the first time in several years the number of visits grew slightly, to 5602, and the number of written

enquiries also grew 10% to 2735. The trend of significant growth in the use of original documents was maintained, with yet another record annual figure of 8587. We have also witnessed a growth in both the number and proportion of our visitors learning about aspects of local history. These two trends may not be unconnected.

Remote access

It was a slightly quieter year for use of the service website www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk, perhaps reflecting its overdue updating. Final figures for 2008/9 saw 154,985 visits to the site, roughly 18% down on the previous two years. Average visit length remained reasonable, with people spending over six minutes on the site during each visit, but the site is not easy for visitors to navigate and we hope to improve both these figures once the redesigned site is available.

Sadly the contractors responsible for creating a new service website have made little progress during the year. The delays to this project are increasingly a source of concern, although some further progress has been made since the end of this reporting period. It seems likely now that the new site will be handed over at some point during 2009/10. Despite this frustration we have still been able to update the existing site with copies of *The Berkshire Echo*, as well as add the Slough schools guide mentioned above and some content about the Broadmoor archive.

In contrast, the New Landscapes site at www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk enjoyed its busiest year ever. A total of 146,654 visits were received to this site and over half a million page views were made. The site also enjoyed its highest ever monthly total of visits, with 15,984 in April. The increasingly high usage of the site shows the potential of investment in online resources dedicated to specific collections. It is wholly free to access, though we are likely to have to find a significant sum to upgrade it during the coming year.

As well as hosting these 300,000 annual visits to BRO resources, we also contribute to many other websites. Most notable of these is the UK-wide a2a site, which has now been brought entirely within The National Archives website. One effect of this has been to change the way that statistics are recorded on the site. The 72,000 times that BRO catalogues were accessed during the year, whilst impressive, is therefore not directly comparable to previous years' statistics.

Outreach

We continued to deliver a diverse outreach programme in order to raise awareness of BRO and our collections. The major campaigns connected with the 60th anniversary and the Broadmoor project are detailed elsewhere.

We were out and about making our usual appearance at the Bracknell Family History Fair, as well as appearances at family history days at Reading and Wokingham libraries, Buckinghamshire Family History Society Fair, and Reading Borough Council's staff days. All these events were partnerships, which gave us a much wider reach than we could achieve alone. We hosted a talk by the Coroner for Berkshire as part of the Reading Festival of Crime Writing. We also sponsored a concert by Radu Lupu as part of Reading's Cultural Services classical music season, and like last year were able to use this as an opportunity to say thank-you to our volunteers for giving their time to help the office.

This year also saw the regular response we provide to requests for talks and visits from local groups and societies. We spoke to Southcote Library's senior citizens group, the Wargrave Pop-in Club, the Calcot Women's Institute, and Sulhampstead and Ufton Nerve Women's Institute. We hosted visits from Wokingham U3A Archaeology Group, the Health Archives and Records Group, Wokingham Borough Libraries volunteers, the Berks Bucks and Oxon Division of CILIP, Museum of English Rural Life staff, the Friends of Christ Church Reading, and Tilehurst Catholic Mothers Group. We also opened for behind-the-scenes tours on the annual Heritage Open Days, when we were also advertised in the Bracknell Forest Heritage Open Days guide for the first time.

We published our regular four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*, which is increasingly used by readers and the media to pick up on research themes. BBC Radio Berkshire published one podcast based on the Victorian Local Board of Health maps for Reading and another about death on the River Thames. Further local media coverage was received for the Manorial Documents Project and the new BBC series of *Who Do You Think You Are?* Nationally, BRO staff and collections were filmed for *Dickens's Secret Life*, broadcast on Channel 4, and *Evacuees Reunited* for ITV. We also contributed our regular columns to the newsletters of the Berkshire Family History Society, and the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Local History Associations.

In the spring we loaned Henry Hunter's Aleppo journal, 1679-1699, to Tate Britain, where it formed part of the exhibition *Traders in the Levant: Andrea Soldi and the English Merchants of Aleppo*. The centrepiece of the exhibition was the Tate's recently-acquired portrait of Henry's grandson, Henry Lannoy Hunter, by Andreas Soldi; our journal, which records the older Hunter's trading activities throughout the middle east in the late seventeenth century, featured prominently, and aroused considerable interest. The Hunter family lived at Beech Hill, Berkshire, from the early eighteenth century until 1949. We also supported exhibitions at Eton Wick, Lambourn and Wallingford, and at the Museum of English Rural Life, where we contributed to the exhibition 'People of the Thames', during which the County Archivist chaired a panel discussion on the future of the Thames.

Lectures and educational work

We continue to focus our attention on bringing informal learning to life. The production of new content, such as our schools guides, our talks and visits programme, as well as the support we provide for customers are all key parts of how we are striving to increase the quality and quantity of informal learning in Berkshire.

In terms of formal learning activities for those in education, this year saw us fulfil our regular commitments to local users. We spoke to the University of Reading's Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, held two day-schools in conjunction with the University's School of Continuing Education on the subject of town improvement during the nineteenth century and one with Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education on Quarter Sessions records.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

New accessions continue to arrive from all quarters of the county and in quantities varying from a single item to a van-load. The total accumulation in 2008/9 was a little over 7 cubic metres (a small increase on the previous year) in 185 separate consignments. They ranged in date from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries, and including some exciting discoveries.

The largest accession by volume was the latest instalment of Broadmoor Hospital patient files; the smallest was also the oldest: a deed of land in Burghfield dating from the 1290s. In between came records from churches, schools, local authorities, charities, clubs and societies, businesses and individuals, some resulting from long-standing relationships established with the Record Office, others quite out of the blue.

One very welcome deposit was the Hungerford tithe award and map, 1849, long thought to be lost, but discovered safe and sound in its own specially-crafted metal tube, thin at one end for the map and thicker at the other for the greater bulk of the award. This was followed a little later in the year by the Hungerford enclosure award, 1820, also very welcome as it complements and interprets the enclosure map which had been in the Record Office's custody for a number of years. Another unexpected deposit, received as a result of the publicity surrounding the Office's 60th anniversary, was an album, discovered in a Caversham loft, containing photographs, mainly interior, of Reading Town Hall and Municipal Offices taken in 1935 when the need for new office accommodation was being discussed. Unusually this means that the photographs show the rooms occupied, providing a fascinating picture of staff in their crowded offices or relaxing in a largely-empty games room and of members of the public crammed into the library reading room or paying their rent.

As usual parish records figure large, accounting for nearly one-third of all accessions, and including not only the usual crop of registers and parish magazines but also a churchwardens' account book begun in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Cataloguing work is under way in order to make these records available for research.

Cataloguing

2008/9 was a spectacular year for catalogue completions. Altogether 174 catalogues were completed, representing 240 accessions and containing over 14,500 items. To be sure, this was partly the result of the completion of two large catalogues representing the accumulation of several years

work, but this should not obscure the real achievement of making such a considerable body of material available for research for the first time.

The most high-profile catalogue was that of the **Broadmoor Archives**. Funded by The Wellcome Trust, this was the product of a two-year project carried out by a dedicated archivist. The collection comprises 3700 items dating from the foundation of the Hospital in 1863, and includes records of hospital administration, staffing, building and estate management as well as extensive patient records. An extended introduction covers the history of the hospital and puts the records in context.

Less high-profile, but even larger in extent, was the catalogue of **Slough Borough building control plans, 1880-1948**. These plans resulted from Victorian legislation designed to improve safety and public health in towns. Detailed plans both for new buildings and for alterations had to be submitted to the local authority, and nearly 7000 survive in the Slough collection, providing an unrivalled insight into the changing face of the town over a period of seventy years.

By comparison with these, catalogues that would in normal years have been considered large now take second place, but worth mentioning (and not merely on grounds of scale) are the 1700 nineteenth- and twentieth-century **probate documents** deposited by a Reading solicitor, and the 500 **Berkshire County Council contracts, 1939-1961**. These include contracts for numerous roads, bridges, schools and other public buildings, and range from minor works, such as the installation of electric light at Shaw House, Newbury, in 1947, to major projects such as the Maidenhead Bypass (1939) and new schools and colleges in Winnersh (The Forest School, 1955) and Maidenhead (Maidenhead Girls' Grammar School, 1957). During the early years of the second world war numerous contracts were issued for air-raid shelters. Most contracts include plans and elevations as well as detailed specifications, and the collection provides much detail about public works in Berkshire in the 1940s and 1950s.

As part of the Manorial Records Project that we undertook in partnership with the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, The National Archives, and Royal Holloway University of London (and which we reported on last year) we located and catalogued some 120 previously unknown **manorial records** from fifteen parishes across Berkshire, dating from the sixteenth century (copies from court rolls of the manor of Chaddleworth) to the twentieth century. During the year we acquired at auction a court book of the manor of Letcombe Regis, 1739-1785, and this too was catalogued by the year's end.

Important local authority records catalogued included council and committee minutes, 1885-1974, and rating records, 1874-1962, from the former **Wokingham Borough**; rating records, 1914-1951, from the former **Borough of New Windsor**; and similar records, c.1850-1962, from the former **Borough of Maidenhead**. (These catalogues arise from our on-going project to catalogue all such records that survive in Berkshire. The value of

the records was discussed in *The Berkshire Echo*, issue 47, published during the year). At a more local level we completed catalogues of **Sunningdale** and **Yattendon parish councils**, in both cases including records dating from the foundation of the council in the nineteenth century. We also catalogued a small group of lately-discovered records of the Wokingham Union Board of Guardians (the body responsible for managing the workhouse and the administration of poor relief in the Wokingham area), including a fascinating letter book dating from the earliest days of the Union in 1835.

Smaller collections completed included a number of archives of **local societies**, including the Berkshire Archaeological Society (1871-2006), Reading Wheelers Cycling Club (1934-1968), and Windsor Ladies Swimming Club (1920-1955); records of **local schools**, including Ranelagh School, Bracknell (1709-1997), Thatcham National School (1883-2005), Sir Charles Russell's School, Swallowfield (1873-1908), Mrs Bland's School, Burghfield (1904-1991), and Wilson School, Reading (1904-c.1980); **deeds and estate records**, including accounts and other records of the Downshire estate in Easthampstead and elsewhere (1717-1911), a lease relating to land in Englefield (1455), and deeds of The Beeches, Wokingham (1851-1879); and some sixty accessions of **parish records**, including a churchwardens' account book from Great Shefford (1748-1921).

Research and Publication

As in previous years the most popular subject of study was family history. Apart from this subjects of research ranged extremely widely, from mediaeval hospitals to twentieth-century Slough. Town and village studies were common, with the group from Wallingford continuing to make regular visits and a new group from Boxford beginning investigations, while local topics included the English civil war, Reading Goal, nineteenth-century church building, brickmaking, the Throckmorton family, a local Methodist Church, Fair Mile Hospital, Caversham Court Gardens and Berkshire Quakers. Broader studies, drawing on the resources of the Record Office but not limited to Berkshire, included a comparative study of English and Irish Asylums, the role of building societies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and nineteenth-century diaries.

Four members of staff contributed articles to local or national journals. Articles arising from the Broadmoor project are mentioned below (under *Special Projects*). Sarah Charlton contributed an article on the Manorial Documents Project to *History Today*; and, as mentioned above, Mark Stevens traced the history of the Record Office for *Berkshire Family Historian*. As also mentioned, the Office published the next in its series of guides to school records, this time (with contributions from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies) on the records of schools in Slough.

Other publications arising from research in the Record Office are noted in the section on the Office's library.

Library

Some 280 titles were added to the Record Office's library during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference books and professional literature. Several were based on research carried out in the Record Office.

Recent publications included studies of political and social conflict in Reading between 1620 and 1640, and of urban governance in the town between 1640 and 1690; an article on healthcare in the Georgian household; a history of the Red Cross in Berkshire, 1907-2007; a pamphlet on Ralph Newbery and the Bell Inn at Waltham St Lawrence; histories of schools in Spencers Wood (Lambs Lane), Radley, East Ilsley, Reading (George Palmer); a study of the building of St Mary's Church, Mortimer; guides to Welford, Shaw-cum-Donnington, and Wokingham St Paul churches; studies of the Wantage Workhouse and of 'church planting' from Reading; a biography of William Blackstone and a history of the firm of Blandy and Blandy, Reading; an edition of the minutes of the Thames Navigation Commission, 1771-1790; and theses on Ashmole's Visitations of Berkshire and on Parliamentary enclosure in Cookham.

Some of the titles were acquired as gifts, both from authors and from friends, and we are grateful to the donors for their generosity.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Broadmoor Hospital Archives

The first part of our Broadmoor project, to repair most of the collection and to make a catalogue available, was ready to launch on 18 November. On that day we welcomed TV crews from More4 News and ITV Thames Valley Tonight, and gave interviews to Radio Berkshire and Radio Wales as well one for use by Radios 4 and 5, and the World Service. One member of staff, unable to sleep at night, found that the first voice she heard on switching on the radio was that of Senior Archivist Mark Stevens talking about the Broadmoor archive. Four Ripperologists also visited the office on that day to look at the file of Ripper suspect Thomas Cutbush, available for research for the first time. Coverage in both *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph* followed, which was subsequently picked up by other newspapers from *The New York Times* to *The Times of India*.

After the initial excitement had died down, we were left to celebrate the achievements of the project: over 4,000 items catalogued; seventy books rebound; and hundreds of documents cleaned and repaired for use. This represents a little over two years' work. The project staff deserve much credit for the volume of work completed both on time and within budget.

To coincide with the launch, project staff curated an exhibition called *The Secret World of Victorian Broadmoor* at The Museum of Reading. The exhibition brought together archives from the collection, artefacts from Bracknell Forest's Heritage collection and a significant number of artworks by Richard Dadd from the Bethlem and Royal Maudsley Hospital's art collection, where Dadd's Broadmoor works are now held. This was supplemented by a talk at the Museum which was open to the general public. The exhibition was a great success, and Museum staff estimate that up to 22,000 visitors may have seen it.

The project was celebrated at a reception later on in November, with guests invited from the Berkshire districts, the hospital and also The Wellcome Trust, who had so generously supported the project. Speeches were made by the Lord Lieutenant; Dr Kevin Murray, Broadmoor's Clinical Director; and the County Archivist.

Media interest continued. Project staff contributed pieces to *ICON News* (the Institute of Conservation's magazine), the *Berkshire Family Historian* and *Ancestors* family history magazine. Further articles were written by outside researchers for *Family Tree Forum* and *Mental Health Today*. Staff participated in an outside broadcast for Radio Berkshire's Breakfast Show aired from the Museum, and also gave an interview to *Russia Today* TV news.

Since the launch of the collection, records relating to Richard Dadd have already appeared in Jeremy Paxman's BBC series *The Victorians*. Researchers have also visited to work on a US film production of William

Chester Minor's story, *The Professor and The Madman*, to star Mel Gibson and Sean Penn. It seems likely that Broadmoor will continue to attract attention from the creative industries over the coming year.

Berkshire Probate Index

Work on the construction of a new index to Berkshire archdeaconry probate records started in October. Berkshire has a fine collection of probate records, rich in inventories and including the third largest collection of probate accounts in the country. However, the existing index to the first period (1508-1652) is very inadequate, and no index has ever been published for the final period (1711-1858). With generous support from the Marc Fitch Fund, Berkshire Record Society, Berkshire Local History Association and Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies we raised sufficient funds to employ a scholar to work full-time on the preparation of an entirely new index for the first period, and we began work to set up a voluntary project to check and revise the indexes for the later periods. Berkshire Record Society will publish the early index in book form, and eventually an integrated electronic index to the whole collection will be produced.

Manorial Documents Register

Work on this project, to create an online index to Berkshire manorial records, was largely complete before the year began. However, at that point the register had not gone live. That was achieved during the year, so there is now world-wide access to information about Berkshire's fine collection of manorial records, and local access to information about Berkshire manorial records held outside the county. The completion of the project was marked by a small ceremony at The National Archives in October.

Yellow Pages

We hold the national archive of Yellow Pages. Yell, the publisher, which is based in Reading, generously awarded us a grant to package these to archival standards (which, as relatively flimsy volumes, they badly need). By the year's end we had ordered the necessary materials and had recruited a temporary preservation assistant to undertake the work, which was due to begin in April.

CONSERVATION

Conservation and Preservation

2008/9 saw another successful and productive year for the Conservation Unit. During the year the conservation team made folders or wraps for nearly 300 documents and encapsulated - that is, placed within an inert plastic sleeve - over 1200 more, secured nearly 1300 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', re-sewed nearly 2700 pamphlets, and provided first-aid to deal with minor damage in a further 1000 cases. Much of the work, such as removing rusty paper clips and cleaning ingrained dirt, is far from glamorous, but it is all a vital part of our work to preserve the records for the future.

Much of this was in response to damage discovered during the cataloguing of new collections or identified when documents were produced in the search room; a good deal took the form of preventative work - for example, the replacement of ferrous staples with cotton thread, or the creation of made-to-measure folders for storage. But in addition to responding to individual instances of need we have also been working on longer-term projects with larger groups of records. Prominent among these have been the school managers' minutes project, the rate books project, and the Windsor rolls project. In the first case we were faced with nearly 200 volumes and files into which minutes had been fixed with sellotape. As the sellotape dried, so the minutes began to fall out. The situation was made worse by the fact that although the minutes themselves were generally on good-quality paper, the paper on to which they had been fixed was anything but. We purchased the necessary new materials, and began the long process of removing the minutes from their old homes and re-affixing them into new files. By the year's end nearly eighty volumes, comprising over 2500 sheets, had been completed. The rate books project was linked to a cataloguing project mentioned above. Rating and valuation records are often heavily-used during their working lives and have generally reached us in a run-down condition. During the year we cleaned and/or provided extensive first-aid to some 47 volumes. The Windsor rolls project was also linked to cataloguing work on records from the Borough Surveyor's department, and involved much cleaning of deep-seated grime and the repair of badly-torn drawings. Altogether 122 rolls received attention.

Amongst the individual documents requiring more detailed work were a sales catalogue of the Billingbear Estate in Waltham St Lawrence dated 1921 and a beautifully-prepared survey of Lord Barrington's estate at Shrivenham dated 1771. The former was printed in six sections, but had fallen apart from over-use. We sewed each section on to a folded stub, gathered them together and then sewed them into a new manilla cover, provided with a pocket for the folded map that accompanied the catalogue. The latter was a leather-bound volume containing schedules of eleven farms on the estate, each accompanied by a finely-drawn map. The cords of the binding had broken, causing the front board to become detached, and the end-caps of both head and tail were broken. We removed the old glue, stuck hemp cords

over the original cords, and tacked them in place. We then pasted several layers of laid paper on to the spine, sewed new end-caps in place, and pasted a new piece of calf over the spine and under the leather of the boards. Next we pasted new laid paper inside the front cover to form a new joint, and finally we replaced the original label on the new spine. The volume is now safe to use - and a joy to handle.

Conservation staff also contributed to preparations for the Broadmoor exhibition and to the presentation of other items for display on and off the premises, as well as undertaking preservation work for the local studies services in partner authorities.

Microfilming

We continue to use microfilming as an economical and effective way of providing substitute copies of documents as a necessary precaution against over-use. Parish registers of baptisms, marriages, burials and banns and school admission registers are particularly at risk, and we aim to film these as soon after receipt as possible. This year we completed our project to film cemetery registers and continued with the filming of rate books. We also embarked on a programme of filming parish overseers' case papers, since with the publication a few years ago of a consolidated calendar and index, the number of requests for access to and copies of these valuable records has increased significantly. Altogether we filmed 52 parish registers, 31 school admission registers, 42 rate books, and 130 bundles of overseers' papers, achieving a total of nearly 48,000 pages.

ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW

The National Archives' Self-Assessment of Local Record Offices

In the summer of 2008 The National Archives conducted its third self-assessment exercise for archive services in England and Wales. The results were notified to participating offices at the end of the year. Berkshire Record Office was awarded a three-star rating (equivalent to last year's two stars, since the scale now runs from one to four). The survey was again divided into five categories: governance, documentation of collections, access and outreach services, preservation and conservation, and buildings security and environment. We scored a solid three stars in all categories, with an overall score four percentage points higher than in the 2007 survey. We were above the national average in all areas, and equal to or above the average for county services in four out of five areas, and very pleasingly were judged likely to improve further. When the comparative scores for all participating archive services were released later in the year we discovered that we had scored very well indeed, coming close to the top of the three-star band and only one-and-a-half percentage points short of achieving a four-star rating. This is once again an excellent result, since resources have not increased since last year, and we remain a very low-cost archive service. However, it is important not to be complacent. Although actual scores in all categories were higher than last year, we still perform less well than we would like to in certain key areas, notably documentation and access - both of which are staff-intensive activities. In an increasingly competitive world it is important that we address these, particularly if we aspire to be a four-star service. For there will be stiff competition for that ranking, not only from services that have already achieved it, but also from services, like ours, that are close to it.

Service Review

The final report on the service review was adopted by Archives Board in May, and an action plan was subsequently prepared to guide the strategic planning of the Record Office for the next five years. The key actions are to secure a new joint agreement for the provision of archive services in Berkshire, to plan a capital project to increase storage space by 2020, to increase income, to review internal processes to maximise time for delivering outreach activities and cataloguing, to develop targeted research sessions outside normal opening hours, to complete a condition survey of the building and implement action points, and to meet The National Archives' Standard for Record Repositories, particularly with regard to IT services and survey work. We are currently working on these action points.

STAFFING

During the year we said farewell to Kate Tyte, Graham Powell and Andy Blake, who had worked with us as, respectively, Broadmoor archivist, strongroom assistant and temporary archives assistant, and we welcomed Ella Voce as archives assistant, Gary Lambden as strongroom assistant, and Pat Naylor as indexer on the probate project. We were also very pleased to congratulate Mark Stevens on the award of a Certificate in Management from the Chartered Management Institute.

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 Treasurer of both the Reading Branch of The Historical Association and the Friends of Reading Abbey, and on Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee. During the year I was elected a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust and a member of its executive committee. Mark Stevens served on the (national) Council of the Society of Archivists and was chair of its Committee for Corporate Affairs. During the year he was appointed as a referee for The Wellcome Trust's Research Resources in Medical History fund. Sabina Sutherland served on the council of the Berkshire Record Society and on the committee of the Reading Branch of The Historical Association. Lisa Spurrier continued to serve on the editorial board of *Berkshire Old and New*.