

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2001-2002

INTRODUCTION

The year 2002/2002 was the first full year of occupation of the new Berkshire Record Office. During this year the increased business enjoyed in the latter part of 2000/2001 was sustained, with substantial rises in the number of personal visits, remote enquiries and transfers of records – all of which are chronicled more fully in the pages that follow. The building continued to be admired, and was chosen as the venue for two celebratory events, the silver jubilee party of the Berkshire Local History Association and the launch of a new study of the work of the architect Henry Woodyer, but problems with the air handling plant persisted and took up a considerable amount of staff time and energy. Throughout the year we were fully involved with our Best Value Review, and a major digitisation project, funded by the New Opportunities Fund, commenced in June. All this work was carried out against a background of continuing staff shortages.

As usual I am glad to have this opportunity to record publicly my thanks to those who have made our achievements possible. This year the staff deserve to come top of the list, but colleagues in Reading Borough Council and in the other unitary authorities in Berkshire, members of the Archives Board, our volunteers and our depositors have all made important contributions, and I am grateful.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
July 2002

BEST VALUE REVIEW

Behind the scenes the year was dominated by the Record Office's 'Best Value' review. It is a government requirement that all local authority services undergo a 'Best Value' review every five years, with the first review taking place between 2000 and 2005. These reviews are detailed scrutinies designed to examine the performance and effectiveness of services, identifying strengths and weakness, and leading to 'improvement plans' that set out directions and targets over a five-year period. Services are required to show that they are, or have a strategy in place to become, focussed and cost-effective, delivering what users want, accessible to all, and comparing favourably with similar services in other local authorities. The review was managed by a best value review board, chaired by the County Archivist, which included representatives from the Record Office itself, from Reading Library and Museum services, and from other local authorities in Berkshire.

The Record Office review was, as Best Value Reviews always are, a time-consuming and demanding process. A terms of reference document, defining the scope of the review, had been completed in March 2001. This set out the objectives of the review under the headings 'value for money', 'providing choices', 'serving the stakeholders', 'developing access', 'promoting learning', and 'promoting awareness' – all key themes for the Record Office, taking into account both national issues and local concerns. Early in the year a lengthy 'Asset Stocktake' was prepared. This provided a detailed description of the service and its resources, the legislative and policy framework in which it operates, the wealth of its collections, and the demands of its users. At the same time investigations were begun under the 'four Cs' of best value: challenge (is the service needed and should we be providing it), compare (how does our service compare with other similar services elsewhere), compete (are our services competitive in providing value for money) and consult (are we providing what our 'stakeholders' and users want). These investigations involved substantial activity, including staff working groups, visits to other Record Offices to compare aspects of the service (we visited Buckinghamshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Oxfordshire), consultation with local residents (through the Reading Borough Council Arts and Leisure residents survey) and with depositors and visitors (through specially convened focus groups). The evidence gathered was fed into a series of reports which in turn informed the improvement plan, which was in advanced draft at the year's end.

The improvement plan, which must be approved by Reading Borough Council (as the lead authority for the service) and adopted by all partner authorities, sets out a five-year strategy for developing services. While the plan recognised that the core work of acquisition, cataloguing and preservation, and the provision of enquiry services, must continue, three key themes emerged for development: the need to establish closer links with related services, particularly local libraries and museums; the need to extend opportunities for access using the latest technology; and the need to increase community awareness of the service. The improvement plan is, as it must be, an ambitious document. The targets it sets out, however, are achievable, and by achieving them we will make an already good service into an even better one.

THE BUILDING

The building continued to be admired during the year, and its facilities commented on favourably by visitors. Gradually a number of small improvements were made to those facilities, with the installation of a drinks vending machine and the provision of a payphone. Landscaping at the front of the building was completed late in 2001. This greatly enhances the appearance of the site, transforming it from a piece of rough ground into something approaching a garden. The provision of a footpath from the road, undertaken at the same time, has both improved the appearance of the entrance and increased safety for visitors.

Unfortunately, problems with the air-handling system continue. Conditions in the strongrooms have generally improved since the early days of occupation, but still give cause for concern. The consultants employed by West Berkshire Council believe that, if functioning correctly, the installed plant should be capable of delivering the conditions required in the strongrooms. However, restrictions on the use of the chiller continue, and this certainly affects the performance of the plant as a whole. Discussions between the consultants and other parties took place throughout the year and will continue into 2002/2003. However, we are hopeful that we are nearing a resolution.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Search Room and Enquiry Services

The number of personal visits to the Record Office reached its highest-ever level during 2001/2002. With over 9000 people coming through the door, visitor numbers were nearly 30% above those in the last full year of opening, 1998/1999. The number of postal, e-mail and telephone enquiries also rose steeply: the total of 9557 enquiries was 15% higher than in the same comparator year. The majority of visitors were leisure users (and most of these were family historians) but an important minority came for other purposes, including educational, academic and legal research. A small but dedicated band came to carry out transcribing and indexing of records, a valuable service that opens up the records to other users.

During our stocktaking fortnight in November we carried out a number of housekeeping tasks, designed in some cases to protect records (for example, all the first edition and 1930s edition Ordnance Survey maps have been put in protective melinex sleeves), and in some to improve access to sources (for example, all the microfiche were checked, and where necessary moved back to their correct place, and the library is now fully signed and labelled and the index cards have been updated).

New resources available in the searchroom include the 1881 national census index, which can be viewed on either of the two new PCs which have been installed, and the Berkshire returns of the 1901 census, available on microfiche. A new reader service put into place (at the suggestion of a number of visitors) is the index to family history searchers' interests. This is a card index open to any researcher who wishes to communicate his or her line of research to others.

Remote Access

Several developments took place in the area of remote access. The Record Office is committed to improving access to information about its services and its collections, and has collaborated with other bodies to make significant progress during the year. Two successful projects are under way to put selected catalogues on-line; a joint project to promote research facilities and collections was begun; and work started on a new website for the office.

Access to Archives (A2A for short) is a Heritage Lottery funded project to increase access to collections by converting existing archives catalogues into electronic form and making them available on the web. Several separate schemes are running, and the Record Office is involved in three of them. The Public Record Office is leading a project to put catalogues of Quarter Sessions records on line. Berkshire Record Office has contributed its catalogues of county and borough sessions encompassing records from the sixteenth century to 1971. These went live during the year, and have already attracted a great deal of interest: the Berkshire catalogues were amongst the most popular of those available. The Record Office is also part of a consortium of Record Offices in south-east England engaged in a project entitled 'Landlords and Labourers', to which it has contributed catalogues of several of the great estate collections of Berkshire. The third and smallest project will include catalogues of a handful of railway and tramway records.

The Record Office was also a partner in a successful bid to a cross-sectoral challenge fund managed by the South East Museums Agency. Together with Reading Museum Service and the Rural History Centre at The University of Reading, it is designing a promotional website that aims to increase awareness of the rich collections available in institutions in the Reading area, and to encourage their use for research at all levels. This project was at an advanced stage at the year's end.

More locally, the Record Office made great strides towards the establishment of its own website. This too was at an advanced stage at the year's end, and is expected to be launched in the spring or summer of 2002.

Outreach

Following a relatively quiet year in 2000/2001, outreach activities took a more prominent part in the year under review. The highlight of the year was the open day, held to coincide with the Heritage Open Days in September, when over one hundred people (many of whom had never been to a record office before) visited the Office. Displays of documents and tours of building offered people an insight into the collections and into aspects of the behind-the-scenes work of the office. Members of the Berkshire Family History Society were welcomed on three occasions and visits were arranged for five local history societies. In the last quarter new audiences were reached through the Record Office's participation in the BBC's 'Journey into History' project. A wider audience still heard Mark Stevens speak about the importance of title deeds on BBC Radio 4's programme 'You and Yours'.

Outside the Office the major event of the year was the annual Family History Fair at Bracknell. This event regularly attracts hundreds of family historians, and is an excellent opportunity to publicise the Record Office's services. Some two hundred enquiries were received at the Record Office's stall.

During the year the Record office hosted two notable celebrations. In October the Berkshire Local History Association celebrated its twenty-fifth birthday with a party at the Record Office. Some fifty people from all parts of the county, many with long-standing links with the Association, gathered for an excellent lunch, following which staff took groups on tour behind the scenes. The afternoon ended with an anniversary address by the president of the Association, Professor Ted Collins, on the work of the Association and its predecessor, the Berkshire Local History Committee. In February a similar-sized group of invited guests gathered at the Record Office for the launch of a new study of the Victorian architect Henry Woodyer.

Lectures and Educational Work

Links with both Reading and Oxford Universities continued to be important, and several visits and seminars were arranged for undergraduates, postgraduates and for life-long learners. Visits were arranged for two groups of Reading University MA students (one for a History Department class on 'Death in Society in early modern

England' and one for a group from the Graduate Centre for Mediaeval Studies), for a group of undergraduates, and for members of a continuing education class on local history. Peter Durrant spoke at the annual History Department seminar for second year undergraduates about using local sources for final-year BA dissertations, and presented a paper at a seminar arranged by the Centre for Ephemera Studies in the Department of Typography and Graphic Communication. He also led two day schools, one on wills, inventories and probate records for the Department of Continuing Education at Reading University, and one on Quarter Sessions records for Oxford University Department for Continuing Education.

Professional Visits

The new building aroused considerable interest among professional colleagues, and visits were arranged by request for several groups. Locally, colleagues from Reading Library and Museum services, Newbury Library, the Thames Valley Police Museum and the local headquarters of the United Bible Societies all paid visits to us. From further afield came representatives of the City of Portsmouth Record Office and Museum, Gwent Archives Service, Southampton University, and the UK Hydrographics Office. In May several members of the Catholic Archives Society came as a part of their annual conference at Douai Abbey.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessions

The year 2001/2002 saw a quite exceptional quantity of new material arrive at the Record Office. Some 255 accessions were received, amounting to almost fourteen cubic metres – as much as had been received altogether in the previous five-year period. Although dealing with such a vast quantity of material made considerable demands on the staff, it was nevertheless gratifying to be offered it, for all the records were important and some of very considerable interest.

A good proportion of this total was made up by a small number of deposits. Cumulatively the largest group came from Slough Borough Council, which transferred a quantity of council and committee minutes and reports, 1870-1974, and a very large accumulation of planning records, including building plans, 1875-1971. With the acquisition these documents, the Record Office now holds minutes from almost all the pre-1974 local authorities in Berkshire, and with them an important resource for the study of public services in Berkshire. The planning records had unfortunately sustained some damage before transfer, and require both conservation treatment and a detailed catalogue before they can be made generally available for research, but they have the potential to reveal a great deal about the physical development of the town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A second large accession (or rather, series of accessions, for it was transferred in instalments over a period on several months) came from Fair Mile Hospital. Established as the Berkshire County Lunatic Asylum in 1870, the hospital is due to close in 2003, when its remaining functions will be transferred to Prospect Park Hospital, Reading. Storage space (in terms of quantity if not always of quality) was never a problem at Fair Mile, so records tended to be kept rather than destroyed. The result, happily, is a very good collection of records about both patients and staff, and about the administration of the hospital. Again, because of the fragile physical condition of some of these records, no immediate public access will be possible, though staff will be able to carry out limited research on request. Records less than one hundred years old (that is, containing any entry dated later than 1901) are in any case closed to public access, and information may be disclosed only with the written permission of the hospital. However, both for family historians and for those interested in the history of medicine, this collection represents a valuable resource whose riches will gradually be revealed in the years to come.

The third source of records in quantity was the Community of St John Baptist at Clewer. The Community was established in 1852, and at its peak ran a school for girls and numerous daughter houses throughout the land. Declining numbers made it necessary to close the house at Clewer and relocate to smaller premises in Oxfordshire. The Record Office was offered, and was pleased to take, its important collection of records, dating from the early days of the Community. Cataloguing of these records was under way at the year's end, and although some will be closed because of the personal information that they contain, the remainder will be available for study in the near future.

Besides these three exceptional collections, numerous smaller, but in their way no less interesting accessions were received. Industrial and commercial business in Berkshire was represented by deposits from the Berkshire Printing Company of Reading, and from Plentys the engineers and Toomers the ironmongers, both of Newbury. The Berkshire Printing Company closed in 2002 after many years as one of the country's leading firms in the field. Its records, spanning the twentieth century, include minutes, photographs, and numerous examples of their printing work, among them tea cards, pop-up Christmas cards, and a depiction of the only motor-driven tricycle ever used to promote Brooke Bond tea. Both Plentys and Toomers can trace their origins back to the eighteenth century. Plentys, dating back to 1790, was famous for its marine engineering, which included constructing some of the first RNLI lifeboats and making engines for boats used all over the world. Toomers' records include not only such items as catalogues and stock books of their wares, smiths' workbooks, and day books giving details of sales, but also an early and detailed census of Newbury. This was made by a member of the Toomer family in 1815 and includes a plan of the town showing courts and lanes, many of which no longer exist.

Parish records were received from 33 different parishes, and included some exciting discoveries. Two parishes deposited records for the first time: Shippon, created in the nineteenth century, transferred records dating from 1856; and Reading St Barnabas, a twentieth-century creation, records dating from 1922. Nineteenth-century registers were received from Hermitage, East Ilsley, Moulsoford and Speen, and from Hermitage came also other parish records including vestry and PCC minutes, licences, faculties and inventories. The highlight of the year was probably the completely unexpected arrival of a collection of Hurley parish records, which had been left in the loft of Hurley vicarage when it was sold in the 1960's and were passed to the Record Office by the purchaser's son following his father's death. The collection included a wonderful set of nineteenth-century parish magazines and the original drawings by J H Hakewill for the restoration of the church in 1852.

School records included two important accessions from Reading schools, one comprising a complete series of admission registers for George Palmer Infant School (and its predecessor schools, one of which was the British School in Southampton Street), 1870-1996, and the other log books and other records from Meadway School (and its predecessor schools, which included Battle and Wilson Secondary Schools), 1891-2001.

The wide range of records received can perhaps best be illustrated by describing briefly just a selection of the many other accessions during the year: deeds of the Letcombe Regis area, 1455-1812; a probate copy of the will of Thomas Hussey of Moulsoford, 1661; deeds of Wethered public houses, 1661-1972; deeds of the Maiden Erlegh estate, 1710-1878; records of the Berkshire Women's Hockey Association, 1908-2000, and of the Ranelagh Ladies Hockey Club, 1934-1998; minutes and other records of the Reading Trades Union Club, 1914-1942; records of Hurst Consolidated Charity for the Poor, 1648-1954; papers of the Maidenhead Model Lodging House Company Ltd, 1891-1922, formed to provide workmen with an alternative to staying in public houses 'where they are exposed to the temptations of drink'; and plans and elevations of the riding stables at Milton Hill, c.1912-1913 (once the largest thatched building in England).

Cataloguing

Cataloguing output rose significantly this year, after the interruptions of the two previous years. Altogether 234 catalogues were completed, comprising 255 accessions and over 3000 items. In volume terms this amounted to over 6.5 cubic metres. Yet even this impressive total fell far behind the figures for accessions received, and so the cataloguing backlog increased rather than diminished during the year.

Nevertheless, a substantial quantity of material has become available for study for the first time. Almost all deposits of parish records were catalogued within a few months of receipt, and parish registers are routinely given priority treatment to avoid delays in making them accessible. Several catalogues of nonconformist records were also completed during the year, including Pangbourne United Reformed (formerly Congregational) Church, 1841-2001, St Paul's United Reformed (formerly Presbyterian) Church, Reading, 1897-2000, Trinity Congregational Church, Reading, 1891-1962, Spencers Wood United Reformed Church, 1901-1995, and Theale Congregational (later United Reformed) Church, 1963-2001.

The largest (and heaviest) single collection completed during the year was the Slough rate book collection, numbering 404 large volumes dating from 1849 to 1963, and representing a substantial (in more ways than one) resource for the history of the town. No other collection matched this for sheer size, though others were more complex and one at least exceeded it in terms of the number of documents handled. The major undertaking completed during the year was the catalogue of the papers of the Ewen family of Sonning, c.1275-1965. This involved extensive revision of a very old summary list, with the addition of new records more recently deposited. Also completed was the catalogue of Sawyer family papers, including deeds and manorial records relating to White Waltham, 1551-1916.

Among the smaller collections catalogued were to be found a very wide variety of records, among which the following may be noted: the Boxford inclosure award and map, 1819; records of the Darby Pension Fund, Cookham, 1897-1983; photographs of Caversham and Emmer Green, c.1860-1980s; letters of Mary Russell Mitford, c.1845-1854; records of Reading Show, 1941-1986; ARP and Civil Defence records of WJ Seager of Reading, 1939-1958, including superb photographs of the bombing of Reading in 1943; records of the Reading Guild of Artists, 1930-2000; client records of Meceys, solicitors of Thatcham, 1621-1962; maps of Earley Common Field, 1669, and of channels and islands in the Thames at Cookham, 17th cent; records of George Palmer and Meadway Schools, Reading, mentioned above; a survey of Brimpton and Shalford, 1622; and deeds from more than forty different parishes throughout Berkshire.

Research and Publication

Once again family history was the predominant subject of research, but a wide range of other subjects was also explored during the year, for a variety of purposes. Educational researchers included teachers preparing material for classroom use as well as school students and undergraduates writing long essays and dissertations. Other visitors included academics, postgraduates working for higher degrees,

transport historians, architectural historians, garden historians, and local historians and leisure users in a range of subjects, as well as those investigating such matters as rights of way and boundary issues.

Subjects of research included the role of women in the nonconformist church in the eighteenth century, brickmaking, enclosure, the Reading-Dusseldorf Association, the Kennet and Avon Canal, Japanese-style gardens in the UK, the history of Bradfield Union workhouse, and eighteenth-century domestic servants, private chapels, testamentary brasses, the London organ builder Henry Jones, manuscript sermons in the early modern period, the regulation of the River Thames in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the seventeenth-century Reading MP Francis Moore, and records of the West Indies.

No volume was published in the Berkshire Record Series during the year, but active research was in progress in preparation for forthcoming volumes. Subjects covered included religion in Tudor Reading, the seventeenth-century woollen industry, the 'Swing' riots, and the life of Robert Lee, JP.

Numerous publications by users of the Record Office appeared during the year, including (to name but a few) millennium histories of Earley, Emmer Green, Eye and Dunsden, and Warfield. The late Cecil Slade's long-awaited book on *The Town of Reading and its Abbey* appeared during the year: this drew on research into Reading's records carried out over nearly four decades. And as already mentioned, the study of *Henry Woodyer, Gentleman Architect*, drawing heavily on records in the Berkshire Record Office, was published and launched at the Office in February.

The Library

Although it does not attempt to be a comprehensive collection of secondary material on Berkshire, the Record Office library has an important role to play in supporting the work and research of the Office. Something over 300 titles were added during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, and professional literature. Many of the titles were acquired as gifts, from both authors and friends, and we are grateful to donors for their generosity.

Recent publications acquired included copies of all titles mention above, and other works published in the past two or three years, among them books and pamphlets about Appleford, Ardington and Lockinge, Datchet, Stratfield Mortimer, Welford and Wickham, and St Paul's Church Wokingham; a study of *The Twentieth-Century Suburb* (drawing on Balmore Drive, Caversham, as one of its subjects); and Margaret Railton's and Marshall Barr's book, *Care and Compassion: Old Prints and Photographs of Hospitals in Berkshire*. A major reference work acquired was the reprint of the complete *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, replacing the incomplete set that was all we had previous owned.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FUND: THE BERKSHIRE ENCLOSURES PROJECT

In June 2001 the Record Office learned that it had been successful in its bid for New Opportunities Fund funding for a project to prepare digital images of its enclosure awards and maps and make them available on-line via the world-wide web. Together with the Rural History Centre at Reading University, the Office received a total of £283,000 over two years. The project formally commenced in December 2001 and two project staff were recruited in February 2002.

The process of Parliamentary enclosure in Berkshire was of huge importance economically, socially and in terms of the landscape of the county. Almost one-third of Berkshire was transformed from open fields and commons to small enclosed fields. The process generated a substantial number of records. The Record Office holds 144 large-scale maps of the areas enclosed, together with 122 detailed schedules. A further thirty-two similar maps and schedules are held in the Public Record Office, and six maps and schedules are held in the Buckinghamshire Record Office. These records are important because they capture the transformation of the landscape virtually at the moment of change. Together with other material, not included in the project but to which reference will be made, they allow the process of enclosure to be traced parish by parish, and show the different pace and scale of change in different parts of the county. Berkshire is of particular interest in this respect because it lay on the border between the largely open-field communities of the midlands and the early-enclosed counties of southern England. An outline survey of Berkshire's enclosure history has recently been published by Berkshire Record Society. This digitisation project will build on that work and offer opportunities for further research, for a wider understanding of the enclosure movement, and above all wider access to a key source for the study of the subject.

In order to make the material as accessible as possible, additional material will be incorporated into the final website. A brief description of each parish in the early nineteenth century will be provided; an index to the schedules will be prepared; background information of the enclosure movement, explaining origins, motives, processes, outcomes and reactions will be provided, to offer a context for the material and to aid interpretation. The aim of the project is to offer access to as wide an audience as possible, from experienced researchers to complete beginners.

The link with the Rural History Centre not only provides advantages in terms of management support, but also links the Record Office project with the Centre's own closely related project to digitise a selection of its illustrated catalogues of agricultural machinery manufacturers. The newly-enclosed fields of Berkshire offered opportunities for farmers to introduce new methods of husbandry, and enterprising manufacturers were quick to seize the chance to develop and market new machinery for this purpose. The joint project will thus enable us to show how the new landscapes were worked, and to make accessible a large body of evidence for the history of farming in the nineteenth century.

CONSERVATION

Like all archive repositories, Berkshire Record Office contains many documents that are in poor condition because of neglect, overuse, accidental damage or (sometimes) deliberate acts of vandalism. Some of these are so badly affected that they cannot be produced for researchers to use; others, whilst not being withheld, would be at serious risk of deterioration were they to be handled regularly. The Record Office's conservation programme attempts to deal with the most pressing cases of serious damage, whilst also ensuring that newly catalogued records are properly prepared for storage, that minor instances of damage spotted whilst documents are being used in the searchroom are dealt with promptly, and generally that high standards of care and cleanliness are maintained.

Perhaps the most challenging project was the repair of a register of grave plots in the churchyard of All Saints, Boyne Hill, Maidenhead. This document had once been a volume, but the whole binding structure had collapsed, individual pages had become separated and torn (in some cases completely in half or worse), and numerous loose fragments had been gathered up and stored separately in an envelope. The whole had become completely disarranged. Every sheet needed to be cleaned and flattened, with careful detective work necessary to place the fragments in their correct position, and then to sort the sheets into the correct order. Finally, following this essential repair work, the sheets were placed in polyester sleeves, to provide protection during use, and the whole document bound in a post-binder album. The result is a complete transformation, and a document that may now be safely used for research.

Other documents previously withheld from users because of their condition, and now available following conservation treatment include a small bundle of bonds relating to the transportation of convicts to America in the mid-eighteenth century, found amongst the records of Reading Quarter Sessions; an overseers' account book from the parish of Beenham; an architect's estimate and list of subscribers for a new church in Windsor, 1868-1871 (a small booklet that had lost its cover and had become dirty and damaged; it was cleaned and re-sewn into a new cover); and a copy on brittle tracing paper of an early nineteenth-century plan of Midgham (this was flattened, cleaned, and placed on a board mount in a polyester sleeve). Repair of an eighteenth-century plan of Whitchurch Bridge involved reversing previous and inappropriate 'repairs' (tears had been secured with brown gummed tape) before it could be cleaned, flattened and repaired using appropriate modern methods and materials.

Much of the work of conservators (like that of archivists) is unglamorous, however, involving careful and laborious cleaning of dirty documents, repairing minor tears, 'tipping-in' pages that have become detached, and preparing documents for storage by creating made-to-measure folders, boxes and other containers. Such work is nevertheless essential if records are to be preserved properly for future generations. During the year a new procedure was introduced to monitor and manage this work, to ensure a rapid and measured response to need. Items requiring attention are reported on forms designed for the purpose, and a weekly review takes place to decide action. Those needing minor repair, simple re-sewing or packaging are normally dealt with immediately; other items are referred to a monthly conservation review meeting where they are considered along with the accumulated backlog, and priorities for action agreed. It remains the case that many items will receive no attention beyond a

protective wrapping, but the system ensures that speedy decisions can be made, and that priorities are kept under review.

Project support

As part of the preparations for the New Opportunities Fund project, a condition survey was undertaken of the enclosure maps proposed for inclusion. This revealed that several needed some surface cleaning and minor repairs prior to photography. A programme was subsequently prepared, and work began in the last quarter of the year. It will continue into 2002/2003. A condition survey was also undertaken of the records collected from Fairmile Hospital as part of the preparation of a bid for funds to support cataloguing and conservation work. This bid was unfortunately not successful, though the work in preparing it was not entirely wasted as the information can be used in planning future conservation work as resources become available.

External work

During the year some conservation work was carried out (on a fee-basis) for Eton College. Advice was given to Reading Museum on the preparation of a preservation strategy, and training in disaster planning was provided for colleagues from libraries across Berkshire

STAFF

During the year we said farewell to Sarah Edmondson, Bob Hale and Ian Wintersgill and welcomed Kim Shahabudin and Neila Warner as temporary searchroom assistants. We also congratulated Mark Stevens on his promotion to Senior Archivist Public Services and welcomed the two NOF project staff, Rachel Hassall and Bruce Wealleans.

Several members of staff contributed significantly to professional matters nationally and to the promotion of historical and archival concerns locally. I served as vice-president of the Berkshire Family History Society, as General Editor of the Berkshire Record Society, and as acting secretary of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. I also continued to hold the post of Honorary Visiting Fellow in the Department of History at Reading University. Mark Stevens served as secretary of the Society of Archivists' Legislation Sub-committee and as chair of the joint Society of Archivists/British Records Association Title Deeds Working Party. Sabina Sutherland served on the committee of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association and of the council of the Berkshire Record Society.

STATISTICS

Public Use	2001/2002	2000/2001
Visitors	9066	5729
Enquiries: post and e-mail	2279	1339
Enquiries: telephone	7278	9141
Reprographics	8037	5262
Items consulted: originals	8770	4245
Items consulted: microform and transcript	120910	29604
Talks and visits		
Number of talks	13	17
People attending	166	327
Accessioning and cataloguing		
Accessions received	252	158
Accessions catalogued	255	68
Items catalogued	3109	263