

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2003-2004

INTRODUCTION

The year 2003/2004 was dominated by building works. Between October and March the floors in both ground-floor strong rooms were renewed, the guttering and flashing on the roof was replaced, and various minor works were carried out to rectify defects or to complete unfinished parts of the building. While the long-term benefit of this work is undeniable, the short-term impact on the service was considerable. The renewal of the floors involved moving the entire contents of the two largest strongrooms into temporary storage. Planning and supervising the moves occupied much staff time, whilst during their time in temporary storage, many documents were inaccessible. Inevitably there has been a reduction in output. The year has also seen a fall in use, which may well be a further consequence of the disruption.

Nevertheless, as this annual report reveals, there have been many achievements during the year. As usual, I am glad to have this opportunity to record publicly my thanks to those who have made this possible: our colleagues in Reading Borough Council and the other unitary authorities in Berkshire, members of Archives Board, our volunteers and depositors, and last but by no means least, the Record Office staff.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
July 2004

BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Record Office's Best Value Improvement and Implementation Plan was formally adopted in June 2002. This set out a five-year plan for improving services, under four main headings: doing more with what we've got, listening, building partnerships, and new horizons. These headings were chosen because they reflected our need to be effective stewards, our wish to be responsive to customers' needs, our awareness that we cannot do everything on our own, and because we want to be adventurous and imaginative in developing services. Within these four areas our over-riding priorities are working together, developing electronic access and promoting awareness.

The year 2003/2004 was the second year of this plan, and notwithstanding the disruption caused by the building works, some notable steps forward were achieved. In a report to Reading's Culture Scrutiny Panel in April, the following achievements were highlighted:

- Reading's charter anniversary celebrated
- The new Collections Gateway website launched
- Local exhibitions supported
- More catalogues in preparation for on-line access
- New Landscapes New Technologies website nearing completion
- Closer working with libraries and museums developed
- Internal procedures manual further developed
- Benchmarking group with Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Record Offices established.

Many of these achievements will be referred to later in the report. There is of course still much to do, and all of the improvements have to be made while maintaining the current high standard of existing services, but a sound start has been made.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Search Room and Enquiry services

After reaching an all-time high in 2001/2002, visitor figures have fallen somewhat in the last two years, though they remain at a higher level than they ever reached in the old Record Office at Shinfield Park. Various explanations can be put forward for this reduction: the extended closure of the Record Office in 2000 may have driven up visitor numbers artificially in the months immediately following the re-opening; the availability of the 1901 census may also have led to a temporary increase in visitors; and the restrictions of service during the building works in 2003/2004 may have had a depressing effect on numbers. There is at the moment no cause for concern, though the trend will be monitored. Some other indicators of use are also down on previous years: written and telephone enquiries and requests for documents for use in the search room have also fallen a little. On the other hand, remote use - access to the service through our own website and through the on-line catalogues available on the collaborative A2A (Access to Archives) website - is booming. Overall, public use of the service remains encouragingly high.

Visitor satisfaction also remains high. The Record Office scored well in the annual Public Services Quality Group survey of archives services, and our own monitoring through customer comments forms has confirmed this finding. Comments such as *'a very helpful service: the staff were excellent'*, *'I have always found all the staff friendly and very helpful'* and *'I would like to express my gratitude to the staff for ... the unstinting assistance they gave me throughout the day'* are typical of those received. Service guarantees were close to being reached on all fronts: 98% of visitors were able to come on the day of their choice, 97% of enquiries were answered within five days, and virtually all reprographics orders were completed within their guarantee period.

Remote Access

We received 71,863 visits to the Record Office website during the year - an increase of 102% on 2002/2003. The website was redesigned in 2002/2003, and received warm praise from a number of users. Its value to our customers seems to have been confirmed by the rapidly growing use made of it.

The Record Office website contains both general information about the service and summary lists of key collections. This information is augmented substantially with our pages on the collaborative A2A website, mentioned above. During 2003/2004 many more catalogue pages were added to this site, which now contains complete catalogues of most of our local authority archives, several of our major estate and family collections, our very important Berkshire Archdeaconry records, and (through what was known as the 'Aladdin's Cave' project) a numerous and extremely diverse range of smaller collections from local organisations and individuals. Catalogue views during the year reached a total of 27,033, a 50% increase on the previous year.

Outreach

The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the exhibition to celebrate the 750th anniversary of Reading's first royal charter. This exhibition, which included several of the borough's charters and other records from the town's archives, augmented with artefacts from the Mayor's office and Reading Museum, was launched at a reception held at the Record Office in July, hosted by the Mayor of Reading, with the Lord Lieutenant as guest of honour, and with representatives of all Berkshire's unitary authorities in attendance. The exhibition remained open throughout the summer. A second special viewing was arranged in August with guests from local civic and historical societies present.

The Record Office again participated in Heritage Open Days in September, and opened its doors on the Saturday. Attendance was numerically a little disappointing this year (only 70 visitors came during the afternoon), but the response from those who came, most of whom had not visited the Record Office before, was very positive. This relatively quiet day was in marked contrast to the bustle at the annual Family History Fair at Bracknell in January, at which the Record Office again took a stall, and at which the staff in attendance were kept very busy indeed.

Talks and visits to local societies continued to be popular, with a diverse audience, ranging from the Newbury U3A Calligraphy Group to the Reading Rotary Club, offered opportunities to learn about the Record Office's services and collections. Efforts to promote the Record Office through media stories were not always successful, but seven stories did reach the press, including the successful purchase of the Ockwells deeds (the *Maidenhead Advertiser* carried a picture of Maidenhead's MP, Theresa May, admiring the documents in the Record Office search room). In addition, to this, several members of staff contributed to a series of five 'Community Bulletins' on 107FM describing aspects of the work of the Record Office, and Mark Stevens spoke on BBC Radio Berkshire about the archival implications of proposed changes to the civil registration service.

Lectures and Educational Work

As in previous years the Record Office concentrated its direct input into postgraduate and adult education. Supporting life-long learning has always been a key part of the Record Office's work, whether through formal teaching or more informal means, and much of its outreach is indirectly in connection with this activity. More formally, links with Oxford University Department for Continuing Education and Reading University's School of Continuing Education were maintained, and I taught two day schools, one introducing the resources of the Record Office to beginners, and one on the records of the Old Poor Law for more advanced researchers. We also hosted classes for the Open University MA course on Crime and Policing, and Reading University's MA in Medieval Studies, and I spoke to second-year history undergraduates at Reading as part of their preparation for their final-year dissertation.

In a new departure, with an eye on a younger audience, the Record Office joined as a partner in Reading Museum's HLF bid to develop its schools loans service. If successful this will provide the opportunity to include archival material in this valuable educational service.

Professional Visits

Visits were received from professional colleagues in archives and libraries interested in discovering more about the Record Office, including Reading University Library, the Museum of English Rural Life, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead libraries, and the National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

In the year 2003/2004 some 193 accessions were received amounting in volume to nearly 6.5 cubic metres. Although less than in the previous two years, this remains well above the level of accessions received in the years before the move to Coley Avenue. Such an influx of new material puts considerable demands on staff working behind the scenes, but it is nevertheless welcome, and adds substantially to the resources available for a study of the history of Berkshire and its people.

The greatest part of this total (over half, by volume) comprised records of Berkshire local authorities - borough, district and parish councils - from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century. Among them were minute books and other records of the former Wokingham Borough and Rural District Councils from 1895, and of Beech Hill Parish Council from its creation in 1894. Often under-valued, records such as these provide evidence of environmental issues and the provision of public services that affected the lives of thousands of people in the twentieth century.

Slightly over a quarter of all accessions received (54 in all) came from Berkshire parish churches. Most of these were additions to existing collections and were post-war in date, but about one-third contained records dating from the nineteenth century, and four of these included eighteenth-century documents. Especially welcome were the records of Twyford, one of the few Berkshire parishes that had not previously deposited anything. Unexpected accessions included records from Ashbury (among them a quantity of eighteenth-century overseers' papers relating to the management of the poor of the parish, churchwardens' accounts, 1791-1963, and vestry and PCC minutes, 1845-1968); from Hurley (the son of a former occupant of Hurley vicarage, now living in the midlands, deposited parish records dating from 1747, including plans of the Victorian alterations to the vicarage); and from Shottesbrooke (the register of baptisms, 1813-1974, missing for nearly a quarter of a century, was rediscovered, and

united with the other registers of this parish in the Record Office strong rooms).

The other accessions were many and varied, including deeds, sales catalogues, records of schools, a workhouse and a gaol, of local clubs and societies, and of a Reading pill-maker.

Perhaps the most high-profile was the small collection of deeds of Ockwells Manor, Bray, purchased at auction in September 2003. The deeds trace the ownership and growth of the manor estate from 1581 to 1777. The earliest deeds date from the ownership of the Fettiplace family, and include a lease of the manor to trustees acting for William Day, Provost of Eton College, 1561-1595. Other deeds record the purchase of fields and meadows around the manor house as the estate grew under the ownership of the Finch family who later sold the manor on in 1786. The publicity surrounding this acquisition has already been mentioned.

Rather different, but equally fascinating, were the records of Dr John Hooper, the Reading doctor and manufacturer of one of the most popular patent medicines of the nineteenth century. In 1743 Hooper was granted a patent for a recipe he sold as 'Dr Hooper's Female Pills', which purported to cure the 'irregularities' and palpitations of the heart, amongst other things. He also patented a Child Bed Cordial and Powder and Strengthening Balsam in 1752 to help with recovery after childbirth. Dr Hooper (who died in 1773) and later his family continued to manufacture the pills at their dispensary in Reading until they sold the business in 1849. The records, mainly accounts, cover the period 1787-1849.

Another highlight of the year was the Visiting Justices' report book on Reading Gaol, 1860-1878. Later volumes in the series were already amongst the prison records in the Record Office, but this earlier volume had long been believed lost. It includes references to the discipline of unruly prisoners, the employment of staff, an outbreak of smallpox in the gaol in 1868, and the resignation *en masse* of the Visiting Justices (a committee of JPs appointed by Quarter Sessions) in 1872 when their favoured candidate was rejected for the post of prison chaplain.

In a short report it is possible to mention only a selection of the records received, but the range and variety can be gauged from the following shortlist: a wonderful album containing photographs and drawings of activities at Didcot Senior School, 1936; the records of Lambrook School, Bracknell, 19c-20c, a private school that has been in the same building (though now in many others as well!) since it opened in 1860; a fine set of late nineteenth-century village scrapbooks from Welford; the archives of Battle Athletic Football Club, Reading, 1935-1977; the first letter book of the Wokingham Board of Guardians, 1835-1843; various sale particulars of properties in Reading, 1927-1954; the minute books of Beech Hill Memorial Hall Committee, 1920-1997; and the re-acquired records of the Shrewsbury estates in Berkshire, withdrawn by the depositor in 1995 but subsequently purchased at auction, which include, extraordinarily enough, correspondence of the Lieutenant of Calais and the Constable of Calais Castle, c.1503, which had spent many years wrapped up inside a manorial court roll.

Cataloguing

The most notable catalogue to reach completion during the year was that of the extensive archive of the Community of St John Baptist, Clewer, 1849-1993. This Anglican Sisterhood was founded in 1852, initially to run the House of Mercy established in Clewer to rescue 'fallen women'. Works undertaken by the sisters included other work of the same kind in other parts of the country: orphanages and children's homes, hospitals and convalescent homes, and mission work in new urban parishes, often in areas of extreme deprivation. The records were deposited following the Community's reluctant decision (taken on account of falling numbers) to leave its splendid Woodyer-designed premises in Clewer for a more modest house in Oxfordshire. They include, besides much information about the mother house itself and St Andrew's Convalescent Home, St Augustine's Boys' Home and St Stephen's (girls') High School, records relating to the Community's work in Devon, Essex, Kent, Gloucestershire, London, Oxfordshire and Surrey.

Another success of the year was the continuing work on the Record Office's large accumulation of Methodist church records. Methodism flourished in Berkshire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and numerous chapels were established in both towns and villages. Some sixty catalogues were completed containing altogether nearly a thousand items, and ranging from the single document from Shefford Woodlands Wesleyan Chapel to the large collections from Caversham Heights Church, Newbury Northbrook Street Church, Wesley, Whitley Hall and Bourne Memorial Churches in Reading, and Ledgers Road Church in Slough. This project is expected to conclude in 2004/2005 by which time a major resource for the study of non-conformity in Berkshire will be available.

Two major important collections of parish records were catalogued during the year. Records from Twyford, already mentioned above, included the informal register of baptisms conducted at the old Twyford Chapel (before the construction of the present church in 1847), and registers of baptisms, marriages and burials in the church and churchyard, 1847-1983, churchwardens' accounts, 1872-1906, and Tower Fund accounts, 1905-1909. Cookham Dean records included registers, 1846-1994, vestry and PCC papers, 1864-1971, records of Pinkneys Green Library and Reading Room, the village war memorial and the Church of England School, and a fine set of parish magazines starting in 1890. Some twenty-one other catalogues were also completed, mainly additions to existing deposits. Catalogues of six civil parish collections were completed, including the first minute books from Beech Hill, Longcot and Welford, and Burial Board records from Old Windsor dating from 1886.

Smaller collections catalogued include records of Berkshire breweries formerly part of the Whitbread chain, 1580-1999; the Ockwells deeds, 1581-1777, mentioned above; a volume of 'astronomical sketches' (recording observations taken in Reading) 1891-1897; a map of Pryse Loveden's estate in Buscot and surrounding parishes, c.1850; the records of John Hooper, 1787-1849, mentioned above; records of Bell's Asbestos, Slough, 1898-1974, and of Eton and Slough Conservative Association, 1953-1983; the records of

Wokingham Bowling Club, 1920-2001; and a delightful record of flora observed in the downland parish of Frilsham during millennium year.

Research and Publication

As in previous years a high proportion of the research carried out in the Record Office was in pursuit of family history, but the subjects studied were by no means limited to this, and included Faringdon Old Police Station, the lives of domestic servants in England, philanthropy in Reading 1870-1914, popular music in England 1550-1650, the English funerary elegy in the seventeenth century, Sir George Bowyer's (unsuccessful) attempts to extract coal at Radley, the centenary of Maidenhead Bowling Club, the letters of William Blackstone of Wallingford, and the role of the coroner in the nineteenth century and the spread of good practice. Researchers ranged from experienced academics to novices at historical investigation.

In addition to those carrying our research for their own projects, the Record Office, and its users, benefit from the work of numerous volunteers who transcribe and index documents and provide copies of their transcripts for the Record Office library. The final meeting of the Berkshire Overseers Project Group was held during the year, and the last of the transcripts of over 10,000 overseers' case papers appeared shortly after the year's end. Brian Hunt has co-ordinated this group for over ten years, and the Record Office is immensely grateful for his work. Individual volunteers continue to transcribe parish registers and other documents, enabling the Record Office to significantly improve access to these records.

The Record Office itself published four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*. Neila Warner published an article on 'Rough Music' in *The Berkshire Family Historian*, for which she was awarded the first Jane Longhurst Award, an award established in memory of the murdered schoolteacher and given annually for the best article in that journal.

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. Some 290 titles were acquired during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference works, and professional literature. Many of the titles were acquired as gifts, both from authors and from friends, and we are grateful to the donors for their generosity.

Recent publications acquired include books and pamphlets about Binfield, Eastbury, Sandhurst, Waltham St Lawrence, William Seymour Blackstone of Wallingford, and the Mount family of Wasing, and guides and histories of St Mary's Church, Bucklebury, St John the Baptist's Church, Cookham Dean, Wokingham Methodist Church and Reading Synagogue. Theses on *Compton and East Ilsley: a comparative study* and *Dissent and Dissenters in Early Modern Berkshire*, both drawing heavily on Record Office resources, were presented by their authors.

During the year the Record Office was fortunate also to acquire the library of the Berkshire Archaeological Society. For many years in store and inaccessible, this library is now once again available for use. It remains the property of the Society, but its location in the Record Office means that both members and non-members may have access to items, which include a fine set of English Place-Name Society volumes. The transfer was marked at a small reception attended by the President and members of the Society in November.

CONSERVATION

Conservation and Preservation

Conservation is the term used in record offices to describe the repair of damaged documents; preservation, on the other hand, denotes the work carried out to ensure that documents are free from risk of further deterioration, and are properly wrapped and boxed for storage. These activities are inextricably interwoven, and both are essential parts of a record office's work. Documents all too often arrive in a less-than-perfect condition, having suffered neglect, overuse or actual damage; even when there are no perceptible problems, they may need wrapping or encapsulating for long-term protection. The Record Office's conservation programme attempts to deal with the most pressing cases of serious damage while at the same time ensuring that as much preventative work as possible is carried out.

Many of the problems faced by conservators are actually avoidable. The use of sellotape and similar self-adhesive tapes is a case in point. During the year the conservation team faced two huge minute books in which the minutes, typed on loose sheets of paper, had been stuck in with sellotape. Not only had the adhesive discoloured and stained the minutes, but it had also lost all adhesive qualities, so that all the pages were in danger of falling out. The team had painstakingly to remove all remaining sticky tape and re-affix the minutes with an archival adhesive. The use of ferrous paper clips and staples presents similar problems. Iron rusts very easily, and can stain and actually destroy documents. The Record Office now has a programme of removing all ferrous staples from parish magazines and other pamphlet-style documents, and resewing them with cotton thread. Such work, unglamorous and time-consuming as it is, is nevertheless very necessary for the preservation of the record. During the year almost 600 loose pages were 'tipped-in' to volumes, and nearly 2500 pamphlets were resewn.

Providing appropriate wrapping for documents is also an important part of the preservation process, since it affords protection in storage and during transit from strongrooms to searchroom. Where possible ready-made folders and envelopes are used, but as documents do not come in uniform sizes it is often necessary to prepare tailor-made wrappers. During the year some 600 such wrappers were made. A further 650 documents were 'encapsulated', that is placed within an inert transparent container. This process can be used only with single-sheet items, but is extremely effective in providing

protection, and is especially useful with frequently-consulted items such as maps. In certain circumstances it can reduce the level of repair work required on a document.

Preservation work, by its nature, can achieve a high-volume throughput. Conservation work, by contrast, is inevitably more intensive. However, it brings back into use documents otherwise too fragile or damaged to be handled. During the year under review several maps were conserved, including a large (16 square feet) eighteenth-century map of Streatley, a mid-nineteenth-century map of Speen, the Binfield enclosure map of 1817 and the Caversham tithe map of 1846. Other work included the repair of an extremely fragile and fragmentary plan on brittle tracing paper of St John's School, Stratfield Mortimer, 1889, and the restoration of an album apparently prepared for Berkshire Education Committee just before the first world war and containing 140 photographs of the interiors and exteriors of Berkshire Council Schools.

Microfilming

As part of its preservation programme the Record Office prepares microfilm copies of popular documents so that these copies can be used in the public search room in place of originals which, even if not damaged on arrival, would rapidly become worn through over-use. Parish registers of baptisms, marriages, burials and banns fall into this category, and the Office is fortunate to have the facilities to film these rapidly so that there is minimal delay in making copies available. Also high on the priority list for filming are school admission registers, documents which are frequently received in a fragile condition. During the year nearly 450 documents were filmed, taking over 34,000 frames.

STAFFING

During the year we said farewell to Jan Booth, Brenda Edwards and Philip Wilson, and also to our two New Opportunities Fund project staff, Rachel Hassall and Bruce Wealleans. We welcomed Vicky Lewis as administrative assistant and Bill Stavely as Records Manager. We also congratulated Ivone Turnbull on her promotion to the new post of Visitor Services Archivist. Tegan Davies joined us for two months during the summer on a project to catalogue our Ordnance Survey maps.

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 Secretary of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. Mark Stevens served as joint chair of the Society of Archivists' Legislation Sub-committee and was appointed an assessor on the Society's registration scheme. Sabina Sutherland served as Treasurer of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association and on the council of the Berkshire Record Society. Lindsay McCormack served as Secretary of the Society's Professional Development Panel.

STATISTICS

Public Use	2002/3	2003/4
Visitors	8762	7734
Enquiries: post and e-mail	2857	2326
Enquiries: telephone	7127	5990
Reprographics	6935	6184
Items consulted: originals	7297	7139
Items consulted: microform and transcript	96520	81161
Talks and visits		
Number of talks	34	23
People attending	394	306
Accessioning and cataloguing		
Accessions received	218	193
Accessions catalogued	198	272
Items catalogued	3090	2174