

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2004-2005

INTRODUCTION

Two highlights of the year might be singled out as indicators of success in key areas of the Record Office's work. At the beginning of the year we launched our new website, *New Landscapes New Technologies*, at a reception hosted by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire and attended by representatives of all our partner local authorities in the county. This website, which had been supported by the New Opportunities Fund and prepared in partnership with the Museum of English Rural Life, highlighted a number of key themes, including partnership, preservation, access and promotion. It was a high-profile event, and the website has created a resource of considerable community value that has been extensively used. At the year's end, with rather less flourish, we calculated that we had taken into safe custody some 27.75 cubic metres of archives - by a significant margin the largest quantity of documents accessioned in a single year in the Office's history. This emphasised the continuing importance of acquisition and cataloguing, for all of these documents will eventually become material for research and a resource for those seeking to find out about the past of their families and communities.

These achievements, together with the essential work of maintaining searchroom and enquiry services, would not have been possible without the hard work of staff, to whom, along with 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 a great pleasure once again to record my thanks.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
October 2005

BEST VALUE REVIEW

The Record Office's five-year Best Value Improvement and Implementation Plan reached its mid point in 2004/2005. The plan, adopted in June 2002, has four main themes: doing more with what we've got, listening, building partnerships, and new horizons - chosen to reflect 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 our ambition to be adventurous and imaginative in developing services.

The year saw a number of achievements in all these areas:

- We increased media coverage of the service
- We achieved very good results in the most recent national survey of archive services
- We made changes to the public service in response to user comments
- We secured grants to develop a marketing strategy and to catalogue and conserve the archives of Fair Mile Hospital
- We continued to develop our work with library and museum services in Berkshire
- We improved our website and added online galleries
- In partnership with the Museum of English Rural Life we launched our *New Landscapes New Technologies* website

Many of these achievements will be referred to later in the report.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Search Room and Enquiry Services

Although remote access to the Record Office is becoming increasingly important to users, our traditional search room and enquiry services remain the gold-standard service for a large number of people, and provide opportunities for a personal response and for in-depth and extended research. During 2004/2005 visitor figures remained steady, and postal and telephone enquiries increased slightly. Figures were rather higher in the second part of the year, suggesting a positive impact from the BBC's family history programme 'Who do you think you are?'

We made a number of changes to visitor services during the year, including the introduction of flexible (instead of timed) document production, and the provision of basic snacks for sale. In the autumn we offered a short, free 'Introduction to the Search Room' for new and inexperienced users; this was extremely successful, and sessions are now run on a quarterly basis.

Visitor satisfaction remains high, with staff regularly receiving praise for their friendliness and helpfulness. Comments such as *'I was given the best treatment I have ever received ... You can be congratulated on the fact that your archives are the best ... There was genuine warmth of reception'*, *'Very nice building, very good, helpful staff'*, and *'We have found your office to be the most helpful we have been in'* 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; 94% of enquiries were answered within five days, and virtually all reprographics orders were completed within the guarantee period.

Remote Access

Opportunities for remote access are offered both through our own websites, www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk and www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk, and through the national online catalogue service, A2A, www.a2a.org.uk. During the year we added to and improved the website in a variety of ways. In particular we introduced online 'galleries', incorporating images of documents that had been used in Office exhibitions. Currently the 2002 Royal Jubilee and the 2003 Reading Charter 750 exhibitions can be viewed online, offering much wider opportunities for enjoyment of some of the highlights of our collections. Website visits, totalling 91,038, showed a very significant increase (27%) over the previous year. Use of our catalogues on A2A increased by a massive 172% (we had over 73,000 catalogue views) demonstrating the value to the public of online catalogues.

Outreach

The major event of the year was the reception to launch the joint Berkshire Record Office/Museum of English Rural Life *New Landscapes, New Technologies* website held at the Record Office in April. This event, hosted by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, marked the culmination of two years' work, funded by the New Opportunities Fund, to create a website containing

(in the Record Office section) images of all Berkshire's Parliamentary enclosure awards and maps - a fantastic resource, including documents from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire Record Offices and The National Archives, with introductory material and indices opening up this material to the world. Originals of some of the records included were on view during the evening.

In terms of numbers, the busiest of the events in which we participated during the year were the visit of HRH the Earl of Wessex to Reading in June (the culmination of Reading's *Charter 750* celebrations), during which HRH inspected a Record Office exhibition of Reading's charters and other civic documents, and the Bracknell Family History Fair in January, when several hundred family historians descended on the Sports Centre at Bracknell in search of information and inspiration. We also opened our doors during the Heritage Open Weekend in September, and had a presence at Newbury Library's Family Funday in October.

Talks to and visits by local societies continued to be popular, with a diverse audience including the Friends of the Royal Borough Collection (Windsor) and Oxfordshire Family History Society. We had several appearances in the media, with reports covering the *New Landscapes* project, the Heritage Open Weekend, a missing volume from the *Yellow Pages* archive, and the 'discovery' of a hitherto lost charter relating to Easthampstead Park. In addition to this we have had regular pieces in the *Berkshire Family Historian* and the Oxfordshire Local History Association *News*, and have continued to publish our own quarterly newsletter, *The Berkshire Echo*.

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 activity is indirectly in connection with this activity. More formally, we have maintained links with Oxford University Department of Continuing Education and Reading University's School of Continuing Education. I taught a day school on the records of the old poor law, and contributed to a celebratory day school to mark the seventieth birthday of Joan Dils, acknowledging her huge contribution to local history studies in Berkshire. 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 undergraduates at Reading as part of their preparation for their final-year dissertation.

Professional visits

Visits were received from professional colleagues in archives and libraries interested in discovering more about the Record Office, including staff from the BBC Written Archives, Portsmouth Museums and Archives Service and Thames Valley Police.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

During 2004/5 we received the massive total of 27.75 cubic metres of records. This far exceeded the quantity accessioned in any previous year in the Record Office's history. A number of major accessions contributed to this total, most notably the Yellow Pages archive and the records of Broadmoor Hospital. Yell PLC, formerly a division of BT, is now an independent company whose headquarters is in Reading. The archive includes nearly all the company's published *Yellow Pages* directories since the first edition appeared in 1966, and is the national collection. The records of Broadmoor Hospital, established in 1863, form another collection of national importance. Two van-loads of records, dating back to the hospital's foundation, were transferred during the year.

Some of these archives had been expected and allowed for when planning the building, but collectively they have put pressure on space. It is unlikely that such an annual total will be repeated in the future, though it is certainly true that merely keeping up with the basic processing of accessions in such quantity has put considerable demands on staff. The sheer bulk of records, however, inevitably means that it will be a long time before cataloguing is completed.

Altogether five large deposits accounted for over four-fifths of the accessions by quantity, though only 3% by number. The remaining 97% of accessions (226 in total) came from a wide variety of sources, including parish and nonconformist churches, local authorities, schools, the coroner, solicitors, local societies and charities, and numerous private individuals.

Anglican parishes accounted for 69 accessions. Most of these comprised modern additions to existing deposits, though important earlier records were received from Knowl Hill (including the first burial register), Woodley St John (including some delightful watercolours of the original rectory), Beech Hill (including a beautiful hand-illuminated service book made for the church's consecration in 1867), and Wargrave (including what is undoubtedly the finest set of parish magazines in the County, dating from 1861 to 2001 and with only five issues missing). Reading All Saints, hitherto the only nineteenth-century Reading church not represented in the Record Office, deposited a fine set of registers, minutes and service registers dating from the consecration of the church in 1865.

Some 32 accessions were received from nonconformist churches in Berkshire. The majority came from Methodist churches, including some from the Thames Valley circuit dating back to the first half of the nineteenth century. A small but interesting collection came from Dedworth Green Baptist Church; several of these had unfortunately been damaged in an arson attack on the church. These accessions reflect the excellent links the Record Office has established with non-conformist churches generally and with the Methodist church in particular.

Amongst the accessions were some pleasant surprises. In November we received log books of Letcombe Bassett school, dating from its opening in 1864 to 1926. These had long been thought lost, but turned out to have been rescued by a teacher when the school closed in 1946: they had been in the family's custody ever since. Another surprise was the letters patent of Charles I confirming the grant of Easthampstead Park to William Trumbull in 1636, which turned up in London - an important record for the early history of this estate.

Other highlights of the year included a small collection of notebooks of the Southby family of Buckland, 1695-1796; a photograph album of Wixenford (now Ludgrove) School, Wokingham, giving a fascinating picture of life at a preparatory school in the 1930s; an inspeximus relating to a fair at Finchampstead, 1582; scrapbooks of amateur dramatic productions in Reading, 1935-1968; a beautifully-illustrated catalogue of brassware available from J Hews, ironmonger of Maidenhead, 1902; the diverse archives of the Royal Borough Collection, Windsor; and last but not least in the year of the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar, a copy of a small book entitled *A Brief Record of the Words and Deeds of Nelson*, one of 10,000 produced for the hundredth anniversary in 1905 and presented to all Reading schoolchildren in that year.

Cataloguing

Cataloguing is the route by which documents become available for research. Whilst it may be relatively straightforward in the case of modern series of records in good condition, it is far more often both challenging and time-consuming, requiring considerable skill in identifying records and locating their context within a collection, as well as extensive research to ensure that catalogue descriptions are full, accurate and helpful to the user. The cataloguing process also offers an opportunity to identify documents in need of conservation or appropriate for microfilming, and thus forms a part of the continuum of preservation in the Record Office.

During 2004/2005 cataloguing work focussed on ecclesiastical records: 66 catalogues of Methodist records were completed, 44 of Anglican parish records, and three of United Reformed Church records. The concentration on Methodist records reflects the final stage in our project to collect and catalogue records of Methodist circuits and churches in Berkshire. Although at the year's end a little more remained to be done, the project was close to conclusion. Through this project a major resource for ecclesiastical and social history in Berkshire has been made available. The large number of Anglican parish catalogues completed is a response to the correspondingly large number of deposits received and the high priority these receive in the cataloguing programme - a reflection in turn of public demand. Some significant additions during the year included records from three Maidenhead churches (St Luke, 1911-2003; St Peter, 1919-2004; and SS Andrew and Mary Magdalene, 1827-2003); Twyford, 1735-2003; Woodley St John, 1881-2003; Swallowfield, 1780-2004; Ashbury, 1729-1978; and Wargrave, 1840-2003.

The largest single catalogue completed was that of Berkshire County Council contracts, 1892-1939 (299 items). The majority of these relate to the construction and maintenance of county property, including bridges, roads, dwellings, farm buildings, police stations, schools and public assistance institutions. One of the most notable projects was the construction of the 1911 Shire Hall. Collectively these provide a wealth of information on the built environment in Berkshire - and in addition contain some very attractive architectural drawings.

Other records catalogued include a fine collection of parish scrapbooks compiled by the wife of the rector of Welford, c.1890-1919; deeds and other papers of the Ormathwaite estates in Warfield and Winkfield, 13c-1876; the Wixenford School photograph album mentioned above; and records of the Berkshire County Hockey Association, 1906-1998.

Research and Publication

Subjects of research were extremely diverse. Family history predominated, as in previous years, but other topics covered aspects of both local and national history and ranged from the early modern period to the twentieth century. Subjects included politics and political culture in late Elizabethan England; non-Parliamentary enclosure in the Lambourn valley, c.1500-c.1800; music in Reading churches in the sixteenth century and musicians in

Windsor in the eighteenth; eighteenth-century vagrancy; nineteenth-century medical and surgical societies; Victorian church architecture in Berkshire; nineteenth-century shopworkers; a proposed (but unbuilt) civic centre for Reading in the 1930s; the gardens of Coleshill House; Vincents of Reading; the Royal Ascot Golf Club; a history of the income tax; the history of the elm tree; and town and parish studies of Abingdon, Arborfield, Barkham, Bradfield, Inkpen, Wallingford and Wargrave, amongst many others. Several visitors were involved in preparing volumes for publication by the Berkshire Record Society.

In addition to those carrying out their own research, we receive regular visits from volunteers transcribing and indexing documents - a work which greatly increases access to often-difficult or fragile originals. The work of the overseers project group came to an end in 2004; the final volume was published at the beginning of this year, and we marked the completion of the project with a small reception at the Record Office in September. Work continues on parish registers and coroners' records.

In April, Berkshire Record Society published volume 8 in the Berkshire Record Series, *Records of the Newbury Kendrick Workhouse, 1627-1641*, edited by Dr Christine Jackson. This incorporated the text of an important account book of John Kendrick's charity workhouse and other records from the Record Office's collections. The 2005 issue of *Berkshire Old and New* included two articles by members of the Record Office staff - my own on enclosure in Berkshire and Lisa Spurrier's on the Community of St John Baptist, Clewer.

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

The Library

Some 250 titles were added to the library during the year, including family histories of the Castle family of Cookham and the Slocock family of Newbury, histories of Bracknell and Wokingham College and Newbury Girls' School, a study of post-war Woolhampton and an oral history of Earley, articles on seventeenth-century workhouse building and a radical network in the English revolution, and a doctoral thesis on *The Winchcombe Family and the Woollen Industry*. Many of the titles were acquired as gifts, both from authors and friends, and we are grateful to the donors for their generosity.

CONSERVATION

Conservation and Preservation

The work of the Conservation Unit is essential both to preservation and to access. Through its activities, documents that have been damaged, whether through neglect, bad storage or over-use, can be brought back to life, and documents that are at risk can be made safe. But is it not only damaged documents that receive attention: documents now in good condition may deteriorate in the future if they are not suitably protected for safe storage and handling. Much of this work is unglamorous, involving laborious cleaning with plastic erasers, or the removal of rusty pins and staples; much is repetitive, such as de-stapling parish magazines and other pamphlets and re-sewing them with cotton thread; some would have been avoidable had documents received better care before they reached us. All of it is important, however, and all requires care and patience.

During the year preservation staff secured over 800 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and re-sewed nearly 3,300 pamphlets. Some 2,000 documents received purpose-made wraps, and a further 690 were 'encapsulated' - that is, placed within an inert transparent container. Documents treated in one of these ways included maps, plans, letters, parish magazines, annual reports, minute books and sales catalogues among many others.

Many documents in the Record Office are too fragile to be used in the public search room, and are placed on a register of items 'not to be produced'. This register is regularly reviewed as part of the process of preparing a list of priorities for repair. Amongst the documents selected for repair in 2004/2005 were plans of SS Andrew and Mary Magdalene church, Maidenhead, and of St Sebastian's rectory, Wokingham, and a seventeenth-century court roll of the manor of Lambourn.

The Maidenhead documents included both plans and elevations of proposed alterations to the church in 1877. Originally backed on linen, they had been seriously damaged by damp, and both document and backing had been severely attacked by mould. Normally the first stage in treatment would be the relatively-straightforward removal of the backing. In this case the fragmentary nature of many of the drawings made this a hazardous process. Some strengthening of the drawings was necessary first, achieved by the application of a very light solution of adhesive. Once the backing had been removed, the back of each drawing (there were eight altogether) was re-lined, and gaps filled with early wove paper. All the drawings were then encapsulated to avoid future damage from friction during handling.

The St Sebastian's rectory plans presented a different problem. These were all on tracing paper, a material that is notorious for becoming brittle and fragile with age. One of the plans had cracked along the folds. All four plans were gently flattened, and the most damaged one was lined with heat-set tissue, prior, again, to being encapsulated.

The Lambourn manorial roll was different again. This was a document on parchment that had suffered from poor storage and heavy handling, resulting in much crumpling and numerous small tears. The document was relaxed, flattened, and the tears individually repaired.

Microfilming

As part of its preservation programme the Record Office prepares copies of popular documents so that these copies can be used in the searchroom 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 all fall into this category, and the Office is fortunate to have the facilities to film these rapidly so there is minimal delay in making copies available. During 2004/2005 nearly 200 parish registers containing over 12,000 pages were filmed, along with registers of Reading Cemetery, admission registers of several schools, and selected Methodist records.

STAFFING

During the year we said farewell to Andrew Mitchell and Vicky Lewis, and welcomed Ruth King, Graham Powell and Alison Pritchard. We congratulated Julie Grisman on her promotion to Archives Assistant, and to Lindsay McCormack and Bill Stavely on their appointments to posts on the permanent staff. We also congratulated Ivone Turnbull on achieving Registration with the society of Archivists.

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; I also served on Douai Abbey's Library Committee and was invited to join the London and South East Committee of Newsplan. Mark Stevens served on the society of Archivists' Professional Affairs Committee and as Chairman of its Legislation sub-committee; he was also an assessor for the Society's continuing professional development 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 of Archivists' Continuing Development Sub-committee.

STATISTICS

Public Use	2003/4	2004/5
Visitors	7734	7783
Enquiries: post and e-mail	2326	2228
Enquiries: telephone	5990	6358
Reprographics	6184	7925
Items consulted: originals	7139	7133
Items consulted: microform and transcript	70967	73718
Talks, visits and promotional events		
Number of events	27	25
People attending	539	827
Accessioning and cataloguing		
Accessions received	193	233
Accessions catalogued	272	227
Items catalogued	2174	2195