

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2006-2007

INTRODUCTION

During the past year we have made solid progress on our externally-funded projects. We celebrated the completion of our work on the Fair Mile Hospital archive at a reception in October jointly hosted by the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire and the Chair of the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust; we began work on the nationally-important Broadmoor Hospital archive; we completed the first two stages of our Manorial Documents Online project; and we introduced new initiatives deriving from our marketing project. At the same time we achieved high levels of satisfaction in our public services, added over ten cubic metres of records to our collections, cataloguing a further nine, and continued with the essential work of conservation and preservation and of outreach.

During the year also we were formally inspected by The National Archives and took part in the first national self-assessment exercise for archives services. The positive reports from these gave us considerable satisfaction, and gave us helpful pointers for areas where we might further improve our services.

Throughout the year I have supported by an able and committed staff, by colleagues in Reading Borough Council and the other Unitary Authorities in Berkshire, by members of Archives Board, and by many volunteers and friends of the service. The achievements recorded in the following pages would not have been possible without this support, and it is a great pleasure to be able to acknowledge it publicly and to express my thanks.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
October 2007

PUBLIC SERVICE

Search Room and Enquiry Services

The provision and promotion of opportunities for personal research continues to be central to our work. There is no substitute for the hands-on experience of using original documents in exploring the layers of history, and we aim to provide a welcoming environment in which visitors can enjoy and advance their research. We would like all our customers to take away a positive memory from their dealings with us, and for them to see us as knowledgeable and efficient. Comments received over the last year suggest that we are succeeding. They include: *'Overwhelmed by the helpfulness and patience of the staff...you are all a credit to your employer'*, *'I think this is the best RO yet I've been into, and I've been to a few'*, *'Excellent, helpful and knowledgeable staff'*, *'BRO do a fantastic job. You are all worth your weight in gold. Thank you!'*, *'Very well laid out and appointed Record Office'*, and *'My wife and I have visited many Record Offices up and down the country and find the facilities at Reading to be the best we have found'*.

This impression is reinforced by the results of the latest Survey of Visitors to British Archives. These indicate that an overwhelming 95% of visitors rated our service overall as good or very good. The high levels of satisfaction we achieve across a range of measures are a credit to the staff who work as part of our public duty team. The same staff also contributed to an excellent performance against our service guarantees:

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time
- 96% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 99% of copies are supplied within 6 working days
- 95% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order.

For those who are unable to come in person, or who wish to explore the availability of sources before travelling, we offer a research and enquiry service. This year we have also been able to remove the 'cap' on research, and offer to undertake much longer and involved paid work for customers than before. Many enquirers have taken advantage of this extension to our services and we will look to build on this further.

The only slight disappointment is that onsite visitor numbers have continued to decline, from 6922 in 2005/6 to 6190 in 2006/7. This is a national trend following the growth of duplicate family history resources online, and one that we seek to address through our marketing strategy to bring in new audiences. Written enquiries continue to grow, however: from 2345 in 2005/6 to 2581 in 2006/7.

We have continued with the oversubscribed 'Introduction to the searchroom' sessions, which are attended both by new visitors and old who would like to find out more about making the best use of our research facilities.

Remote access

Although we are still unable to access statistics for use of either the service website, www.berkshirerecordoffice.org.uk, or the New Landscapes enclosure site, www.berkshirenclosure.org.uk, we know that both sites are heavily used due to the volume and immediacy of messages we receive if either of them suffers from a technical problem. We also know from comments received that the resources available on the New Landscapes site have been admired and appreciated by users.

Work has continued throughout the year to solve some of the problems with the New Landscapes site, and we estimate that roughly 97% of images are now working correctly. Preparatory work has also been completed for a project to redesign the service website and place it within a content management system, which should allow us much more control over the site, and make it much easier to generate content.

As well as the normal updates to the service website, the Fair Mile project saw the delivery of a suite of pages about the history of the old County Asylum. These pages follow the style of our other online galleries to present both storyboards and virtual display cases that afford a fascinating glimpse into the day-to-day practice of Victorian mental health care.

Catalogues available on www.a2a.org.uk received 65,000 views during the year. We estimate that around two-thirds of our paper catalogues are now available in this form.

Outreach

In October we held a major reception to celebrate the completion of our Fair Mile project (see 'Special Projects', below). Hosted jointly by the Lord-Lieutenant of Berkshire, Mr Philip Wroughton, and the Chair of Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Mrs Lorna Roberts, guests were treated to a detailed display of documents which illustrated every facet of the history of the Hospital, which had previously been known as the Moulsoford Asylum or the Berkshire Mental Hospital. Other events during the year included our regular attendance at the Bracknell Family History Fair in January, and opening for tours over the Heritage Open Days in September, as well as a stand at Longworth and District Historical Society's 'History on your Doorstep' festival. We also contributed to or supported events and exhibitions in a number of places in the county, including Windsor Library, Maidenhead Heritage Centre, Reading Minster and East Garston church.

Similarly we responded to requests for talks and visits and groups we have spoken to include the Vale of White Horse branch of the Berkshire Family History Society, the History of Reading Society, Hampshire Archives Trust, Pangbourne Heritage Group, Swallowfield Local History Society, and the U3A Goring branch. We have also spoken to assembled individuals at Whitley Library, Carey Baptist Church, and the Salvation Army. Professional visits have included Reading University Library staff and CILIP's regional group of university and research librarians.

During the year we completed our first year's activities based on our marketing strategy, which has been funded by a grant from MLA South East. This included the production of a new promotional leaflet and the design of a banner that we can use for talks and events. The design of these items was followed through into a new-look full-colour *Berkshire Echo*, which is now available via email to a subscribers list.

As well as the *Echo*, we have continued to place news stories within the *Berkshire Family Historian*, and to contribute a regular column to the newsletters of both the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Local History Associations. Media coverage was quieter this year than last, although ITV Meridian's 'Thames Valley Tonight' showed some of our St Kitts documents as part of a feature on the abolition of the slave trade. We achieved a mention for the first time in *Berkshire Life* magazine, in a feature on Women's Institutes which included several paragraphs on the links forged between the Record Office and the Berkshire Federation.

Lectures and educational work

Although most learning we support is self-directed, we have also been involved with education providers during the year. In partnership with Slough Museum and Windsor Arts Centre's 'Place Space Trace' project, we delivered two INSET training sessions for teachers and volunteers, based on sources for Victorian Windsor and Slough during World War 2. As part of the University of Oxford's Continuing Education Department we delivered a day school on the records of the Old Poor Law, and for the University of Reading's School of Continuing Education we presented two linked day schools on sources for the Victorian village. We also spoke to second-year undergraduates at the University of Reading as part of their preparation for their final-year history dissertations, and to the University's MA in Medieval Studies students.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessions

During the year under review a little over ten cubic metres of records were added to the collections. This is not the highest total ever, but nevertheless represents a considerable quantity of material, and is four to five times as much as we were receiving annually only a decade ago. Nearly two-fifths of this was accounted for by records of Broadmoor Hospital. The remainder came from a wide and diverse range of places including town halls, parish and nonconformist churches, parish councils, the coroner, schools, local societies, solicitors, businesses, charities, private individuals, and, in a very few cases, the sale room. Of course, quantity is not the only or even the main measure of success, though it is certainly one of them. Quality, in terms of historical interest, is also vital, and in this respect we have not been disappointed. Records ranged in date from 1318 to 2006 and include minute books, account books, parish registers, maps, deeds, sale catalogues, programmes and handbills and even a volume of popular songs. It is always a particular pleasure to recover records thought to have been lost, and our acquisition at auction (with financial support from the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies) of a Wallingford vestry minute book, 1819-1853, was therefore especially welcome. All parts of the county were represented, from Slough in the east (an ARP guide, 1940) to Lambourn in the west (a burial register begun in 1842).

Full details of these will be released as they are catalogued and become available for research.

Cataloguing

Collecting records without cataloguing them would have little purpose, since it is only through cataloguing that they become available for research. Cataloguing is thus an essential part of the Record Office's access agenda, though as it is mainly carried on behind the scenes it is often less noticed than the Office's public service and outreach activities. Cataloguing by its nature must be meticulous and is often time-consuming, but the benefits are immeasurable and enduring.

A particular focus of the year was on local authority records, including the archives of Wallingford Borough Council, 1835-1974, Wokingham Rural Sanitary Authority and Wokingham Rural District Council, 1873-1974, Reading Borough Council, 1785-2003, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, 1973-1999, and five parish councils. Of these, the Wokingham archive was, by a long margin, the largest. It included a full set of council and committee minutes, 1895-1974, account books, and an extensive collection of rating records (important for house history and the history of development in the district), 1873-1973. The Reading records catalogued included the minutes of the town's Paving and Lighting Commission from 1785, and a fine set of large-scale maps prepared for the Local Board of Health in 1853. We have also taken in recent minutes from both Reading and Windsor & Maidenhead, and these too were among the records catalogued last year. Of the parish council

records catalogued, those from Chaddleworth, East Garston, Greenham and Winnersh dated from the establishment of the councils in 1894.

Another important public-sector archive catalogued was that of Fair Mile Hospital. This is described more fully below under Special Projects.

Some 40 parish and 14 non-conformist collections were catalogued during the year. Notable among the parish collections were Grazeley, 1822-2006, including designs for stained glass windows, 1915; Peasemore, 1804-1986, including a register of baptisms and burials, 1804-1812, subsequently used, with commendable regard for economy, for keeping the parish accounts, 1836-1911; Holy Trinity, Windsor, 1843-1901, including the draft conveyance of the original church site, 1843; and registers dating from the opening of the churches at Woodlands St Mary (1842) and Eastbury (1867). Outstanding among the non-conformist archives was that of Sunningdale Baptist Church. This church traces its history to 1801, though it faltered later in the nineteenth century. It was revived in 1878, and from this date its records, including minutes, accounts and membership papers, are very full.

In March 2005 the archive collections of the Windsor and Royal Borough Museum were transferred to the Record Office. Cataloguing work was completed during the year, and the collection is now available for research. It includes a large number of architectural drawings from the firm of Edgington and Spink, 1857-1973, including plans for alterations to Windsor Town Hall, Windsor Union workhouse, and several other buildings in and around Windsor; records of Windsor Afternoon Townswomen's Guild, 1973-1998; deeds of various properties, 1656-1968; a petition concerning an encroachment on royal fisheries at Cookham (c.1630); sale catalogues, c.1915-1934; and a memoir written in 1941 by S T Mann, stationmaster at Windsor, relating to his railway career, 1903-1925.

Among the other catalogues completed are several of the records of local clubs and societies, notably two horticultural associations (Sutton Courtenay, 1950-1984, and Hurst, 1906-2006, the latter including minutes, accounts, and a good collection of show programmes and posters), a cricket club (Aldermaston, 1894-1931) and a choir (Reading Festival Chorus, 1946-2003); plans of Reading schools, 1851-1872; records of several charities (including a particularly fine terrier of the properties of Newbury Church and Almshouse charity, surveyed in 1839-40, and containing beautifully-executed plans and elevations of buildings, and details of the location and species (denoted by leaf) of individual trees); a calendar of prisoners at Newbury Borough Quarter Sessions, 1938-1959; and a catalogue of the products of Ideal Casements (Reading) Ltd, 1964.

Altogether 141 new catalogues were completed, representing 196 accessions and comprising nearly 2300 items.

Research and Publication

As in previous years the most popular subject of study in 2006-2007 was family history. However, research carried out in the Record Office was by no means limited to this, and local, regional, political, religious, medical and business

studies all drew on the resources of the Record Office during the year. As usual we have supported both professional and amateur historians, and have assisted those studying for first and higher degrees in history at Reading and other universities. We were particularly pleased to receive warm commendation from Reading University's external examiners for the support we gave to undergraduates preparing final-year history dissertations. Subjects of study have included mediaeval cartularies, the fate of ex-religious in Berkshire following the dissolution of the monasteries, seventeenth-century Quakers, eye care and treatment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English trade with China and the East Indies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the teaching of grammar in eighteenth-century England, the political role of the second Marchioness of Downshire, the Reading and Berkshire Constabularies, and the history of Horlicks. 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. Once again work concentrated on parish registers and coroners' records. We are very grateful to those who give up their time in this way.

The Record Office did not itself issue any publications during the year, but material from the Record Office was included in *The Letters of Sir William Blackstone*, published by the Selden Society (Blackstone of Wallingford was a celebrated eighteenth-century legal commentator), and two members of staff contributed articles to local and national journals. Lisa Spurrier wrote on 'The Devon House of Mercy, 1863-1940' for *The Devon Historian* (the Devon House was a daughter house of the convent at Clewer) and on 'School Records at the Berkshire Record Office' for the *Berkshire Family Historian*, while Kate Tyte contributed articles on 'Fair Mile Hospital' and 'Interpreting old mental health records' for the same journal, and on 'The Fair Mile Hospital Archives' for *Wellcome History*.

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

Recent publications acquired included histories of Thatcham United Reformed Church and Carey Baptist Church, Reading, and guides to Lower Basildon church, St James' church, Reading, and Waltham St Lawrence church and to Finchampstead churchyard; a history of Christ Church Primary School, Reading; family histories of the Berkshire Dunches, the Keates family, and the Clarke family of White Waltham; local histories of East Garston, wartime Shurlock Row, and Sutton's Seeds; a biographical guide to men of Basildon

who died in the two world wars; histories of the firms of Samuel Elliott of Reading and J M Jones of Maidenhead; a volume of essays on the 'Swing' riots of 1830; and a new study of civil war battles, which includes a critical reassessment of the battles of Newbury.

Many 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

Historic Mental Health Records

During the year we completed our work on the Fair Mile Hospital archive, which forms the first part of our Historic Mental Health Records Project. The project archivist completed cataloguing work on Fair Mile ahead of schedule, and has produced a comprehensive catalogue of the archive which is available online through www.a2a.org.uk. The project also saw the completion of repair work to around a dozen volumes that had been badly damp damaged, and were previously unfit for research, as well as the creation of preservation packaging for all the items in the archive. This is in addition to the promotional articles, web pages and reception mentioned above. Thanks are due to all those who made the project such a success and in such a short time period. Thanks are also due to The Wellcome Trust for funding the project.

The second and final part of the Historic Mental Health Records Project was also begun during the year. This part, also funded by The Wellcome Trust, will see similar activities to Fair Mile undertaken for the much larger, and nationally-significant archive of Broadmoor Hospital. Although much cataloguing work for Broadmoor has been undertaken during the year, it will continue to run through this year and beyond. We were very pleased that our archivist for Fair Mile agreed to stay on for the Broadmoor project, and she has been able to draw on her experience of the former as she creates a similarly detailed catalogue for Broadmoor.

During the course of the year we received a number of new accessions from the Hospital. We have built a strong relationship with Broadmoor staff, and have begun working on a joint access protocol which will inform use of the archive once it is available for research. We have also begun to plan the conservation work which will form the second principal strand of the project. We recruited a conservator who joined the Office shortly after the year's end.

Manorial Documents On-line

The Manorial Documents Register is a national database of manorial records, containing summary details of the records and their locations. It was established following the Law of Property Act 1922, because of the importance of manorial records as evidence for property ownership, and it has been maintained, under statute, by the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (now part of The National Archives) acting for the Master of the Rolls. The records, dating from the middle ages to the twentieth century, are, in addition to being important for legal purposes, of great value for the history of land use, local customs, and local social and economic history generally. Hitherto the entire register has been held on paper. A programme to convert the register into an on-line database was begun some years ago and is proceeding as funds permit. The Berkshire and Buckinghamshire project, running in partnership with The National Archives and Royal Holloway University of London, and with financial support from the Marc Fitch Fund, commenced in February 2006.

By the end of the year under review the project officer had completed work in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies and was well on the way to completing her work in Berkshire Record Office. As an outcome of her work here she was able to provide details that allowed us to update and extend our own index to these records. In 2007-8 she will move on to examine records in other repositories up and down the land, which will enable us to bring to local people information about manorial records held elsewhere. The project is due for completion in May 2008.

Berkshire Probate Index

During the year under review the Record Office embarked on a project to raise funds to compile a new index to the large and important collection of Berkshire Archdeaconry probate records, 1508-1652. Probate records - wills, administrations, inventories, accounts and related documents - are extremely important for economic, social, local and family history, and Berkshire has a particularly fine collection. However, the index for this early period is extremely deficient. We estimate that it will cost between £25,000 and £30,000 to employ a suitably qualified and experienced person to compile an index and prepare it for publication. Berkshire Record Society has promised £5,000 towards the cost. Fundraising will continue into 2007/8.

CONSERVATION

Conservation and Preservation

Conservation and preservation are vital elements of the work of a Record Office, as much a part of its access agenda as public services and cataloguing. Without conservation damaged documents would remain inaccessible, whilst documents in good condition would lack the protection they need to preserve them for the future. Much of the work carried out in the Conservation Unit is unglamorous, involving such things as the removal of rusty paper clips, sewing pamphlets, and replacing acidic wraps with acid-free packaging, but all of it is essential.

During the year under review the conservation team made folders for some 1700 documents and encapsulated - that is, placed within an inert transparent sleeve - over 1500 more, secured nearly 500 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and re-sewed nearly 3300 pamphlets. Documents treated in these ways include maps, plans, letters, parish magazines, annual reports, minute books and sales catalogues. Particular priorities this year were early twentieth-century building control plans from Slough (a very large collection) and an important series of valuation maps prepared under the Land Duties Act of 1911. Both projects continued into the new year. The permanent staff were supported in their work by a team of volunteers from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes, for whose assistance we are very grateful.

Inevitably, some documents required specialist repair. Notable among these were several badly-damaged plans of parsonage houses. The designs prepared in 1851 for Sandhurst parsonage, for example, had been drawn on tracing paper. This is a notoriously fragile and vulnerable medium, and over the years the paper had completely fractured. It was necessary to prepare a new backing and then to reassemble the pieces of plan on to this, filling the gaps with archival-quality tissue. The finished repairs were then encapsulated to provide additional protection. In addition to these we repaired a number of other plans from the same collection, a volume of Wallingford churchwardens' accounts, a plan of the proposed Abingdon Junction Railway, 1855; accounts relating to the enlargement of Speen churchyard, 1888; a number of plans (including plans of the workhouse) from the Windsor and Royal Borough Museum collection; and (following a request to view it from a descendant of the surveyor who prepared it) a plan dated 1862 showing the boundaries of the liberties of Whistley and Broad Hinton in the parish of Hurst.

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 have also focussed on cemetery records and coroners' inquest files. Altogether we filmed 106 parish registers, 72 school admission registers and 31 cemetery books as well as other items, achieving a total of nearly 33,000 pages.

INSPECTION AND ASSESSMENT

Under the terms of the Public Records Acts and of the Manorial Documents and Tithe Rules, Berkshire Record Office must have the approval of the Lord Chancellor/Secretary of State for Constitutional Affairs and the Master of the Rolls in order to hold Public Records and manorial and tithe documents. This approval is given subject to a satisfactory report by The National Archives, following an inspection. We were inspected on 16 October 2006. The inspection also measures the extent to which the Record Office meets the national standards expected of archive services as set out in The National Archives' *Standard for Record Repositories* (2004). Satisfactory performance against this standard is a pre-requisite for approval to hold manorial and tithe records.

Berkshire Record Office has been granted provisional 'TNA approval' for a period of five years, and has been formally appointed a place of deposit for Public Records.. The report referred to 'a strong performance overall', and stated: 'In the context of restricted staff numbers, the service is ... performing solidly in continuing to tackle cataloguing backlogs, keeping a sound public service running and making a welcome strategic effort to improve and target outreach work. This amounts to a considerable success, and you and your staff should be congratulated on your achievements'. This is a gratifying acknowledgement of a quality service.

The National Archives has also introduced a self-assessment exercise for archive services, which it piloted in 2006. A lengthy questionnaire was circulated last summer to all record offices seeking information about a range of aspects of the service, including governance; documentation of collections; customer responsiveness; searchroom and other public services; buildings, security and environment; and preservation and conservation. Returns were 'scored' by TNA: services have been informed of their scores, presented as percentages, and have been awarded a star rating, from no stars (poor) to three stars (excellent), according to their performance.

The outcome of the self-assessment exercise was the award of a 'two-star' rating to the Record Office. In terms of relative performance, Berkshire Record Office scored above the national average in all areas, above the south-east average in five out of six areas, and above the average for county services in four out of six areas. We were delighted with this result, which we believe reflects our performance of doing some things very well, but not undertaking the full range of services that are presently expected of a county archives service.

Whilst we can be satisfied with the outcomes of both investigations, we have also to acknowledge that there are areas where we must seek to make improvements. These will be addressed in the service review that we will be undertaking in 2007/8.

STAFFING

During the year we said farewell to Jane Powell and welcomed Zoe Darani as temporary archive assistant and Ben White as temporary archivist, covering during the maternity leave of Lindsay McCormack. We were delighted to congratulate Lindsay on the birth of her daughter in the autumn. We were pleased to be able to extend Kate Tyte's contract: she will be staying with us to serve as project archivist for the Broadmoor project.

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, on Douai Abbey's Library Committee and on the London and South East Committee of Newsplan. I was elected a member of the council of the British Records Association, and Treasurer of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. Mark Stevens continued to serve on the (national) Council of the Society of Archivists, and as Chair of its Publications Sub-committee and as a member of its Committee on Corporate Affairs. Sabina Sutherland served on the Council of the Berkshire Record Society. Lisa Spurrier served as a member of the Editorial Board of *Berkshire Old and New*.