

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2010-2011

INTRODUCTION

The best news during the year 2010/11 came at the very end when we heard that Berkshire Record Office had been awarded the top ranking of four stars in The National Archives' assessment of local authority archive services. This was a splendid achievement, and one of which everyone associated with the service can be justifiably proud. It means that we are now recognised as one of the top record offices in the country, and puts into context the many warm endorsements we regularly receive from our users, some of which are reported below.

The year was not without its difficulties as the effects of the first wave of staffing reductions began to be felt, but nevertheless we are able to record a number of positive achievements. We completed the new index to our very important collection of Tudor and early Stuart probate records and launched this at a very pleasant reception in January; we launched our new collaborative research project into eighteenth-century education in Berkshire; and we expanded our work in postgraduate and adult education, widening our links with Reading University and establishing new partnerships with the local branches of the U3A and WEA. We accepted nearly five cubic metres of new records and catalogued rather more. And at the same time we carried out the core work of maintaining the public research and enquiry service, of preservation and conservation work, and of supporting community use and enjoyment of the records.

In all of this I have been supported, as always, 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 pages that follow would not have been possible without this support, and it is, as it always is, a pleasure to record my thanks to them all.

Peter Durrant
County Archivist
August 2011

PUBLIC SERVICE

Visitor and enquiry services

The year was a challenging one for duty staff, who were set the task of continuing to provide exceptional levels of customer care with fewer resources to do so. The result was a number of behind-the-scenes adjustments to enable us to deliver the service as usual. Although regular visitors noticed the difference, we were still able to finish the year running as efficiently as when we began it, and for that my thanks are due to all members of staff.

The standards that we have set ourselves were confirmed by the results of the latest Survey of Visitors to British Archives, conducted by the Institute of Public Finance. 94% of visitors continue to say that our overall service is either very good or good, and 97% that we are friendly, and provide expert advice. More widely, visitors recognise the role we play in both preserving community cohesion and in providing for public accountability.

Overall, there was very little in the way of criticism, and even then it was often supportive. Our comparatively frugal resources for IT was the principal deficiency identified. These high standards are something that we must now look to take forward in yet more straitened times.

The broad performance of the Office is also apparent in our success against our customer guarantee targets. By the end of the year these stood at:

- 99% of visitors get their first choice of visit time
- 96% of written enquiries are answered within 5 working days
- 100% of copies are supplied within 6 working days
- 82% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

The latter result is particularly pleasing, as it confirms that the comparatively poor performance on two of the monitoring days in 2009/10 was based purely on volume of requests, rather than an underlying problem with the document production system.

While these figures give an overall impression of achievement, they comprise many personal tales from visitors and enquirers who make use of us, and some of their comments also serve to illustrate the welcoming and helpful service that we strive to provide:

The facilities have all been excellent and the staff courteous and very helpful. A delightful visit!

I should like to congratulate the staff team for being extremely helpful, very polite and cheerful on my visit today. So refreshing to come to a CRO where the welcome is really genuine.

Wonderful, and the staff are fantastic.

Such polite and knowledgeable advice at all times - thank you.

We continued to run both quarterly 'introduction to the searchroom' visits and family history evenings, the latter in partnership with the Berkshire Family History Society. We had intended to expand the number of research study evenings, broadening out into local history, but the reduction in staff numbers has made this unlikely. We have also signalled a reduction in the number of family history evenings that we can support in the future. Similarly, we were able to add a further schools guide to our list of those publications, this time for West Berkshire, but it seems unlikely that we will be able to commit to recent levels of such activity in the future.

Overall usage figures for direct contact dipped slightly again this year. The number of onsite visits was approximately 2% lower, and the larger part of the reduction was once more made up by fewer phone enquiries. This continuing trend undoubtedly reflects our efforts to put more and more content online. Despite the drop in visitor numbers, however, there was a staggering increase in the number of items consulted, up 15% to nearly nine thousand documents over the year. This is an appreciable increase in staff time required to process requests, and if the trend continues, will make it even more important that we maintain resources to deliver the public service.

Remote access

It was another frustrating year for the service website, in that the long-promised upgrade once again failed to materialise. However, with support from both Archives Board and Standing Conference on Archives, much progress was made during the year, with the result that the revamped site was ready to launch by its end. A lot of staff time was taken up with the transfer of content from the old site to the new, as each page was edited separately and some changes made to the way that content will display. We hope that the end result will be a significant improvement in our ability to deliver content online.

Meanwhile, the old site continued to increase in use. This year saw a slight increase in the number of visits to the site of around 2%. The median visit length was approximately five minutes, and the average visitor looked at seven pages. Due to a change in the way that statistics were collected, the basic figures for use of the New Landscapes site look as though it halved over the year. We will monitor this trend and report back next year. The new statistics package also allows for a much more detailed analysis of the site, which shows amongst other things that the website is used for study at the University of Quebec, and also that it is referred to on the History of Cartography website.

Another drop was experienced in views of catalogues available on a2a. However, the link to a2a will be much more prominent on the new Record Office website, so we hope that this trend will be reversed in the short term.

Outreach and audience development

We responded to all requests for talks and visits, and were able to accommodate most requests. We hosted visits for volunteers from the Berkshire Family History Society (twice), the Calcot Evening WI, Berkshire Gardens Trust, Catholic Archives Society and the Sutton Courtenay Local History Society. We gave talks to the Bracknell Forest Society, Crowthorne Library reminiscence group, Pangbourne Rotary Club, Reading Rotary Club, the Bracknell branch of the Berkshire Family History Society, Palmer Park Library group and the Farnborough U3A group. We also spoke at the Bracknell Family History Fair and at a study day organised by the Wokingham U3A at Wellington College, as well as speaking about Broadmoor as part of The National Archives' talk programme at Kew.

We made our usual appearance at the Bracknell Family History fair, manning a stall for the day, and also opened up for behind-the-scenes tours on the Saturday of the Heritage Open Days. Both these events were well attended. We produced our regular four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*, on the themes of the Civil War, extreme weather (spread across two issues), and informal adult education. We also contributed our quarterly columns in the newsletters of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Local History Associations, and the Oxfordshire Family History Society.

Media interest in the Record Office this year spanned Victorian Broadmoor (a regular topic), the development of the *Yellow Pages* and a Radio 4 programme on 'The Real Apprentice', which featured an indenture of 1421 which is part of our collections.

Learning

Everyone who uses the Record Office is engaged with learning, and we do all that we can to support that. Apart from the provision of our visitor and enquiry services, the creation of catalogues, and the production of new content for the web or the searchroom, we also hold or contribute to events dedicated either to formal or informal learning.

This year we supported a number of local services whose business is learning. We hosted a visit for Year 6 children at Redlands Primary School, as well as sessions for various courses at the University of Reading: MA in Modern History, MA in Medieval Studies and MA in 19th Century Literature. We also spoke to the history undergraduates at Reading, and to MSc students at Oxford studying local history at the Continuing Education Department (OUDCE).

We also held two days schools for the OUDCE: one on churchwardens records, and one on researching the Old Poor Law. These events were pitched at self-directed study, as were a day school we supported at The Museum of English Rural Life on the subject of researching Reading's history, and a Reading WEA course relating to local museum collections.

We also became involved in encouraging research as part of the Thames Valley U3A Network's River Thames project. We spoke to a Network study day in Goring, and also provided an introduction to research session for the project's Industrial Archaeology group. The result has been a strengthening of the link between the Record Office and local U3A groups, which already has had a direct benefit to our schools research project.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

Extending and developing the archive collections at the Record Office is an essential part of the work that we do. Sometimes, as with the survey of the records of sports clubs in Berkshire, we set about this in a proactive way. Sometimes, for example in the case of parish and nonconformist church records, we benefit from contacts and arrangements built up painstakingly over many years. Sometimes records arrive entirely without warning from a wholly unexpected source, reflecting both the importance of and our success in raising and maintaining our profile in the community. But however it happens, taking in new records is always welcome. During the year under review we added something to the collections almost every day that we were open - a total of 196 accessions, in fact, amounting to almost five cubic metres by volume and ranging in date from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first.

We were especially pleased this year to receive two important West Berkshire maps - the Brimpton tithe map of 1842, with its associated award, and a mid-nineteenth-century copy of one of the maps that accompanied the Marsh Benham (Speen) enclosure award of 1780. In the latter case the original has been lost, so this copy assumes additional importance in completing the mapping of the whole of the enclosed area. Both had strayed from their proper homes, and it was very pleasing to be able to restore them to where they belonged.

Another item that had strayed from official custody was a seventeenth-century court book from the former borough of New Windsor. Separated from the borough archive for over 150 years (it was given away in the 1830s by the daughter of a former mayor!) it turned up at auction in London, and with financial support from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead we were able to secure it. It is a register of final concords - in effect a register of certain property transactions in Windsor between 1597 and 1685. At the end has been added a number of lists of borough officials to 1863. As with the maps, it was very satisfying to have been able to restore this book to its proper home.

Parish records, as usual, arrived in large numbers. Reflecting our success in previous years in encouraging the deposit of parish records, most of this year's accession dated from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but it was pleasing to receive an eighteenth-century overseers' account book from East Ilsley. Amongst the non-conformist records received was a fine collection from Newbury Northbrook Street Methodist Church, described more fully under cataloguing.

As for the remainder, only a few examples can be noted here, among them records of the Polehampton Charities, Twyford (including trustees' minutes from 1887 and school records from 1903); printed plans relating to a proposed Berks and Hants Junction Canal, 1825-1826 (a canal planned to

link the Kennet and Avon and Basingstoke Canals); additional records of the Cookham Bridge Company, 1837-1947 (including papers relating to the building of the bridge in the 1830s); papers of the Martin family of Reading and Kent (including a detailed personal memorandum book of John Martin, 1787-1812, and a wonderful album of Victorian mourning cards); a collection of photographs and detailed drawings of Saxon and Norman churches in Berkshire and elsewhere made in the 1940s by Dr Edward Houghton, latterly of Woodley); and a copy of a proof of a delightfully illustrated booklet issued by Berkshire County Council's County Planning Officer in 1948 to outline new regulations governing advertising in public places.

Cataloguing

2010/11 proved another good year for cataloguing. Altogether we completed 167 catalogues, representing 204 accessions and making some 3400 items available for research.

Cataloguing work during the year was concentrated particularly on records received from the historic local authorities of Berkshire, the rural and urban district councils and especially the ancient boroughs, and completions in this area accounted for some 40% of the total. Once again records from the important Reading Borough archive feature prominently. This year completions included an important series of borough leases, 1514-1875; a very large quantity of finance records, including over 300 volumes dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as a small but significant group from earlier centuries, among them a tax assessment from 1297; records of the court of quarter sessions, 1603-1777; and a register of canal boats, 1879-1921. Though they may sound dull, the borough leases in fact contain a wealth of information about buildings and businesses in and around the town centre. We know, for example, not only that Daniel Pearse was in business as a vintner in 1614, and that in that year he took a twenty-one year lease on the Half Moon in High Street, but also that he had recently extended it - and even what the extensions looked like. We also know that the canny Corporation insisted on four quarts of the best claret wine in part payment of the rent! There are numerous leases of premises in Fisher Row and Butcher Row, formerly at the eastern end of Broad Street, including many shops under the woolhall that once stood there. Some of the later deeds are building leases that help chart the development of the town eastwards along London Road in the early nineteenth century. Altogether these are a rich source for the history of the town.

But Reading's was not the only archive to receive attention. During the year we completed a catalogue of plans and drawings prepared by Windsor's Borough Surveyor recording developments in the town between 1850 and 1966, and a large collection of planning applications received by Newbury District council between 1930 and 1967. The former, numbering altogether over 700 drawings for nearly 250 projects, include Frank Verity's plans for a new Theatre Royal, 1910 and plans by an unknown architect for a proposed electric theatre, 1912; Edwin Lutyens' plans for the George V memorial,

1936-1937; plans for municipal housing schemes at various locations dating between the 1920s and the 1950s; much material on nineteenth-century sewerage schemes; and numerous drawings for proposed riverside improvements between 1860 and the first world war. The latter comprises mainly applications for private dwellings - houses, bungalows and cottages - illustrating how development occurred in a rural area in this period - but it also includes occasional applications in respect of public houses and business premises, among them one for a garage and tea rooms in Hambridge on the outskirts of Newbury and one for a portable shop!

For some time we have working steadily through our large collection of rate books. This year that project reached a conclusion, with a further 260 volumes added to the catalogue. No-one ever liked paying rates - but for the historian it's good news that they paid up, as rating and valuation records can be an extremely valuable source for local history. The detailed accounts of who paid what for where tell us a great deal about the local scene. Individual houses and business premises can be traced, together with their occupants, and we can discover not only the history of a particular property but also the development of whole areas over time. We now have over 2300 volumes, containing many hundreds of thousands of entries, dating from the mid-nineteenth century to 1974 and covering the whole of Berkshire, available for public consultation.

Aside from local authority records we catalogued records of 39 Anglican parishes and 13 non-conformist churches. The former included tithe maps and awards from Brimpton (1842) and Yattendon (1846) and a fine set of nineteenth-century parish magazines from Christ Church, Reading. The latter included records from Northbrook Street Methodist Church, Newbury, 1832-2004, and Park United Reformed Church, Reading, 1907-2008. The Newbury records are of particular interest as they include detailed bills and invoices from the contractors and suppliers who built and equipped the church in the 1830s - revealing everything from the Bath stone trims to the 14 frosted tulip lamp shades (costing £2 9s), documents which significantly enlarge our understanding of the history of this important local building.

Rather different from all this was the archive of Plenty's of Newbury. Plenty's is one of the most prestigious names in Newbury's history. William Plenty established his business around 1790: the earliest patent in the company archive is for a plough, dated 1815. Around the same time William began designing lifeboats, changing the direction of his company. By 1824, eleven of the RNLI's fourteen active lifeboats had been built by Plenty. In the 1860s the main focus of the business changed to designing marine steam engines for the Admiralty and shipbuilders all over the world. This work continued for the next century, and order books survive which list in loving detail the specifications of each engine or boiler that was made. The most unusual order was probably for engines for steam powered submarines, built for the Turkish Government in the 1880s. Seventy years later, Plenty's were again at the forefront of submarine technology, designing machinery for the Royal Navy's first nuclear powered submarine *HMS Dreadnought*. The Plenty's archive includes numerous items that chart the company's history.

As well as the order books, there are photographs of steam engines, brochures, newsletters, apprenticeship indentures, patents, company minutes and accounts, as well as photographs of staff and the new works being built on Hambridge Road in the 1960s. A database of engines has also been created so that researchers can track the ships that Plenty's helped to build from the 1880s to the 1960s.

Other highlights of a busy year include the records of the Dodeka (Book) Club of Reading, 1892-2009; deeds of the Purley Park Estate, 1677-1913; an important collection of manorial records from Cookham, 1388-1851; and a small but delightful collection of private correspondence from the early nineteenth century, including a contemporary commentary on the machine-breaking 'Swing' riots of 1830 - and the observation that the dangers all seemed rather exaggerated: one machine attacked by the rioters had already been broken for two or three years and had allegedly not been used since the end of the Napoleonic war some fifteen years previously.

Research and publication

As in previous years, family history was the most popular subject of study in the Record Office, though local history, the history of houses, academic studies and research for legal or administrative purposes now account for almost one in four of our visitors. The subject matter of research varied widely. The immensely rich Broadmoor archive attracted a number of researchers. Local topics included the 'Swing' riots, Reading Gaol, the building of Victorian churches in Berkshire, historic gardens, seventeenth-century Quakers and nineteenth-century Methodists, the history of Newbury Corn Exchange, education and schooling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, enclosure and the poor law, as well as a number of town and village studies. Broader studies, drawing on the resources of the Record Office but not limited to Berkshire, included mediaeval seals, galleries in churches, and rural preservation campaigns between the wars.

The great event of the year in terms of publications was the completion and launch of the new index to Berkshire probate records, 1480-1652, which is described more fully under Special Projects. Besides this, three articles by Mark Stevens were published in national journals this year: *Family Tree* and *HerStoria* magazines carried articles on Broadmoor, and a feature on magistrates court records appeared in *Family History Monthly*. Lisa Spurrier contributed a substantial article to the journal *Archives* reviewing the research potential of the Broadmoor archives.

Library

Some 214 titles were added to the Record Office library during the year, encompassing local historical studies, guides to records and research, reference books and professional literature. Several were based on research carried out in the Record Office, and it is through such publications that the

riches of the collections can be made available to a very wide readership throughout Berkshire and beyond.

Recent publications include studies of towns (small-town politics in Abingdon, 1547-1688), villages (Aldermaston, Ashampstead, Leckhampstead) and individual houses (Coleshill, Inglewood in Kintbury), a charity (Tilehurst Poor's Land), a study of nineteenth-century nonconformist chapels, and a book about Berkshire's nabobs.

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

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Broadmoor

The Broadmoor conservation project was in abeyance until November, when our conservator returned from maternity leave. By the end of the year, she had completed two-thirds of the files for repair. The last third will be completed during the remaining year of the project, which will now run until May 2012.

Berkshire Probate Index

Our new index to the Archdeaconry of Berkshire probate records, 1480-1652, was completed during the year, and was launched at a reception in January. The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire was guest of honour, and other guests included the High Sheriff and representatives from Berkshire's Unitary Authorities and from the various bodies that had supported the project. The index, published by Berkshire Record Society, is in three volumes and runs to nearly 1000 pages, and is the first comprehensive index to this exceptional collection. We enjoyed good media coverage with journalists from the Reading Chronicle, Evening Post, Windsor Express/Maidenhead Advertiser and BBC South Today all picking up on the event and featuring some of the very human stories that are revealed in these documents. The project received financial and practical support from the Marc Fitch Fund, the Berkshire Record Society, the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and the Berkshire Local History Association, to all of which we express our gratitude.

We also continued, with voluntary help, the task of checking the existing indexes for the period 1653-1857, with a view to publishing on CD an index to the complete collection.

Survey of the records of sports clubs

We completed the initial stage of the survey in December 2010, by which time over 500 sports clubs had been contacted from all sports. We then undertook a second stage, contacting clubs that had expressed an interest but had not yet deposited their records and also re-sending the survey to clubs that had not responded but that are over fifty years old or are of particular interest. Some interest was also received as a result of advertising in the local press and in the 'What's On' in Reading brochure, with several individuals with previous involvements with sports clubs expressing an interest in depositing records and with several small collections deposited during the year.

In January we produced images and captions for five display panels for the sports exhibition 'Bikes Bats & Biscuitmen' which will take place during the summer of 2012 at Reading Museum. The subjects covered range from a female Berkshire hockey player who became the 'Queen of Speedway' to the controversial Olympic marathon of 1908 and were taken from

previously-catalogued collections and from the recently-catalogued records of Reading Athletic Club.

Education in eighteenth-century Berkshire

In January we launched our new research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833. An enthusiastic audience gathered in the Record Office's Wroughton Room to hear presentations from Record Office staff and others on the aims of the project and on the volunteering opportunities that it offers. A high proportion signed up for the initial research workshops, and subsequently embarked on research in local newspapers and Parliamentary returns. A planned programme of research has been prepared, to last for an estimated three years. The project, which is supported by the Berkshire Record Society and the Berkshire Local History Association, will result in a gazetteer of Berkshire schools and schoolteachers in this period, offering a unique insight into educational provision in the county.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

The work of the Conservation Unit makes a vital contribution both to our commitment to preserve the archives in our care and to our access agenda, for unless documents are fit to be handled they cannot be used for research. Much of the work necessarily takes place away from public view (though demonstrations of the conservation team's skills are offered from time to time), but it is nevertheless an essential part of the public service we provide.

During the year the conservation team, with valuable help from a small band of volunteers, provided first aid (mending minor tears and the like) for 2680 documents and pages from volumes, secured over 1100 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', encapsulated - that is, placed within an inert plastic folder - 550 items, and sewed with cotton thread (having first removed the ferrous staples) over 4900 pamphlets and periodicals.

Much of this was in response to damage discovered during the cataloguing of new collections or identified when documents were produced in the searchroom. But in addition to responding to individual instances of need we have also continued to work on longer-term projects with whole collections. Among these, continued from the previous year, have been the school managers' minutes project and projects with selected workhouse records and Thames Conservancy drawings. In the managers' minutes project we were dealing with volumes and files into which the minutes had originally been fixed with sellotape; as the sellotape dried, so the minutes began to fall out. This year saw the project reach a conclusion, with the final eight volumes and 42 files completed and over 800 pages of minutes secured, where possible on to acid-free paper. The workhouse records project saw some 72 volumes wrapped, whilst nearly 500 Thames Conservancy drawings were freed from sellotape or the equivalent. Sometimes it happens that research interests throw up new needs. This was the case this year as interest in railway history led to a number of plans of proposed railway undertakings being requested in the searchroom. These plans, which have been rolled up since they were deposited with the Clerk of the Peace in the nineteenth century, are often dirty and quite frequently torn; they are also extremely difficult to handle. Having cleaned and repaired some seven rolls during the course of the year, it seemed sensible to look at the rest if possible before they were asked for. This will become a project for 2011/12.

Preservation work of this sort is the bread and butter work of the Conservation Unit. Some documents, however, need specialist treatment. During the year we provided this treatment to a number of items, among them a mediaeval manorial court roll, a seventeenth-century rental, some eighteenth-century estate papers, a twentieth-century photograph album, and two antiquarian books.

The court roll in question came from the manor of Bray and was dated 1421-1423. The damage was so extensive, with the paper torn and crumbling, that in its unrepaired state the document was effectively un-useable. Each page was patiently washed and flattened, with loose fragments reassembled, and then repaired using a technique known as leaf-casting (which uses paper pulp) before the whole was re-sewn into a new parchment cover. Once again fit for handling, and looking as good as it did nearly 600 years ago, the document is now available for research, and is expected to last for many hundreds of years without further attention.

A similar technique was used for the rental - a seventeenth-century list of tenants on part of the Englefield estate with the rents that they paid. As well as damage on the folds, the ink used on the document had been laid on so thickly in places that it eaten right through the paper. The document was clearly already fragile in 1813, when the then Richard Benyon had wrapped it, with a covering note 'this is a very old paper and has been accurately copied by me into my book of copyholds and it will be best not to open this unless for evidence of any point in dispute.' Thanks to conservation work it may now be consulted safely.

A bundle of receipts and vouchers for building work at the Chamberhouse estate in Thatcham, 1749-59, presented slightly different problems, as some had been so badly damaged by damp and mould that they were too weak to be washed. These were lined with a special tissue on each side and the lost areas replaced with Japanese paper. Six of the stronger documents were washed to reduce the staining made by the mould, after which remedial repairs were carried out.

The photograph album had actually been commissioned in 1935 by Reading Borough Council as part of plans to build a new civic centre at Albion Place on London Road. It includes many photographs of council staff at work in the offices of the Town Clerk, Borough Accountant and Medical Officer of Health, as well as images of the Library and Museum. It is of particular interest because it is very rare to find such a complete 'living' record of workers going about their daily business, and the pictures vividly illustrate office life in the 1930s, with open fires in every room and even a hierarchy of hats (trilbys for the junior staff, bowlers for senior officers). The volume was offered to us following the publicity generated by our sixtieth anniversary celebrations in 2008, having languished for many years in the attic of a local house. It had been badly affected by mould and damp. The pages were cockled and the captions loose, while the cover was a wreck. The volume was disbound and each page treated separately before rebinding; the photographs were protected by interleaving with special paper, the captions were re-attached, and the whole was bound in a neutral bookcloth with the title from the original cover stuck on to the front board.

The two antiquarian books were both from the library of the Berkshire Archaeological Society which the society has generously placed on loan with us. Both required extensive cleaning. In one case this involved very careful washing of a series of badly-discoloured engravings which had been printed

on a very fine paper supported by watercolour paper (a process known as India-laid). Since traditional washing would have caused the print to float off its support, each individual print was sandwiched between blotting paper and Perspex sheets, and then dipped in a tray of water. The water was absorbed by the end of the blotting paper and travelled up it to the other end drawing the stains, dirt and acid with it by capillary action leaving the India-laid print clean and still attached to the water colour paper. Both volumes were rebound using traditional techniques. The volume was bound in goatskin with marbled paper sides.

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 and burials and school admission registers continue to remain our priority, but during the year we continued to film rate books (73,000 frames), and parish overseers case papers (5000 frames). Altogether we completed nearly 100,000 frames.

STAFFING

The year began very sadly with news of the death of Neila Warner after a long battle with cancer. Neila had worked as a Searchroom Assistant since 2001, and had made many friends among both staff and visitors. Her family have generously presented the Office with three historic directories in her memory. During the year we said farewell to Wilma Grant and Gary Lambden, who had worked with us respectively as Business Manager and Strongroom assistant. We also heard of the death at the age of 95 of Berkshire's first County Archivist, Felix Hull, who worked here between 1948 and 1952, and whose influence is still evident in many of the things we do and the collections we care for.

Several members of staff contributed significantly to professional matters nationally and to the promotion of historical and archival concerns locally. I continued to serve on the Council of the British Records Association, as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society, as General Editor of the Berkshire Record Society, as Treasurer of the Friends of Reading Abbey, as a member of Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee and as a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust, and I was elected President of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. I also continued as an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History at Reading University. Mark Stevens continued his work with the Society of Archivists, and was much involved in the planning for the new national archives body, the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) which came into being in July. Sabina Sutherland continued to serve on the council of the Berkshire Record Society and on the committee of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association. Lisa Spurrier continued to serve on the editorial board of *Berkshire Old and New*.

Finally, mention should be made of our volunteers, old and new, and too numerous to name individually, who have given generously of their time. In addition to the groups who have worked in the conservation unit and on the probate project, we have benefitted from voluntary assistance on documentation projects with twentieth-century records and on a project to improve the storage of some of our longer-held collections, both of which have yielded valuable results.