

BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

2011-2012

INTRODUCTION

The year began with much welcome media coverage of our award of four stars in the national assessment of archive services at the end of the previous year. After such a start we might have been forgiven for thinking that what followed would be something of an anti-climax, but in fact the year proved as busy and productive as its predecessor and saw many significant achievements. At a time of reduced resources this is greatly to the credit of the Record Office staff.

Another notable achievement at the start of the year was the launch of our long-awaited new website, followed later by the setting up of our own Facebook page. We completed all the preliminary checking required for the new complete probate index and we brought the survey of sports club records to a successful conclusion: both projects were due to come to fruition in 2012/13 with the publication of the index and our contribution to the exhibition 'Our Sporting Life' at Reading Museum. We continued to mine the Broadmoor archive for research and outreach opportunities, and were delighted to congratulate Mark Stevens on the success of his ebook. We developed links with the U3A and began to plan a new joint project with them. We accepted 6.3 cubic metres of new records and catalogued the same amount, and at the same time 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. The highlight of the end of the year was our opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the Royal County of Berkshire's Loyal Address to Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of her Diamond Jubilee: I was privileged to be one of the Berkshire delegation to the presentation ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

In all of this I have been 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 pages that follow 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
September 2012

PUBLIC SERVICE

Visitor and enquiry services

We are very pleased to report that we have continued to provide our full range of visitor and enquiry services throughout the year, despite reductions in staffing. The duty team's commitment has been much appreciated. As the year drew to a close we were contemplating the retirement of another two members of staff, meaning that we finished 2011/12 by planning to run the service with a duty team of 7.6fte. Despite the inevitable effect this had on scheduling both their personal as well as their work lives, the team proved themselves to be both receptive and adaptable to change, as well as supportive of each other. We are lucky that this is so and will do all that we can to foster this spirit.

Even in a difficult year, we have strived to maintain our commitment to delivering high levels of customer service. An external benchmark was again available this year for us to measure ourselves against: the results of the latest Survey of Visitors to British Archives, conducted in February 2011, were published over the summer. The Survey indicated that 97% of visitors said that our service was either very good or good; a similar number rated our friendliness as very good or good, and 100% of visitors rated our advice at the same standard. There was strong support for us as a centre of learning and of cultural heritage.

As with previous surveys, nearly half our visitors are happy with the service as provided. Those who wished to see change wished to have either longer opening hours, more onsite IT or more content available online. We will try and do what we can: while an extension of opening hours may be aspirational in the current climate, we continue to discuss digitisation projects in partnership, and we are endeavouring to see whether we can free up funds to improve our IT provision.

The broad performance of the Office is also measured 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
- 95% of original documents are produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

These results are broadly in line with previous years, though the latter result confirms what is probably a plateau for an upward trend after a comparatively poor result in 2009/10.

After Christmas, we also took part in the Institute of Public Finance's first Survey of Remote Users of British Archives, which was designed to discover more about our written enquiry service. The results of this survey are awaited.

We get a lot of personal thank yous from visitors and enquirers which help to illustrate some of the numbers above. Here is a flavour of comments received last year:

The only suggested improvement I can see would be to open on Saturdays. Otherwise perfect and very helpful staff.

Very impressed by the quality of the microforms.

Staff were excellent and incredibly helpful.

You all seem to work very hard and have an apparent passion for your work, thanks.

Very helpful and enthusiastic staff. An enjoyable experience.

We also continue to offer additional services for visitors. We continued to run quarterly 'introduction to the searchroom' visits and family history evenings, the latter in partnership with the Berkshire Family History Society, though we will be reducing the number of these that we offer in 2012/13. We have maintained our five school guides and begun work on one for Reading. A guide to rating records is also in production.

Although customer satisfaction remains at high levels, usage figures for the service dropped significantly this year. Visitor numbers fell by 15%, and telephone and written enquiries by 13%. There was a much smaller dip in the number of items consulted and copies ordered. Evidence suggests that we continue to lose family historians to the large commercial websites, which offer a wide range of online resources on a subscription basis. We are not alone amongst Record Offices in suffering these falls and the reduction in our staffing levels, while limiting our opportunities to grow business, has at least allowed us to be creative without compromising the safety of our collections.

Going forward, we would like to grow usage once more. Our challenge is twofold: firstly to look at what else we can offer visitors onsite within existing constraints, and secondly to endeavour to ensure that we obtain some benefit from the online market. Work in 2012/13 will look to focus on this.

Remote access

Finally, the new Berkshire Record Office website was launched in April. In the event, once the content management system had finally been made available to us we were able to populate the new site fairly quickly. The site itself is much easier for us to maintain and update, and has enabled us to reduce the clicks required by visitors to access content. As well as the existing site, a variety of new content has been provided, including an enhanced gallery feature and a monthly highlight. Analysis of the visitor experience suggests that although visits have not increased, each visitor is viewing more pages than they were on the old site.

In August, we also set up our own Facebook page. This has provided us with another promotional tool as well as providing an outlet for the more day-to-day news that is generated by running an archives service. It has also given

us an opportunity to see what our 'friends' like to read about (old photographs are very popular) and given people another way of making contact with us. The page can be accessed from the Record Office website.

Visitor figures have remained largely unchanged, and we are pleased to report that last year's figures for the New Landscapes site were indeed a result of the way that data is being gathered: this year saw an increase in visitors of around 6%. For 2012/13, we are changing the way that we collect data about the Record Office site which will see a similar dip in those figures next year.

We are also pleased to report that The National Archives has taken note of the continuing interest shown in its Access to Archives (a2a) catalogue by us and other Offices. This year saw an improved promotion of the site, as well as the new home page link on the Record Office site, and the result was that searches for our collections increased by 13%.

Outreach and audience development

We were pleased to be able to accept most requests for group talks and visits. We hosted visits for Oxfordshire History Centre, Bracknell U3A, the Royal Berkshire Heritage Centre, the Friends of Reading Museum, the Berkshire Archaeological Society, the Reading Deanery Chapter and the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes. Perhaps most noteworthy was that we hosted a visit for the State Archives of China as part of their fortnight-long visit to the UK. We gave local history talks to Reading U3A, Battle Library customers, Bracknell's Thames Valley Vision group and Thatcham Historical Society. We also continued to deliver talks on particular research topics: the Newbury Society heard about the old poor law; the Friends of Cholsey Church and the Berkshire Family History Society AGM heard about Victorian Fair Mile; while the Victorian Broadmoor talk was delivered to the Family History Society's Reading branch, Sandhurst Library and Winnersh and District Local History Society as well as at the Bracknell Family History Fair. In November we hosted a regional heat in The Historical Association's national debating competition for sixth-formers, and heard some lively and talented contributions on the topic 'Why does history matter?'

The Family History Fair saw us take up our usual stall, and the national Heritage Open Days saw us provide our usual behind-the-scenes tours. We produced four issues of *The Berkshire Echo*, on the themes of weddings, summer outings, schools and the Berkshire militia. *The Echo* can now also be accessed from our website homepage. We contributed quarterly columns to the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and Local History Associations, and an article in *Family History Monthly* on getting the most out of using a Record Office.

Unsurprisingly, Broadmoor remained our principal topic of media interest, particularly after the publication of Mark Stevens' ebook (covered more fully below). Other subjects that featured in the press included the contents of the Plenty archive, the discovery of a 1648 inspection report for

Reading School and (at the beginning of the year) the award of four stars to the Record Office in The National Archives' assessment.

Two exhibitions were mounted in the Record Office's Wroughton Room - a display of probate documents, prepared in connection with the publication of the new index to Berkshire Archdeaconry probate records, and *The Diaries of a Gentleman*, in anticipation of the publication of the diaries and correspondence of Robert Lee of Binfield, which included his own and other diaries, selections from his correspondence, and other papers relating to his life as a landowner, magistrate and High Sheriff. We also contributed to exhibitions in Brightwell, East Garston, Easthampstead, Newbury (celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Corn Exchange), Wallingford and Windsor.

Learning

Most learning in the Record Office is self-directed, and it is what every visitor is doing. We support that through our advice as well as the creation of content or catalogues.

We hosted formal learning sessions for the University of Reading's Early Modern Literature and Medieval Studies programmes as well as their graduate teacher trainees; and for primary school children from St Edward's Royal Free School in Windsor. We also spoke to the University of Reading's history undergraduates about using local sources for their dissertations, and at an event on medical archives at Kingston University.

We also held two days schools for the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education: one on the Victorian Village School and another on researching the New Poor Law. These events were pitched at self-directed study.

Our work with the Thames Valley U3A Network's River Thames project drew to a close in the autumn of 2011. The U3A celebrated the project with a conference at Wellington College at which we gave one of the keynote lectures, on the subject of *Modernising the River: Navigation on the Thames, 1750-1850*. Following the success of this collaboration we began discussions on a new project on the subject of historic pathways, which should launch during 2012/13.

ACCESSIONING, CATALOGUING, RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Accessioning

In 2011/12 we took in over 6.3 cubic metres of records in 238 separate accessions - an increase of more than 20 per cent on the previous year - and added new evidence for over 500 years of Berkshire's history to our collections.

The earliest records all came from the west of the county. Some of these, such as the fifteenth-century manorial records from Shaw, the early seventeenth century records of the Newbury Weavers' Company, and the fine set of Newbury Borough charters dating from 1596, we already knew about. Others, such as the seventeenth-century records from Newbury United Reformed Church, were unexpected arrivals, though of course no less welcome. All came from organisations with whom we have built up successful and long-standing relationships, and demonstrate the importance of such relationships in helping us to enlarge and enhance our collections.

At the other end of the date-range came the very recent (twenty-first century) committee papers from Reading and Slough Borough Councils, reflecting both our commitment to take contemporary records as the archives of the future and our role as the official archive for the records of public authorities in Berkshire. The Slough records were transferred, along with earlier records of the Borough Council, following the Council's decision to move out of the Town Hall, and we were glad to be able to work with colleagues in the Borough to ensure that these essential records were properly safeguarded.

In between these two extremes came the usual wide range of records from an almost equally wide range of sources. We were particularly pleased to receive three enclosure awards and maps - Harwell, 1805, Burghfield, 1829, and Wash Common, 1855-1858 - which had previously been in local custody (one in the store rooms of a local solicitor). These very important documents are now secure in our strongrooms. We also welcomed more records from Berkshire sports clubs and associations, following on from the survey we began in 2009, including items from the Waltham St Lawrence Cricket and Football Clubs, c.1890-2011, Maidenhead Cycling and Athletic Club, 1914-1999, and Cookham Reach Sailing Club, 1948-2011.

As the recognised place of deposit for records of Berkshire churches we would expect to receive a number accessions from this source, but our success (51 accession of parish records, including the annual accumulations of parish magazines; 29 accessions from Methodist churches; and four from other non-conformist churches) reflects also the contacts and arrangements we have built up painstakingly over many years. The records of the Newbury URC, already mentioned, were among this year's highlights.

Of the remainder, only a few examples can be noted here, among them a plan of the proposed Kennet and Avon Canal, 1794; architectural drawings of the new municipal buildings in Newbury, 1908; records of St

Bartholomew's Grammar School, 1883-1973, and its successor, St Bartholomew's School, 1963-1979; an album of photographs showing soldiers in the war hospitals at Ascot racecourse and other local houses, c.1914-1918; several personal diaries; and the original agreement between the poet Christopher Smart and his friend, the writer and historian Richard Rolt, to provide materials for the monthly magazine *The Universal Visitor*. We were able to acquire by purchase a rare bound copy of the parish magazines of Christ Church, Reading; an important survey of the Englefield Estate, with related documents, 1889-1920 (with financial support from the Estate); and the original grant of arms to Berkshire County Council, 1974 (which had clearly strayed from official custody at some point and had ended up in South Africa). Last (it was in fact the final accession of the year) but certainly not least, mention must be made of the copy of the Loyal Address prepared on the occasion of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee.

Cataloguing

As in the previous year, cataloguing work was concentrated particularly on records received from the historic local authorities of Berkshire, and completions in this area accounted for nearly 60% of the total.

In terms of sheer bulk (and weight) the palm must go to the 295 volumes of Berkshire County Council finance books, 1889-1974. Far from being dry accounts, these volumes contain a wealth of evidence about the activities of the Council, the men and women who provided its services, and many of those who were recipients of those services. The records are particularly strong in the areas of public assistance and education.

Less bulky, but no less important, were the records from the large and important Reading Borough archive, where we made further progress, this year adding more financial records from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century to those available for research. These included a fascinating series of bills and vouchers for a whole variety of transactions, including payments for relief of persons visited with the plague, 1608 and 1646-1647, along with a memorandum of agreement to build a new pest house, 1647; payments to the borough constable for various duties, including cleaning the weights and measures and transporting dead bodies from public houses to churchyards, 1642; payments for lighting street lamps (particularly on race nights), 1809-1812, for barrels of beer to celebrate the peace, 1814, and for mourning materials to drape the borough mace and staves on the occasion of George III's funeral; and bills for repairs to the old bridewell and for building the new prison, 1826-1827.

But the Reading archive was only one of several to be worked on. During the year we turned our attention also to both Wokingham and Slough. In the case of Wokingham it was rate books that received attention. 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. Last

year we reported the completion (as we thought) of the long-running project to catalogue all Berkshire's rating records. At the time some 2,300 volumes, dating from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth century, had been made available for public consultation. But archives is all about discovery, and this year we were delighted to add to the catalogue a further one hundred volumes of late nineteenth century poor rates, highway rates, lighting rates and drainage rates from Wokingham, taking the evidence now available for the town back over 50 years. The Slough completions also included a small number of rating and valuation records, 1851-1928, the minutes of the short-lived Upton-cum-Chalvey Parish Council, 1894-1900, and four very large boundary maps.

Last year we were able to report on the catalogue of plans submitted in support of planning applications in Newbury Rural District. This year the focus was on records from the former Wallingford Rural District, where completions included over 1000 files of plans, 1928-1957. These were mainly applications for private dwellings - individual houses, bungalows and cottages as well as larger-scale developments - illustrating how development occurred in a rural area in this period, but the collection also included plans in respect of shops and business premises and other facilities, among them one for a skittle alley at the Marlborough Club in Didcot, and one to dismantle, re-erect and adapt a former isolation hospital for use as a village hall in North Moreton.

Aside from local authority records our catalogues were many and varied. We catalogued records from 42 Anglican parishes and 18 non-conformist churches. The former included a memorandum of gifts to Kintbury church, 1683-1688, overseers' accounts from East Ilsley, 1743-1752, and a fascinating parish diary and memoranda book from Clewer St Stephen, 1868-1900. We also continued to work on the records of sports clubs deposited as a result of our survey: completions this year included the records of the Reading Athletics Club, 1890-1969, and the Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club, 1952-2009. Other highlights included the records of the Cookham Bridge Company (received from a High Wycombe solicitor on the closure of the firm), providing evidence of the company (and its management of the bridge) from its founding in 1836 until the purchase of the bridge by Berkshire County Council in 1947; and additional records of the Toomer family of Newbury, including a fascinating memorandum book of Joseph Toomer (1780-1853) mainly relating to his years as mayor of Newbury in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Finally, mention must be made of the records of the Berkshire Lieutenancy. This substantial archive, of nearly 2000 documents, includes many records of officers and men who served in the Berkshire Rifle Volunteer Corps and the 1st Volunteer Battalion of the Berkshire Regiment between 1862 and 1892, as well as papers relating to the formation and management of the volunteer forces during this period. Whilst these records make up the bulk of the collection, the earliest documents date from the 1750s, following the formation of the Berkshire Militia, and include applications for commissions in this and later volunteer forces. All this valuable evidence is now available for study in the Record Office's search room.

Altogether we completed 203 catalogues, representing 229 accessions and containing over 4000 items, and requiring the examination of many more hundreds of individual documents. While it has to be admitted that some of the larger projects represent the completion of work begun some years earlier, and that not all catalogues are entirely the work of this single year, the fact that we achieved such a considerable output in a year when resources were severely stretched does great credit to the staff involved.

Research and Publication

Family history, with its wide appeal across the community, continues to be the most popular subject of study the Record Office, though local history, the history of houses, academic studies and research for legal or administrative purposes continues to account for a substantial minority of visitors. As in previous years, the subjects of study varied widely. Unsurprisingly the unique and rich Broadmoor archive attracted many researchers. Local topics included welfare and poor relief, the 'Swing' riots, church furnishings and church bells, sixteenth-century churchwardens' accounts, seventeenth-century Quakers and nineteenth-century schools, railways, turnpike roads, brickmaking, and numerous studies of Berkshire towns and villages. Broader studies, drawing on the resources of the Record Office to contribute to a national or regional picture, included sixteenth-century painters, seventeenth-century literature and eighteenth-century household management. We were pleased also to welcome researchers from the national research project *The East India Company at Home*, which is exploring the domestic impact of the British involvement in India in the eighteenth century.

By far the most prominent publication of the year was Mark Stevens' ebook *Broadmoor Revealed: Victorian Crime and the Lunatic Asylum*, which held a high place in Amazon's top twenty list of free downloads for some weeks, finally reaching the number one spot shortly before Christmas. The book contains carefully-researched stories of some of the hospital's lesser-known patients, as well as some of its more notorious ones, and offers both a balanced assessment of the hospital's work and an insight into the richness of the archive. Although not all online retailers keep records for free books, we can be confident that by the year's end it had been downloaded over 200,000 times worldwide. We were delighted at its success. Mark also contributed articles on Broadmoor to *Family History Monthly* and to *The Ephemerist*, while a new book on Richard Dadd, one of Broadmoor's more famous patients, also appeared during the year. Other publications drawing on the resources of the Record Office, included (from the west of the county) a new history of Hungerford Church, and (from the east), a *History of the Royal Stag at Datchet and the Robert Barker Trust*. Harry Leonard's edition of the *Diaries and Correspondence of Robert Lee of Binfield, 1736-1744*, published by Berkshire Record Society, went to press during the year, though publication actually took place after the year's end.

Library

Some 216 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. We were especially grateful to the family of Neila Warner, formerly a Search Room Assistant in the Record Office, who presented three nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Berkshire directories in her memory. We were also glad, through the good offices of the Hungerford Historical Association and his widow, to receive the transcripts from various national sources made by the Hungerford historian Norman Hidden. Several of the new titles were based on research 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 in Berkshire and beyond. A number 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 as originally scoped had been completed by the end of the year. This meant that all the severely damp-damaged patient files that were open were now available for research. However, the project did not end as planned: the Wellcome Trust generously granted us an extension of a further year to undertake desirable, though non-essential remedial work on other parts of the collection. This was a very kind recognition that we had completed a three-year project on time and under budget. The project will now complete in May 2013.

Berkshire Probate Index

Following the successful completion and publication of the new index to Berkshire Archdeaconry probate records, 1480-1652, in January 2011, work proceeded on the revision of the index for the period 1653-1857. The considerable labour involved in checking the existing index and inputting corrections was carried out by volunteers under the supervision of Record Office staff. The whole project was supported by the Berkshire Record Society, the Berkshire and Oxfordshire Family History Societies and the Berkshire Local History Association. Work was close to completion at the year's end, with preparation of the CD (undertaken on behalf of all partners by the Berkshire Family History Society) at an advanced stage.

Survey of the Records of Sports Clubs

The survey, which we began in 2009, officially came to a close in January 2012. During the course of the survey we sent enquiries to over 500 clubs and associations in Berkshire. Although the overall response was modest we received a number of deposits of records from a variety of sports and have made some useful contacts, as well as raising our profile in the Berkshire sporting world. Material from the survey, and from existing collections in the Record Office, was used to create five panels on the theme of Berkshire's sporting life to feature in the exhibition due to open in Reading Museum in May 2012.

Education in Eighteenth-century Berkshire

Our research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833, which began in January 2011, continued to make good progress. Our team of volunteers completed research into the records of the Archdeaconry and moved on to local newspapers and to the surviving records of local schools themselves. Newspapers have proved a mine of information, particularly about short-lived private schools and academies, proving that by the end of the eighteenth century numerous such schools existed in all the major towns and several of the villages of Berkshire. School records have shown the extent and range of voluntary and charitable provision. The project, which is supported by the Berkshire Record Society and the Berkshire Local History Association, will result in a published gazetteer of Berkshire schools.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Although - like archivists carrying out cataloguing - conservators are seldom seen at work, the output of the conservation workshop is very evident to observant users of the Record Office and is a vital part of our programme of preserving and making available the historic records of the county. Through that work we are able to make available for research documents that would otherwise be too fragile to handle, and provide protection for all our documents for their long-term safety.

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 over 900 items, secured nearly 1100 loose pages in volumes by the process known as 'tipping-in', and sewed with cotton thread (having first removed the ferrous staple) over 2500 pamphlets and periodicals. This year much time was spent on the laborious but necessary process of removing (using a plastic eraser) accumulated surface dirt from nearly 900 documents. We also provided protective covers for a further 60 volumes of Poor Law Guardians' minute books and removed sellotape from 179 Thames Conservancy drawings.

Among the items requiring more detailed work, a handful may be highlighted. This year several of these were twentieth-century items, demonstrating that it is not always the oldest of our documents that reach us in the poorest condition.

The most recent was a war-time photograph of the warship HMS Hawthorn, a ship that had been 'adopted' by a Berkshire Women's Institute. The photograph had at some time past been sewn between two pieces of clear plastic, presumably in an attempt to protect it. Unfortunately (though perhaps not surprisingly) the plastic was of non-archival quality. The photograph had stuck to the plastic - and the plastic had wrinkled. Not only did this threaten the long-term safety of the image, but, more immediately, it made it impossible for us to supply the copy that a customer had requested. Our solution was to remove the plastic by gentle steaming, so that small areas of the plastic softened sufficiently to be peeled away from the surface of the image. It was a very delicate operation, since too little steaming would have been ineffective - and too much would have destroyed the photograph. However, all was well, the photograph has been saved, and it is now packaged in a properly archival wrapper.

Another of our twentieth-century repairs was on a volume from the Fair Mile archive, a Chronic Female Case Book, 1925-1944. The bottom edge of all pages in the volume had suffered serious mould damage, which had softened them and in places caused parts to flake away. Repair was complicated by the fact the ink used in the volume was water-soluble. To overcome this, the volume was repaired using Japanese tissue and a process known as heat-setting; the soft edges of the pages were suitably strengthened, and the volume can now be consulted safely.

A third modern document needing attention was a late twentieth-century minute book of St Bartholomew's School Newbury. Minutes had been fixed into a commercially produced volume using sellotape. So many sheets had been thus introduced that the volume was bursting and the binding collapsing. Moreover, much of the sellotape had dried, so that several of the new sheets were loose and in danger of falling out. With the permission of the school we split the volume into two parts, remounted the minutes on to acid-free paper, and sewed them into two new covers, again using acid-free materials.

By contrast, the oldest item conserved was a mid-sixteenth century court roll from the borough of Wallingford. This was made up of 27 sheets of hand-made paper secured at the top by a number of brass pins (a new pin being supplied each time a new sheet was added to the roll). The document had suffered severe damage - it was dirty, badly dog-eared, torn in several places, and had whole sections missing. Each sheet was surface-cleaned before being repaired with matching hand-made paper using wheat-starch paste; the fragmentary sheets were made up to full size by the addition of new paper; and the whole was re-sewn at the head, before being packaged in a new archival container.

During the year we benefitted greatly from the input of volunteers. As mentioned above, our long-standing team from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes continued with their preservation work, which this year included repairs to damaged pages from the recently-catalogued collection of rate books. We also welcomed a number of students gaining work experience. Particular mention should be made of Alex Martin, a qualified conservator gaining additional practical experience before embarking on a Master's degree. Her work included the remounting of a collection of late-eighteenth century correspondence and the repair of a large early-nineteenth century map. The correspondence had previously been glued (using what appeared to be a rubber solution) into three albums using a 'window' technique. The glue had discoloured with age (staining the letters) and had dried out so that all the letters were loose. They were remounted with hinges onto archival paper and sewn into an archival cover, thus protecting and securing them. The map, which had been badly damaged and torn, was repaired on the back with light-weight Japanese tissue and then placed on the glass wall-board to dry, thus offering valuable experience to the student and achieving a worthwhile repair.

But perhaps the most high-profile work to emerge from the conservation workshop during the year was the Loyal Address prepared for the Royal County of Berkshire in celebration of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee. The Address itself was the result of a collaboration between ourselves, the designer David Woodward from the Department of Typography at Reading University, and the calligrapher Paul Antonio. We assembled the pages and bound Her Majesty's copy in green silk with marbled endpapers. The Address was presented to Her Majesty the Queen by the Lord Lieutenant at the presentation of Loyal Addresses by Privileged Bodies at Buckingham Palace in March.

Outreach

During the year Conservation staff presented two training sessions. The first was to a group of reference librarians from Slough Borough Libraries and focussed on simple preservation techniques, most especially the safe removal of self-adhesive tape such as sellotape from books and documents. Since so many do-it-yourself repairs make use of this material it has become a widespread problem. However, with the aid of the recently-invented hot-air wand, removal has become a much more straightforward process. The wand blows a stream of hot air over the tape to soften the adhesive. The tape is thus loosened and can, with care, be peeled away. It leaves a residue, but this, now dry, can be removed using a crepe eraser. The device has already been used very effectively in the Record Office and has allowed us to increase considerably the number of cases treated.

The second session was delivered in the Record Office's Wroughton Room to a group from the Berkshire Federation of Women's Institutes. This was supported by the Federation and brought an enthusiastic audience to hear presentations on the work of the Record Office and its collections and on preservation techniques; these were followed by a practical session in which various of the techniques were tried out. This session has resulted in 3 new volunteers joining the preservation team on Wednesday mornings.

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. This year much of our focus was on rate books, which have often reached us in poor condition and need protecting against further wear and tear. We completed over 50,000 frames. Parish registers and electoral registers continued to account for a significant proportion of our output. Our project to film overseers' case papers, which has featured largely in recent years, has now been completed.

STAFFING

During the year we said goodbye to Helen Williams, one of our search room assistants, and welcomed Cate Metheringham as archives assistant and Nick Martin as strong room assistant. We were delighted to offer congratulations to Ruth King on achieving a Diploma in Archive Administration from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. Ruth is the third member of staff in the past few years to have successfully completed this distance-learning course, and as part of our commitment to staff development we have been pleased to support all three colleagues in their endeavours. Their success is not only a significant personal achievement but also makes an important contribution to the Record Office as a whole as we strive to ensure the highest quality of service to customers.

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 President of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association, as a member of Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee and as a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust. I also continued as an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of History at Reading University. During the year I was formally admitted as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London. 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 have been pleased to offer short-term work-experience placements to recent graduates and undergraduates interested in finding out about work in archives. We are grateful for their contribution.

STATISTICS

Public service

Visitors to the search room	4147
Written and telephone enquiries	5994
Enquiries answered within 5 days	96%
Documents produced	7338
Microforms consulted	15841
Copies supplied	7886
Visits to online resources	337767
Outreach events: number	36
Outreach events: attendance	794

Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	238
Accessions received: volume	6.32m ³
Catalogues completed: number	203
Catalogues completed: volume	6.30m ³
Accessions catalogued: number	229

Conservation and preservation

First aid	936
Tipping-in	1095
Sewing	2512
Packaging	224
Encapsulation	379
Microfilming: number of frames	74581