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The Berkshire Record Office
The Archives of the Royal County

The BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT

For 2014-2015

Berkshire Record Office, a countywide archive service for all
local authorities in the Royal County of Berkshire

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Introduction

My first report as County Archivist is dominated by two goodbyes.

One was unplanned and painful. After eighteen months spent of treatment for cancer - including some periods of better health - Senior Archivist Sabina Sutherland died in July. Thirty years' worth of collections knowledge and expertise died with her.

The loss of Sabina alone would have created sufficient void, but this was followed in December by the retirement of Dr Peter Durrant as County Archivist. Though the circumstances were happier, the effect was just as great. Peter's dedication to the Record Office spanned some forty years, with twenty-five as head of service; he leaves us for a well-earned chance to pursue his own research and with our best wishes for a long and prosperous future.

The result was that much of 2014/15 was - rather appropriately for an archive service - spent thinking of the past. Reflections were glimpsed of prior progress; succession plans were made. By the year's end, we were prepared for the future. Additional posts had been lost to help our partners meet their budget challenges, and there were new occupants in three of our four senior posts. A leaner, refreshed Berkshire Record Office now looks ahead.

As we do so, we will build on the successes of the previous year.

There are some standout moments. We enjoyed another spell in the national spotlight with our 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' exhibition and event; we were able to celebrate our fabulous holdings of medieval seals; and we began a blog that takes you through the First World War centenary in Berkshire real-time.

And we kept the show on the road. We continued to deliver a cost-effective service, to keep our collections safe and to help anyone enquiring into Berkshire's history. We welcomed every visitor and every new collection; we listed thousands of items and repaired hundreds more.

The skills and knowledge to do this are what our staff bring to the archives party. As ever, the annual report would not exist without them.

So I need to offer my thanks to colleagues here and those departed; to our network of support in Reading, West Berkshire and the other Berkshire districts; to Archives Board and Standing Conference; to our volunteers, our friends and all those across the globe who take an interest in Berkshire's history, and want to celebrate it.

Mark Stevens
County Archivist
June 2015

Welcoming Visitors and Enquirers

In the final months of 2013/14 we had seen evidence of a sustained drop in the number of researcher visits to the Office. This drop became a fixture in 2014/15, with an annual visitor figure some 12% lower than for the previous year. This is not necessarily the same as a decrease in time spent helping visitors, but it is something we will keep an eye on.

There was a similar decrease in the amount of items produced for the public, though there was a small increase in the number of copies supplied and a big increase in the use of our online subscription services.

Although the number of email, postal and telephone enquiries was down by 14%, this is probably due to more content being provided online - and particularly the online catalogue. What we have noticed is that while the volume of enquiries has reduced, the loss has been almost entirely of routine requests. Those questions that we do receive are increasingly sophisticated and complex, and require more work to create a satisfactory response.

For those who have one particular routine enquiry - how to begin research - we continued to offer introductory sessions to the Office. These have been traditionally on a Monday afternoon, though we intend to experiment with evening and weekend sessions in future. We also continued to grow our subscriptions to online resources: for a modest cost, we have provided customers with access to British Newspapers Online. When combined with the material available on Ancestry and Find My Past, we now have a wide offer for anyone researching history across the UK.

No UK visitor survey results were available this year, but instead we received our results from the first UK survey of remote users to archives - specifically, email or letter contacts. We were pleased to see that 92% of respondents ranked our service as good or better, with a figure of 91% for our website content and 96% for its navigation. These are strong results. While it was hard to draw comparisons with other services - the result of some large statistical margins of error from other places - it does appear that our website did particularly well when measured against other county archives. Standing Conference members will remember the long road travelled to create the present site, so it is nice to have some feedback suggesting the wait was worthwhile.

The customer experience

Thank you to everyone for the fabulous service I received - I really appreciate the lovely surroundings and the quiet, unassuming helpfulness of everyone

Really fantastic service

Very helpful

I had a lovely time

Thank you - you have provided key information for investigating an enquiry relating to historic abuse

Our customer guarantees stood as follows:

- 99% of visitors got their first choice of visit time
- 97% of written enquiries were answered within 5 working days
- 100% of all copies were supplied within 10 working days
- 94% of original documents were produced for visitors within 15 minutes of order

For the Online Browser

During the first full year availability for our online catalogue, we added around 8,000 items to it. These included every new item listed, as well as 3,500 from the old, hardcopy lists. By the year's end, over 120,000 items could be searched online.

This was not the only content added to our website. We also continued to write a monthly page about one of the unsung stars of our collections. This year's picks included a medieval bake-off at Welford Park, the Victorian money man behind Reading Football Club, the pleasures of Thames Conservancy launch ownership, and a female Berkshire golfer who became British champion.

Additionally, we continued to place content on websites other than our own. As well as our regular Facebook updates - now to over 300 friends - we have our first videos on youtube. These come via the University of Reading channel and our joint prison projects. We have also created a First World War event blog on Wordpress. This provides a daily update on the war as reported to and experienced by the Berkshire home front, one hundred years ago. The blog is testament to the commitment of one member of staff - Lisa Spurrier - and an array of volunteers who have been scouring parish magazines, school log books and other items for snippets about the war. Thousands of small details have been uncovered and will be published between 2014 and 2019. Projects like this remind us of how much of our collections content is still hidden, waiting to be read and brought to life.

Visitor figures for the Office website were largely static during the year, though when the blog visitors are included, numbers were above those for 2013/14. It is not yet possible for us to receive data on use of our online catalogue, but catalogue views via The National Archives have decreased since the launch of their new search engine; a reflection of the fact that information about collections outside Kew is more buried than before.

Engaging the Curious

We remain committed to finding ways to tell people about these fantastic collections. Over the past year we have done so by providing stories and content, both in print and online; through set-piece events; and by meeting people directly.

The latter is the bread and butter of an archive's groundwork. The groups spoken to - usually about sources for local or family history - were the Bracknell U3A, Thames Valley Network U3A, and University of Reading library staff, as well as an audience booked via the Berkshire Family History Society visits programme. This latter event included a talk on how to preserve family documents, and a demonstration of leafcasting by our conservator. In addition, Ellie Thorne spoke to employees and pensioners at the Newbury firm of Plenty's about the history of their company - a talk also given to the East Woodhay Local History Society - and I spoke to Wargrave Local History Society, Newbury and District Field Club, the Historical Association Reading Branch, Woodley Over 55s Club, and public audiences at Battle, Southcote and Caversham Libraries about Victorian Broadmoor.

We were also delighted to host a group of staff from Chongqing Municipal Archives in China. The visit culminated in the exchange of gifts - a bamboo artwork in a presentation box for us, and a copy of the *Historical Atlas for Berkshire* for them; both sides seemed equally delighted with their bounty.



A gift from Chongqing

We organised or took part in various events during the year. There were launches for our two exhibitions - of which more below - as well as our regular behind-the-scenes tours and demonstrations for the Heritage Open Days. We took our usual stall at the Bracknell Family History Fair, and also had a presence at the Berkshire

Family History Society's conference in Theale entitled 'The Early Twentieth Century: Conflict and Change'. There, we advertised the Record Office and mounted a copy display of documents based on last year's 'Enemies of the State' project on Reading Prison and the Easter Rising.

We staged two in-house exhibitions during the year. One was for 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' project, which is described in more detail elsewhere, while the other, entitled 'Small objects of power', championed the artistic brilliance of several of our medieval wax seals.

These intricate personal emblems included depictions of the murder of Thomas Becket, of a Knight Hospitaller kneeling in prayer, and of the elegant Itonia de Camville with a bird resting on her outstretched hand. Considerable thanks are due to Professor Brian Kemp for his help with the selection and description of the items on display. The exhibition received coverage in the Berkshire press and on local radio, while the Southampton papers featured its cover star - a 1447 impression of the mayoral seal for the port.



Poster advertising our seals exhibition

The seals were one of several things to feature in the media. The Maidenhead Advertiser ran a large spread on documents for the town and surrounding villages, The Reading Post featured some of our historic scenes of snow, while one of our

online highlights, an assize of bread from 1337, was picked up by the newspapers and Radio Berkshire because it related to Welford Park, the new home for the BBC's *Great British Bake-Off*. The existence of some rules for fourteenth century bakers provided a historical contrast with the modern challenges of Mary Berry and Paul Hollywood.

We also spoke to Radio Berkshire on various occasions about Reading Prison and my continuing work with historic mental health. More diverse contributions came about through a series of interviews for the BBC's 'World War One At Home' project, the results of which can be heard on the BBC website.

Virtually all this coverage was a direct result of online content we created. We also wrote our regular pieces for the county historical magazines, and produced another four editions of *The Berkshire Echo*. This year's *Echo* themes were Tudor Berkshire, the First World War centenary, Georgian Berkshire and historic elections.

Learning

The year saw an expansion of our work to support students at the University of Reading. In addition to the now regular sessions for history undergraduates, and early modern literature postgraduates, we hosted two learning events as part of the 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' project - one for Victorian literature students, and another for A level students interested in studying English at university.



A level students get to grips with a Victorian pub quiz

We also worked with the University's History Department to create a new study module for undergraduates - 'Discovering Archives and Collections', and took our first students in the January term. The aim of the module is to give students an opportunity to understand how and why historical sources come to be kept, and the philosophy behind their management. Feedback has been very positive, and it is planned to run the module again in the autumn term.



*The County Archivist introduces Discovering Archives students
to an ancient technology*

Developing Collections

Our most notable new collections all reflect aspects of modern life.

It is very pleasing to report that, after overtures first made during our sports records survey in 2008, the Berkshire County Cricket Club decided to deposit its key archives. Founded in 1895, the club has now handed us minutes from 1903, scorebooks from 1924, and an almost complete set of yearbooks from 1931. This is a major resource from one of the most visible sports organisations in the county, and efforts will be made to make it available as soon as we can.

It may take rather longer to process some of the other new highlights. An array of reports and photographic records was received from the National Transport

Laboratory at Crowthorne, detailing national tests for road surfaces and car safety from the 1930s onward. A road also features in our acquisition of the records from each side of the Newbury Bypass debate - the Protest Campaign and the Supporters Group. These collections will have interest far beyond the Berkshire boundary, and we will see whether we can find volunteer time to prepare more detailed lists of their contents, so that professional staff can begin the tasks of appraisal and interpretation.

Three other new collections have such substantial preservation needs that they are unlikely to become available quickly. A treasure trove of sale catalogues and other property records was retrieved from Dreweatt Neate, the Newbury land agents, while both the Reading Post and Chronicle transferred their vast archive sets of Berkshire newspapers. The latter include complete runs of the Reading Standard from 1873, and the Reading Mercury from 1773; even though the British Library has made their copies available online, we felt that we ought to take what are the 'official' copies of such key local assets. They include a very rare set of the short-lived *Maidenhead Argus*.



Just a few of our new - and rather battered - newspapers

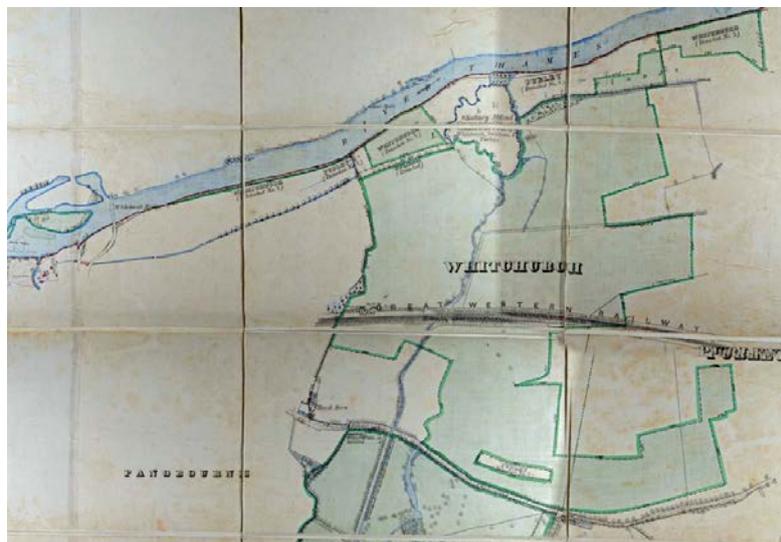
These were the bulkiest accruals of the year, accounting for a large part of the nearly 20 cubic metres we accessioned. Although space is not yet a problem, the receipt of the newspaper collections has placed significant pressure on our storage for large items. However, most collections were somewhat smaller and more routine in nature. Slough, Bracknell Forest and Reading Borough Councils made their regular transfers of council and committee records; the parish councils of Frilsham and Datchet passed on more material; and schools in Slough, Earley, Yattendon and Reading all added to our holdings.

Our longstanding relationship with the Diocese of Oxford found the parish churches of Easthampstead, Mortimer, Cookham, Fawley, Bracknell and Ruscombe among 22 who increased their collections, while the Sonning Deanery branch of the Diocesan Bell Ringers deposited its archive from 1880. Similar links with the Methodist

church saw records arrive from chapels in Maidenhead, Slough, Wokingham and Caversham.

As ever, the bulk of new arrivals were chance survivals, shining a bright light onto something quite specific. Seventeenth century deeds of a house in Enborne; the minutes of the Windsor and Eton Society, the Newbury Society, Pangbourne and District Volunteer Centre, and the Reading Geological Society; scrapbooks from St Sebastian's Football Club in Wokingham; the partnership records of a Reading accountancy firm: these are just a few examples from the last twelve months. Perhaps the rarest items to find their way here were the order books of Reeves and Sons, 'fried fish dealers' - or chippy, if you prefer - of Abingdon and Wantage. As yet, we have no other archives from fish and chip shops; perhaps some kind of survey is required.

We also dipped into our documents purchase fund to purchase a small number of items that came up at auction. We are hugely grateful to our customers, who continue to drop notes and coins into the donations box. This year, their generosity allowed us to purchase two private patient case books from Fair Mile Hospital (books that should never have left public ownership in the first place); an order made at the Berkshire Quarter Sessions regarding the county boundary at Whitchurch in 1875; and a copy of the Garford enclosure award from 1827.



Part of the Whitchurch boundary map bought at auction

Making Things Available

We are still able to sort, arrange and list many of the new collections we receive in the course of the year. A glimpse at the back page of each *Echo* provides a snapshot of our success in making sure that the things we get do not sit unused.

It would be wrong, though, to assume that the backlog of material waiting to be processed does not grow. It does. So each year, we survey the backlog and bring forward older collections on which to spend staff - or volunteer - time, or for which to seek additional funding.

During the last year we are pleased to report that several notable collections have finally been assessed and made available.

In terms of bulk, the largest two were both local authority collections. Firstly, as a team, the staff listed all the aerial photographs we inherited from the old County Council. These were taken every few years between 1964 and 1996, and (with some losses) provide an almost complete bird's eye view of the county during a period of much change. In contrasting method, one member of staff worked alone to list the 2,000 building control plans deposited with Easthampstead Rural District Council from 1908 onwards - a rich architectural resource for what would become Bracknell New Town and its surrounding villages.



Part of Bucklebury, seen from the air in 1969

Urban development was also a theme for the archive of the Jesse family from Reading. The Jesses were responsible for much of the housebuilding that now surrounds the Record Office, even giving their name to one road opposite. But their reach extended further round the town, and their legacy can also be seen in the terraced streets of Whitley Rise or between the Tilehurst and Oxford Roads, as

well as in the grander villas of Caversham Heights. The most remarkable part of social history in the archive is a plan for the first, wooden stand at Reading Football Club. Edwin Jesse sold Elm Park to the club while he was laying out his new estate, and had his architect design the ground.

A set of personal papers that we catalogued belonged to the artist Sydney Langford Jones (1888-1948), who lived in Blewbury. Langford Jones is best known for designing medals - including the coronation medal for George VI - but he was also imprisoned as a conscientious objector during the First World War. Amongst the letters, sketches and other artwork within his papers are two tiny sculptures, made from the prison porridge he received in Pentonville.

Custodial life also featured in a long-term project to catalogue the papers of Phoebe Cusden, one-time mayor of Reading and founder of the Reading-Dusseldorf Association. Phoebe was moved to reach out to Germany after the Second World War because her husband, Albert, had been interned by the Germans during the First. The fact that he had been treated well was a profound influence on them both. Amongst the first batch of papers that we have listed are Albert's sketches and paintings of Ruhleben internment camp, near Berlin, along with the postcards that he was allowed to send home. We have more papers from Ruhleben to list, as well as Phoebe's political papers, where she was something of a female pioneer within the Labour movement.



Part of Ruhleben Camp, drawn by Albert Cusden in 1918

More Berkshire women can be found in the archives of two religious communities. The Community of Companions of Jesus the Good Shepherd had its roots in Wantage in 1920, and although for most of its life, its principal convent was in Devon, it retained much interest in Berkshire, particularly with St Gabriel's School at Sandford Priory. Its educational work spread beyond England into the West Indies and South America. This international archive came here through the

Community's merger with that of St John Baptist in Clewer, whose important archive has been mentioned in previous reports.

The sisters from Clewer also passed us the archive of their own school, St Stephen's College. This began life beside the House of Mercy in Clewer, though moved later to Broadstairs in Kent. The school, originally for the Clewer poor, quickly began to take paying pupils from families keen for their daughters to have a religious education. It remained a girls' boarding school after its move to Kent, retaining its close link to the Clewer Community.

The last catalogue I would like to highlight returns to the theme of custody. When Reading Prison closed in November 2013, its remaining archives were transferred to us. These have now been appraised and listed by staff. Interest in the prison buildings remains high, and the new material will provide a substantial resource for the period from the prison's reopening in 1946 to its eventual closure. Though access is restricted to some more recent material - by nature of the personal information contained within - both 20th century plans and photographs of the site are now available.

Spreading the Impact of Research

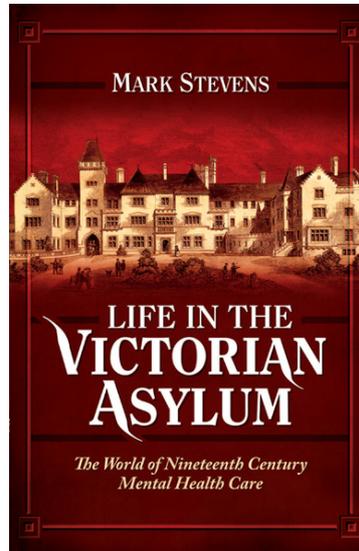
We are always grateful to the many researchers who bring our collections to a wider audience.

This year we have featured in works as diverse as *At Home in the Institution* by Jane Hamlett of Royal Holloway College, who used Victorian Broadmoor as one of her examples, and Bewley Homes' sales brochure for the redevelopment of the Reading waterworks on the Bath Road. We also featured in a presentation to the Folklore Society on the Uffington White Horse, a website on sources for early English drama, an article on the First World War and the Berkshire countryside, and a public information board outside the old Fair Mile Hospital. Professor Brian Kemp also featured us in his chapter 'Family identity: the seals of the Longespées' in *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*; while the Berkshire Family History Society continued to transcribe and index parish registers for publication.

In the near future, we have forthcoming mentions in the Oxford University Press edition of the *Letters of Sir Humphry Davy* (we have three letters, two to the Irish soldier and scientist Sir Edward Sabine, and one to the Swiss doctor Alexander Marcet), and on the Forces War website, which is including a register of military patients at Newbury District Hospital amongst its resources.

To return to Fair Mile, the year also saw the publication of my second book, *Life in the Victorian Asylum: the World of Nineteenth Century Mental Health Care*, which is largely based on the day-to-day experiences for patients in our county asylum.

The book includes a short history of Victorian Fair Mile, but its main purpose is to recreate the detail of the asylum system as if the Victorians had written patient information booklets. It was launched with a sell-out talk at what was once Fair Mile Hospital - but is now known as Cholsey Meadows - while it drew coverage from across the Berkshire and Oxfordshire press as well as the Daily Mirror Online.



The cover image for 'Life in the Victorian Asylum'

Caring for Collections

With only one member of staff within the conservation unit for much of the year, it has been a challenge to maintain our programmes of preventative and remedial work.

The two most substantial repairs completed were a survey of the manor of Sonning, 1547-53, and the Price family's Farnborough scrapbook, which members viewed at the November meeting.

The Sonning survey was a book of two sections, written on paper in iron gall ink, and with a simple paper folio stitched to either end as a rudimentary cover. These folios had suffered severe damage simply through being stored and handled, and were badly torn and creased. They were surface cleaned, washed and then relaxed, before being repaired through use of the leafcaster. New protective endpapers were then sewn onto the front and back with a linen thread, and the whole placed within a limp vellum cover - used because it does not require glue.

Though credited as the property of Leonard Price, the Farnborough scrapbook appears to have been compiled over several generations, spanning 1857 to 1945. As reported previously, it is a document of mystery, having arrived unexpectedly in

the post, and with no covering note or other information. Both its half bound leather cover and internal pages had been partially eaten by silverfish; while the spine had been damp damaged and was rotten.

The whole volume was disbound and then each page treated separately. Missing areas were recreated with plain watercolour paper, attached with wheat starch, while fragile items on each page were reinforced with archival heat-set tissue. Each page was then guarded with watercolour paper and re sewn onto tapes, before the boards were reattached. A new, cloth spine was glued under the original leather, and a new cloth cover attached to the boards, leaving the original cloth label visible on the front.



Recreating the gaps in the Farnborough scrapbook

A substantial amount of work also went into preparing the seals displayed in 'Small objects of power'. All the items were brushed clean, or dirt gently removed with cotton buds, so that the detail of each design could be better seen. One seal split into two halves - that of Sir William Longespée - was also reformed once the exhibition was complete. The two halves were fixed together with a layer of new beeswax applied round the rim of the seal. A tear in the seal tag was repaired using goldbeater's skin (the outer membrane of ox intestine) with a gelatine adhesive.

Packaging projects undertaken during the year included some two hundred attendance registers for schools evacuated to Berkshire during the Second World War, quantities of early twentieth century coroners' papers, and also a large quantity of the Preston papers. Arthur Preston was an Abingdon magistrate and antiquarian. His father saved many documents from the old Abingdon borough, and these are often interspersed with Preston's own notes. The result is a collection that is something of a challenge to issue to researchers, and so improvements have been undertaken to make it easier for staff to know what is being consulted, and to make sure that it goes back in the right place.

Although we had no in-house reprographics support during the year, we were able to arrange for the routine copying of electoral registers to continue. We were also

able to put some of our budget underspend towards the purchase of an A2-sized digital photography platform. This will enable us to move to a digital production of microform in future, as well as provide much higher quality images of documents for our customers.

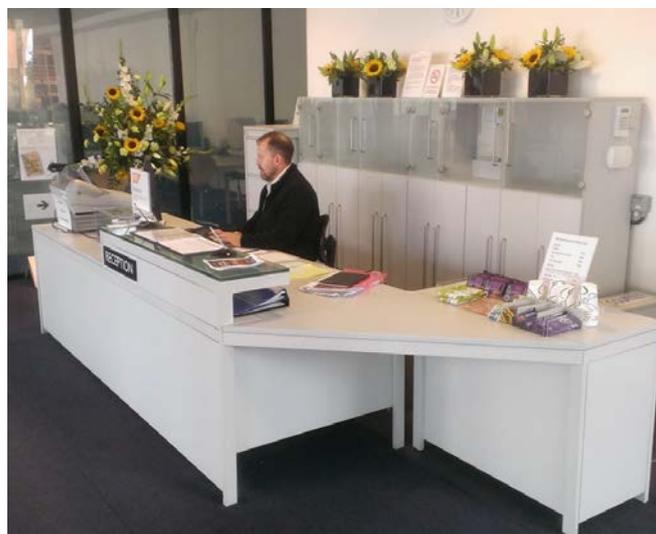
A Little Extra

Oscar Wilde and Reading gaol

Our second Reading Prison project ran from October through till March. As before, this was a joint venture between the Record Office and the University of Reading's Department of English Literature, while materials were covered by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Following the model of 'Enemies of the State', last year's project about Irish patriots interned in the prison, 'Oscar Wilde and Reading Gaol' sought to engage the public with a familiar story, told from a new angle.

The principal events funded by the project were an exhibition and public launch event. The exhibition included items from the prison archive here, as well as rare books from the University of Reading's Special Collections. These told the story both of Berkshire's Victorian gaol, and the life of its most famous inmate. The real-life inspirations were on display for Wilde's letters about children in prisons, and for the *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. The exhibition was illustrated with boards providing more detail on the Victorian prison regime and Wilde's aesthetic approach to publishing. Our lottery grant also enabled us to commission a photographic survey of the prison at the point of its closure in 2013, and images from this survey formed part of our display.



Willean flowers ready to welcome guests

The exhibition was launched with a free public event, hugely oversubscribed and set within floral displays of sunflowers, carnations and lilies - all flowers associated with Wilde - which were generously provided by Sonning Flowers. Over sixty people then sat captivated while Gyles Brandreth, the author and Wilde scholar, chaired a lecture by Merlin Holland, Wilde's only grandchild. Merlin spoke movingly about his family history, and about the impact that his grandfather had on those around him. Afterwards, he took questions from the audience.

The event was covered widely in the local media - in print, on television and the radio - and Radio Berkshire presented a series of live broadcasts from the Record Office on the day that the exhibition opened. That the event also gained an international audience was due to the work of Professor Peter Stoneley, my collaborator on the project, who created an unlikely rival to Oscar for the limelight: a young gardener from Theale by the name of Henry Bushell.

Bushell - sometimes Bushnell - was a serial, and unsuccessful thief. He was in Reading Prison at the same time as Wilde, and the author sent him money later. Almost certainly, Bushell was the 'dark-eyed chap' Wilde wrote about as the prisoner who caught his eye. Bushell's prison mugshot thus provides the first photographic evidence of a working class man to whom Wilde was attracted, and this mugshot formed part of Professor Stoneley's article 'Looking at the others', published in the *Journal of Victorian Culture*. Its discovery created wide media interest - in the *Guardian* and *Mail Online*, the BBC website, the *Irish Independent* and RTE radio.



Henry Bush[n]ell, prior to one of his many discharges, 1895

After this initial excitement the exhibition ran until February, incorporating the A level students' event mentioned earlier, a seminar for English MA students, and

also a short story project for students in Year 8 (the fruits of which are now on the Record Office website). We were also able to make two short films: one of the launch event, and another about 'Looking for Oscar' in the collections held here and at the university. Both films are available on the university's youtube channel.

Berkshire Schools in the Eighteenth Century

The volunteer research project into education in Berkshire, 1660-1833, continued during the year. We have around ten active volunteers, and in the last twelve months they have almost completed the parish and charity records, the Oxford newspapers, and begun to work through the borough records and the Windsor papers. This research will continue for at least another year, but significant progress is also being made towards the gazetteer of schools and schooling that should result from the project.

The gazetteer's editor, Dr Sue Clifford, has made a first draft of entries for parishes up to 'H'. Our partners, the Berkshire Record Society and the Berkshire Local History Association, have expressed themselves happy with the form that the gazetteer is taking. The plan is to create a two part, alphabetical list of places - those within Berkshire in 1833, and those that arrived subsequently - prefaced with an extensive introductory essay, describing the educational picture during the period and highlighting some of the new evidence being found.

With Thanks to Our Staff

The achievements in this report are due mostly to a small handful of people: the staff at the Record Office. I would like to thank them all for their work during the year, of which they should be proud. I would also like to say a bit more about some of them.

Dr Peter Durrant's retirement as County Archivist brought the curtain down on the career of arguably the most influential member of staff to have crossed the Record Office threshold. Peter arrived in Berkshire when the dust was settling on the local government re-organisation of 1974; he managed the Office through a further re-organisation in 1998 and also two building moves; becoming, in the process, the only person who can speak with experience of each incarnation of the Record Office and its parent bodies. His departure is, truly, the end of an era.

Peter's retirement came shortly after the death of Sabina Sutherland, who was another pillar of the Record Office: in Sabina's case, for nearly thirty years. For most of those she had presided over every new accession, affording her a detailed knowledge of every shelf and box within the building. Her absence had been keenly felt since she fell ill at the end of 2012; although she was able to return

briefly to work a year later, her cancer returned and she died in July. Her funeral, at Christ Church in Reading, was held barely twenty-four hours before that of Ted Ridgewell, who had been a familiar face on our reception desk. Both farewells were well attended, and many staff past and present were able to say goodbye.

Without Peter and Sabina, there was a period of discussion to agree a new management structure for the service. I was promoted to County Archivist and Ivone Turnbull to my previous post as Senior Archivist; the other senior archivist post was retained and recruitment was in hand when the year ended. One professional post of archivist was lost in the need to achieve budget savings.

We were also able to appoint to our other vacant posts, albeit on significantly reduced hours. So we welcomed Jane Mac Tarling as Preservation Assistant, Krystyna Franek as Strongroom Cleaner, and Lucie Lang as Reprographics Assistant.

During the year Dr Peter Durrant continued - and will continue - to serve as Vice-President of the Berkshire Family History Society, as General Editor of the Berkshire Record Society, as President of the Reading Branch of the Historical Association, as a member of Douai Abbey's Library and Archives Committee, as a trustee of the Royal County of Berkshire Churches Trust, and as Chairman of the Friends of Reading Abbey. Lisa Spurrier continued to serve on the editorial board of *Berkshire Old and New*, and Ellie Thorne served as minutes secretary of the Pangbourne Heritage Group.

And with Thanks to Our Volunteers

The staff at the Office do not work alone. We are now fortunate enough to have over one thousand hours given to us each year by friends of the Office - and that is before even considering the time put in by the volunteers on the schools research project.

Our teams from the Berkshire Women's Institutes and Wokingham Theatre continued to provide conservation support throughout the year. They completed a large project to provide first aid repairs to records of evacuation during the Second World War, while the WI volunteers also improved the state of their own archives. Thanks are due to: Joan Knock, Greta Dixon, Marion Searle, Ann Knee-Robinson, Wendy Backhouse, Eve Collinge, Christina McCann, Susan Main-Morris, Sue Baughan and Francesca Heffernan.

We also had three volunteers spend time gaining work experience for a career in archives. Kate Butcher and Charlotte Andrews undertook research for our First World War blog, and helped prepare catalogues for items in the Reading borough archive; while Nitisha Ramrekha-Heeramum completed a variety of paper repairs and packaging jobs.

Our 'Discovering Archives and Collections' students, Katie Bishop and Sophie McKenna, both spent ten days with us, during which they provided much help with the Phoebe Cusden collection.

And a final mention must go to Philip Etherington, who gave up his Thursday evenings for two years to help research for the First World War blog, and whose promotion in his day job meant he could do so no longer.

I would like to express our thanks to everyone, all of whom completed work that would have not otherwise been done.

Some Key Numbers

Visitors and enquiries

Visitors to the search room	3099
Written and telephone enquiries	5207
Documents produced	6335
Microforms consulted	8154
Copies supplied	8364
Visits to online resources	113368
Talks and visits: number	22
Talks and visits: attendance	491

Accessioning and cataloguing

Accessions received: number	203
Accessions received: volume	19.85m ³
Catalogues completed: volume	4.08m ³
Accessions catalogued: number	163
Producible units catalogued	4540

Conservation and preservation

First aid	406
Tipping-in	298
Sewing	1570
Packaging	249
Encapsulation	179