

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM

ANNUAL REPORT 2001/2002

Buckinghamshire County Museum has had a very successful year with two major thematic exhibitions attracting new visitors, and the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery continuing to attract large numbers of school parties and family groups. In September 2001, admission charges to the main Museum were withdrawn, resulting in a dramatic increase in numbers of visitors to the Church Street premises. The total for 2001-02, including 7 months of free access, topped 100,000, the first time this figure has been achieved since 1995-6, when the Museum was reopened after its major refurbishment. Plans to increase the capacity of the Museum Café were drawn up, but the project was halted when architect's estimates of the building costs were received. Further plans for the redisplay of the permanent exhibitions and the development of space for handling school parties have been progressed.

The decision to abolish entry charges to the main Museum was made by Councillor Margaret Dewar, the Cabinet Member holding the Community Services Portfolio in the modernised Buckinghamshire County Council. In the new structure, Bob Strong, the newly-appointed Head of Libraries and Heritage Service, reports directly to the Cabinet member. Heritage Manager, Julian Hunt, has direct responsibility for the County Museum and the new Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. The Libraries and Heritage Management Team also includes the Curator of the County Museum, Sarah Gray and the County Archivist, Roger Bettridge.

The Museum's Collections Team has been strengthened during the year and now includes Brett Thorn, Keeper of Archaeology, Alexandra MacCulloch, Keeper of Art, Clothing and Textiles, Mike Palmer, Keeper of Natural History and Catherine Weston, Keeper of Social History. The Collections Team works closely with the Education and Exhibitions Manager, David Erskine, in planning the Museum's education and display programme. An application for Registration under Phase II of Resource's Museum Registration

Scheme was submitted in December. Registration was confirmed in March 2002.

EXHIBITIONS

The Museum offered visitors two major exhibitions during the year. The 'Great Gardens Show' featured Eric Throssell's re-creation of the lost gardens of Hartwell House and included the John Piper drawings of Stowe, which have been acquired for the County Museum through the government's Acceptance in Lieu of Inheritance Tax Scheme. The 'Leaves on the Line' exhibition celebrated the opening of the Metropolitan Railway to Aylesbury in 1892 and the ideal of living in 'Metroland'.

EDUCATION

The Museum's Education Service to schools continues to be extremely popular, with taught sessions now fully booked over a term in advance. During the year, 9,000 school children visited the Museum in organised school parties. Following the success of 'Stone, Paper, Scissors', an exhibition relating to the maths, science and literacy curricula, another curriculum-related exhibition, entitled 'The Romans', was opened in the Temporary Exhibitions Gallery in January 2002. This has proved highly successful and has attracted many school parties in addition to those visiting the Roald Dahl Gallery. Further successful 'Family Fun Days' were held in June and December, which attracted 2,500 visitors. Special events for the October and February half-term holidays were also very successful with most activities fully booked.

COLLECTIONS

The Collections Team now comprises the Curator of the County Museum, Sarah Gray, and four keepers: Brett Thorn, Keeper of Archaeology; Alexandra MacCulloch, Keeper of Art, Clothing and Textiles; Mike Palmer, Keeper of Natural

History; and Catherine Weston, Keeper of Social History.

New mobile shelving has been installed to accommodate significant new deposits of material from the Eton Rowing Lake and the Maidenhead Flood Prevention Scheme

Discussions have been held with English Nature with a view to strengthening the Environmental Records Centre, also based at Halton, and the possible creation of a unit to co-ordinate Environmental Record provision across Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

The legal transfer to Milton Keynes Council of those objects in the collections which were added since 1957 and have a Milton Keynes provenance

has progressed and has been linked to an application by Milton Keynes for the status of a registered museum. These objects will remain at Halton for the foreseeable future and the valuable financial contribution of Milton Keynes Council to the operational costs of the Museum will continue. The Joint Arrangement under which this work is carried out for Milton Keynes is likely to be renewed in 2003 along with a similar arrangement for the accommodation of archives of Milton Keynes origin in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.

Julian Hunt
Heritage Manager

CENTRE FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE STUDIES

REPORT FOR 2001/2002

The major event of the year was the opening of the new Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies in February 2002. Based in the former County Record Office in the County Offices, Aylesbury, the Centre continues to house the county archives and in addition the local and family history resources previously held two floors above in the Local Studies Library in the County Reference Library. Since many researchers need to use the resources of both service-points, the new arrangement should be more convenient but it also provides greatly enhanced facilities for researchers.

The Centre has a new ground-floor entrance off Walton Street. All visitors enter through the Local Studies reading room, which has seating for 44 researchers and, at the time of opening, 8 microfilm readers (including 5 reader-printers), 17 microfiche readers (including 2 reader-printers), 3 computers for the use of family and local history CD-ROMs and databases, and People's Network computers providing internet access. To the right of the entrance is the Archive Searchroom, formerly the Record Office searchroom, which has been slightly enlarged. The number of places for researchers has been increased from 16 to 22 and a new layout and larger tables give researchers more space, especially those looking at original maps and plans. The Centre has its own toilets, a coffee room, and a Learning Centre where groups can be received without disrupting other users, thereby creating the potential for more work with schools, adult learning groups and local societies. For the first time, the Archive Searchroom is open on Saturdays.

Improving the strongroom accommodation for archives was another aim of the project. The five existing strongrooms were refurbished and a new air-conditioning system was installed for regulating temperature and relative humidity. In addition, two adjoining rooms were converted into new strongrooms, with full fire protection and environmental controls, to give us space for future accruals.

The Centre is the fruit of many years' planning

and was funded with the assistance of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund of £463,500. The building work itself took eight months, beginning in July 2001. The decision was taken to keep the Record Office open to the public for as long as possible, but as the work progressed, more and more records within the strongrooms became inaccessible and finally it was necessary to close the Office for three months from 29 November 2001 until the opening of the new Centre. The Local Studies Library was also closed for the week preceding the opening in order to allow stock to be moved down to the Centre.

Inevitably the building work caused considerable disruption both to our users and to staff and a considerable debt of thanks is owed to everyone for their patience and forbearance.

The Centre was officially opened on 23 February 2002 by Lord Cottesloe, a former Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, whose family archives, the Fremantle MSS, have been held in the Record Office since 1967 and are of international significance.

ACCESSIONS

Altogether 128 accessions were received in the Record Office in the calendar year 2001. A full list can be found in the appendix to the Annual Report available from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies and also on our website at www.bucksec.gov.uk/archives.

As usual, the records came from a wide variety of sources, both official and private, but the most widely-travelled were without doubt five boxes of deeds from the Library of Congress, Washington DC. These deeds form part of the collection of William C. Wakefield, a book and manuscript dealer based in London and New York. The Wakefield Collection was deposited in the Library of Congress in the 1930s, but its significance to British historians was not realized until the 1980s. The British Records Association secured the repatriation of the whole of the collection to the United

Kingdom in 2000 and, on its arrival in this country, it was given temporary storage at Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, where it was sorted by geographical location and then despatched to the appropriate archive repositories.

Two of the five boxes sent to Buckinghamshire relate to Beaconsfield, and in particular to the Waller family of Hall Barn. The records include title deeds, 1336–1718, a poor rate assessment for Beaconsfield for 1692–93, and the quietus roll containing the accounts of Edmund Waller in his post of cofferer to the household of King George II, dated 1745. There are also a few items relating to Farmington in Gloucestershire, where the Wallers had an estate. A third box contains deeds relating to properties in Coleshill, Amersham, 1616–1873, in particular referring to the Butterfield, Grove and Fowler families. The two final boxes contain miscellaneous deeds for various places in Buckinghamshire, mainly 18th–19th century.

Another exciting acquisition was the purchase of two large estate maps of Whaddon Chase, made for the Selby (later Selby Lowndes) family, who owned the Chase. One map shows Whaddon Chase in 1791 and was made for William Selby, though it may be a 19th-century copy. The other map, dating from 1814, shows a wider area, including the Chase and lands in adjoining parishes, not long after the estate had been inherited by Selby's son, William Selby Lowndes. One interesting feature shown on this map is the strips of land belonging to Selby Lowndes in the open fields of Whaddon parish, a few years before its enclosure. The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies is grateful to the Buckinghamshire Record Society and the Francis Coales Foundation, who each gave generous contributions towards the purchase price of these maps.

One of the largest accessions of the year came from the Whitbread archives. It comprises the records of two Buckinghamshire breweries: Thomas Wethered and Sons, Marlow, and Thomas Williams and Co., Wooburn. The Record Office already held the title deeds of many of their former pubs (D 177), but the new accession includes records relating to business administration, particularly for Wethereds, e.g. minutes, accounts and wages books, as well as photographs and more title deeds.

Archives of Buckinghamshire County Council

transferred during the year include historical title deeds to a number of properties purchased in the early 20th century, including farms in Haversham, Singleborough, Stewkley, Swanbourne, Thornborough and Waddesdon and property in Walton Street, Aylesbury. Other County Council accessions include mid-20th-century plans and a register of smallholdings; plans of bridges in High Wycombe, c.1895–1907; and photographs of various bridges in the county dating from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Slough Borough Council, via our colleagues in Berkshire Record Office, deposited the parish copies of the Colnbrook inclosure plan, c.1809–1815, and the Langley Marish tithe plan, 1845.

The move of Aylesbury Vale District Council into their new offices led to records of historical interest being deposited in the archives. These include files on street-naming in the former Aylesbury, Buckingham and Wing Rural Districts, photographs of buildings in Aylesbury and elsewhere dating from the 1950s to the 1970s, planning scheme maps of the mid-20th century, and large-scale sewerage junction plans for Aylesbury, c.1889–1896.

Trust deeds of a number of Amersham charities were donated to the archives. These relate to Tothill's Charity, 1637–1827 (also including 18th-century apprenticeship indentures), Sir William Drake's Almshouses, 1669–1771 (also including the statutes of 1676), and Edmund Waller's (or Bow Wood) Charity, 1709–1852, which owned property in Wendover.

School records deposited over the year comprise a wide range of material. The log books of Ellesborough and Edlesborough schools (the latter in photocopy form only) cover the period from their respective origins as Board Schools until the mid-20th century, by which time they had become County Council schools under the 1902 Education Act. The log books and other records of Southcourt Junior and Infants School cover the whole period from its opening in 1926 to its closure in 2001. From the 19th century there is a register of pupils at the Free School, Buckingham, c.1803–1855 (including unsuccessful applicants) and from the private sector in the 20th century minute books of Oakdene School, Beaconsfield, and memorabilia relating to the Farmhouse School at Mayertorne Manor.

The Public Record Office donated microfilms of their holdings of the surviving Hearth Tax returns for Buckinghamshire, which date from 1662 to 1672. Some of the original documents are in a poor condition and are not legible, but the films include returns relating to some or all parishes in the following hundreds: Ashendon, Aylesbury, Buckingham, Burnham, Desborough, Newport and Stoke.

We purchased from the Public Record Office three sets of microfiche of the 1901 census returns for Buckinghamshire in readiness for their release to an eager public on 2 January 2002. One set is available in the Local Studies reading room, another in High Wycombe Reference Library, and the third set was divided between Buckingham and Chesham Libraries. The returns are also available at the Local Studies Library in Milton Keynes Reference Library.

ACCESS TO ARCHIVES (A2A) WEBSITE

The year saw the successful completion of 'From Landlord to Labourer', a project organized by the South-East Regional Archives Council for converting the catalogues of major collections of family and estate archives into electronic format and placing them on the A2A website, www.a2a.pro.gov.uk. This project, which was awarded an HLF grant of £85,000, involved the conversion of over 30,000 catalogue pages from the participating repositories in the region. Over 3,000 pages of catalogues of family and estate archives held in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies were supplied, including those of the Drake family of Shardeloes, the Dashwood, Fremantle and Carrington families, and the Uthwatts of Great Linford.

During this year, the A2A website has proved itself to be one of the most significant advances in English archives of recent years, enabling as it does freetext searches to be made of all the catalogues on the site. By the end of 2002 the website held over 4 million catalogue entries to records held in over 200 record repositories and projects are already in preparation across the country to make significant additions.

In the first three months of 2002, there were 9,992 viewings of Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies catalogues on the A2A website, constituting 2.7% of all catalogues viewed during this

period. The most popular of our catalogues has proved to be that of the Buckinghamshire Quarter Sessions records, which in January 2002 made the first of several appearances at the No. 1 spot in the 'Top Forty' list of catalogues consulted on A2A.

CATALOGUING AND CONSERVATION

Because of the pressures involving the building work, there was little time available for cataloguing. Much effort was put into compiling strongroom inventories, however, and in addition staff were able to use the period of the Record Office closure to enter many existing catalogues into our electronic database on CALM 2000, which by the end of March 2002 held over 39,000 entries.

The Conservation Unit finally completed the long-term project of repairing the marriage bonds and allegations of the archdeaconry of Buckingham. Altogether, there are 53 boxes in the collection, each containing 250–300 items. All of them needed some sort of treatment – at the least flattening and in many cases repair. As a result, many items of great importance to family historians can now be safely consulted for the first time in many years.

EVENTS

In 2001 we launched a new outreach programme 'Meet The Archivist'. Under this scheme, staff from the Centre visit a library or other suitable venue around the county to advise members of the public on archival matters. For example, we might be asked to suggest sources that would be useful for particular lines of research or to help with reading and interpreting archival documents. During the year, sessions were held at Milton Keynes, High Wycombe, Olney and Chesham. For security reasons we are unable to take original archives with us, so researchers may still need to visit the Centre in person but we hope that the sessions will enable them to get the most from their visits.

Our conservator prepared six exhibition boards for a touring exhibition on Buckinghamshire and the Boer War, organized by the Buckinghamshire Military Museum Trust. Professor Ian Beckett compiled the exhibition using facsimiles of original documents held at the Record Office and the official opening was held at Buckingham Gaol in June 2001.

Items from the archives were loaned to the County Museum for inclusion in temporary exhibitions. Architects' plans of proposed houses in Metroland were shown in the 'Leaves on the Line' exhibition on railways. For the exhibition on gardens, we lent the account book of Sir Thomas Lee recording the payment to Balthasar Nebot for his seven paintings, which now belong to the

Museum, of the gardens at Hartwell of 1738; in addition, our conservator made new mounts for some of the Museum's engravings of Stowe by Jacques Rigaud.

Roger Bettridge
County Archivist

COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SERVICE

REPORT FOR 2001

The year 2001 featured a continuing high level of development-control casework and steady progress on implementing the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Management Plan, approved by the County Council the previous year. The service received a total of 563 planning and conservation-related consultations of which 199 required a positive response. The Sites and Monuments Record handled 112 consultations, continuing the upward trend begun the previous year.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The most significant results from development-related fieldwork were on the A41 Aston Clinton Bypass where an Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlement was excavated by RPS Consultants in advance of construction. The settlement straddled the Lower Icknield Way but its route here does not seem to have been any earlier than medieval, the main axis of the settlement being instead along a trackway which ran up towards the Chiltern scarp where a small Saxon cemetery was found next to the Tring roundabout. The Cotswold Archaeological Trust undertook the first phase of excavation in advance of mineral extraction at The Lea, Denham, which has revealed a later prehistoric and Roman field system and the edge of an associated Roman settlement. Further investigation will take place over the next 5 years and a display will be set up at the Colne Valley Centre. Archaeological Services and Consultancy amply demonstrated the value of small-scale field evaluation in a single trial trench in a garden at Rose Cottage, Penn. The trench revealed a well preserved brick-built kiln of 17th/18th century date which had apparently been used for the manufacture of roof tiles. A few of Penn's famous decorated floor tiles were also found, suggesting that a production site lay nearby. The kiln was in sufficiently good condition to justify preservation in-situ but unfortunately a planning inspector did not uphold this view and granted consent subject to a condition requiring further investigation. At the Rye Environment Centre,

High Wycombe, trial pitting demonstrated that the walls and floor sub-base of the Roman villa excavated in 1954 survive within the Holywell swimming pool. The remains have been preserved in-situ beneath the new building whilst a geophysical survey of the surrounding land has identified more buildings associated with the villa.

SITES AND MONUMENTS RECORD

Sites and Monuments Record work focused on completing the audit commenced the previous year and an action plan for addressing the issues identified. A major problem was the substantial data-inputting backlog that had built up since the mid-1990s. Work began on this task and the first inroads were made but it is estimated that it will take 5 years sustained effort to bring the SMR up to date. A bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the "Unlocking Buckinghamshire's Past" project is in preparation to enable public access to SMR information over the Internet. The intention is to submit the bid in the summer of 2002 with a view to commencing work the following year. A consultation amongst schools, parish councils and local history and archaeology societies demonstrated the high level of support essential for success – the service is grateful to everyone who took the time to respond and for the support of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.

Whiteleaf hill

December saw a major success with the approval of a Heritage Lottery grant for conservation works on Whiteleaf Hill, Princes Risborough. The bid had been prepared and submitted by the County Council's Countryside Team with support from the County Archaeology Service and a project design prepared by Oxford Archaeology. It includes the stabilisation and cleaning of the chalk-cut Whiteleaf Cross; re-excavation and restoration of a Neolithic barrow above the cross and related research and community archaeology activities. Further information about the project is

available on the County Council's web site at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/countryside/white-leaf/index.htm>.

EXPANSION PLANS

Last, but by no means least, after prolonged negotiations English Heritage and the County Council agreed that the County Archaeological Service required a third post to address the increasing demands of planning and conservation casework without compromising essential investment in the

Sites and Monuments Record. Approval was therefore given for the appointment of a planning and conservation archaeologist from April 2002, initially on a three year contract, part-funded by English Heritage. This represents a major success and will be essential to both maintaining a high quality professional service and delivering wider benefits to local communities in terms of conservation, access and outreach activities.

*Alexander (Sandy) Kidd
Senior Archaeological Officer*