

## THE MUSEUM

April 1994 saw the start of the final year's work on the County Museum buildings. Much of the work was to complete the internal finishes to the building, and by December carpets were beginning to be laid and final coats of paint applied. The Art Gallery Appeal Committee completed its task of raising £500,000 for the Art Gallery extension building, thanks to a donation of £60,000 from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Thanks to this the Art Gallery extension was almost completed by the end of the year, representing a major improvement to the layout and facilities of the Museum. Mrs Norma Major, the wife of the Prime Minister, visited the County Museum in April to view the progress of the refurbishment.

Building work on the extension to the Coach House for the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery was started, using funds provided by the family of the late Roald Dahl. Fundraising for this facility continued throughout the year.

Funds for new displays in the Museum were made available by Buckinghamshire County Council, and a museum display design company was appointed to produce the Museum's new displays. During the year Museum staff also worked to plan the displays and develop ideas for new exhibitions. New posts of Head of Public Services, Keeper of Art, Assistant Keeper of Education and Designer were appointed to the Museum staff to assist in the development of the Museum.

A project to computerise the Museum's photographic collection and prints, watercolours and drawings was started, and will lead to easy access to all the images held by the County Museum and, later, the County Library. Volunteers in the Museum continued to assist with the cataloguing of collections and assisted in cleaning and conserving items ready for display.

On 31 March the Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit was formally closed after more than 20 years work. Particular tribute should be paid to its Manager, Dennis Mynard, who served with the Unit since 1971. The County Museum's archaeology service took on responsibility for monitoring the archaeological needs of Milton Keynes, but no additional resources were provided for this to be done.

The Museum continued to acquire items for its collections, by gift and purchase. A notable acquisition was a 15th century bronze seal matrix from Tickford Priory near Newport Pagnell. The Victoria & Albert Museum/MGC Purchase Fund helped the Museum to purchase an important Buckinghamshire painting, the House at Upper Winchendon, by Peter Tillemans, painted about 1720. This depicts the Dutch garden and the fine house, most of which has now been demolished.

An important item from Stowe was acquired, the early 18th century statue of Friga, or Friday, by Rysbrack. This is another of the seven Saxon Gods and Goddesses from Stowe; Mona, or Monday, was acquired by the Museum in 1991. Only two days were available for the Museum to raise almost £55,000 needed to purchase the statue at auction, and this was achieved thanks to help from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the V&A/MGC Purchase Fund. The statue was sold from Stowe in 1921 and later went to Portmeirion, and will be displayed in the County Museum when it reopens in 1995.

Archaeological material acquired included a unique Bronze Age gold bracelet from the Lee, which was purchased with help from the National Art Collections Fund and the V&A/MGC Purchase Fund, and a second-century Roman key with a lion's head from Weston Underwood.

Colin V. Dawes,  
County Museums Officer

# COUNTY RECORD OFFICE

*Extracts from the Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1994*

The refurbishment of the public and staff areas was completed in April, completing the improvements to the Office envisaged in 1991. Progress was also made on staffing with the appointment of an additional archivist.

Accessions during the year totalled 158; last year's total was 149. There were no very large accessions.

The relocation of the Engineers Department of A.V.D.C. brought to light a quantity of records whose very existence had been lost sight of, and dating back as far as the 1870s.

The Buckinghamshire Military Museum Trust deposited some papers loaned to it from the Hall-barn Archives Trust, relating to the Bucks Hussars, and the 1st or Southern Regiment of Bucks Yeomanry, 1804–1826. They link with other papers in the Clayton family records held in the Record Office.

Records were received from eight parish councils. Those for Westbury included papers relating to the Bucks Agricultural Executive Committee during World War I.

The Rev Henry Roundell (1824–1864), who was vicar of Buckingham from 1854 to 1862, had a passion for antiquarian studies and was the author of several well-researched articles in the early numbers of *Records of Buckinghamshire*. His admirably kept notes, have been deposited by the present Vicar.

The ancient parish registers of Great Marlow and Fingest were also deposited.

There were six accessions of Nonconformist records, the largest being that of Aylesbury Methodist circuit and its component churches.

Among the few records of voluntary bodies received this year were those of the Wing Provident Dispensary which was established in 1896 "to provide medical aid and medicine for labourers". Members had to pay 4d monthly, or 12d per family. By December 1897 there were 807 members. Thereafter numbers gradually fell off and by 1919 membership had declined to 386.

The papermaking industry has so far been under-represented in the Office's holdings. The deposit of the records of the Wycombe Marsh Paper Mills, Ltd, goes some way to rectifying the deficiency. The site was closed down in 1993. Some much earlier records of a paper mill at Wycombe Marsh are among the records of insolvent debtors in the Quarter Sessions records.

The Very Rev P. C. Moore deposited a large quantity of documents relating to his family's estate in Chalfont St Peter. Many date back to the 17th century and a few are earlier. They join other papers from the same source.

Deeds and papers were also received for the Hillesden estate of W. H. Domville (d. 1927) and for the Weller family of Amersham, brewers. The latter include information about a great many "tied" public houses.

Additional papers were received for several other Bucks landed estates, including Cliveden, Stowe, Fawley Court, Little Linford (Knapp family), Chilton (Aubrey) and Langley park. Items of note include a very informative survey of the Fawley Court estate in 1790 and a rental of the Stowe and other Grenville family estates.

A letter from J. Richardson at Burnham dated 1753 addressed to Thomas Penn, lord of the manor of Penn, incorporates a neatly-drawn sketch map of a farm belonging to Jonas Morris at Penn.

Some tantalising details of a clandestine love affair of 1723 are revealed in a series of four letters found under the floorboards of a house in Marsh Gibbon. Three of the letters were written by a certain John Wells of Barton Hartshorn, to an unidentified lady. The fourth is from the lady's mother reproaching her daughter for an unworthy attachment.

Life in the remote hamlet of Bledlow Ridge in 1870 is the theme of a manuscript journal received via the North Yorkshire Record Office.

### *Cataloguing and Indexing*

Priority was given to listing the smaller current accessions and most of these were dealt with before the end of the year. The comprehensive re-listing of the large collection of manorial records received from the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society in 1987 is now expected to be completed in early 1995.

### *Use of the Records*

The number of personal visits to the Office was 2,724, which was slightly up on last year (2,693) despite a four weeks closure for alterations. Postal enquiries numbered 814 (784). A total of 3704 (3,449) telephone calls were logged, of which 1,665 (1,536) were enquiries and the rest reservations, etc. The number of document slips presented was 7,940 (7,367).

In response to pressure to increase income a limited research service is now being offered and is meeting with good response. Searches are limited to a maximum of two hours at a charge of £10 per hour plus VAT. The service was first intro-

duced in July 1993, but owing to an oversight mention of it was omitted in last year's report.

Donations received in response to the standard appeal slips sent out when short genealogical searches are done by request amounted to £350 (£333).

Work on the refurbishment of the public reading room and staff accommodation was completed by the end of April. Many favourable comments have been received from regular users of the Office. Wellcome though the improvements are, there is still insufficient space to provide the level of service found in other comparable record offices. Susan Shaw, the Public Record Office's liaison officer, made a visit of inspection in June to approve the recently-converted basement strongroom as a suitable place in which to store public records as defined by the Public Record Act 1958. It was recommended that the Record Office (including the new strongroom) should be re-appointed. Ms Shaw commented favourably on the recent improvements to the public areas. She noted, however, that "staff working space is already severely limited and their lack of space must hamper certain activities such as the preparation of exhibitions or cataloguing of large collections".

The following is a summary of work done in 1994: Paper documents repaired, 34; Parchment items, 36; Seals (applied), 21; Maps repaired, 16; Maps encapsulated, 16; Volumes repaired, 10; Photographs encapsulated, 185.

The Office's first-ever Open Day was held on 10 September in conjunction with "Heritage Open Days 1994".