

THE MUSEUM

Since its reopening in November 1995 the Museum has become increasingly successful. Over 75,000 people visited in its first year of operation and many expressed approval for the new facilities and displays. National recognition was given when the National Heritage Museum of the Year Award for 1996 was awarded jointly to the County Museum and the National Trust property at Uppark. Locally the Museum won a series of awards for good design and its interpretation of Buckinghamshire's heritage.

On 23 November the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery opened to the public. On the previous evening Lord Rothschild formally declared the Gallery open and praised its innovation and design. As Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund it was particularly appropriate that Lord Rothschild opened the Gallery, since the Lottery provided £280,500 towards its cost of some £520,000.

Funding for the Museum from Buckinghamshire County Council was reduced due to budgetary constraints and in addition its grant towards the provision of educational services in the Museum was terminated. This led to the redundancy of the Keeper of Education in September 1996, prevent-

ing the Museum from carrying out an active education programme other than in the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery.

Planning for the effects of the Review of Local Government occupied much senior staff time, since the loss of Milton Keynes to Buckinghamshire was expected to affect the Museum's operation considerably.

Acquisitions continued at their usual level, with over 2,500 items being acquired during the year. Of particular interest were two paintings by John Nash, funded by the National Art Collections Fund, and an outstanding hoard of 59 Medieval brooches from Hambleden purchased with assistance from the V&A/Museums & Galleries Commission Purchase Fund. A rare, large dinosaur claw from Aylesbury was placed on loan to the Museum for ten years.

The Friends and Patrons of Buckinghamshire County Museum, a Registered Charity, was launched in October. Sir Timothy Raison PC was elected President. The organisation aims to support the Museum with both practical help and fundraising.

Colin Dawes
County Museums Officer

COUNTY RECORD OFFICE

Extracts from the Annual Report of the County Archivist for 1996

Local Government Reorganisation began to take effect. For the Record Office the principal developments were the agreement for a joint arrangement on archives with Milton Keynes and the decision to reorganise the Record Office and Local Studies into a single administrative unit.

It is expected that Milton Keynes Council will fund two archivist posts and also the post of assistant conservator.

With the "repositioning" of a greatly reduced County Council into four large departments the Record Office was allocated to the Libraries, Information, Museum and Archives (LIMA) service in the new Education Department. Following the decision of the County Archivist to take early retirement, the Record Office and the Local Studies section of the County Library are to be merged.

The present Local Studies Librarian, Julian Hunt, has been appointed to the new post of County Records and Local Studies Manager, and Roger Bettridge, the present Senior Assistant Archivist, is to be his deputy with the title of County Archivist.

Accessions this year totalled 150 compared with 143 in 1995. Additional deposits of records were received from nineteen ecclesiastical parishes. Among those from Stoke Poges were seventeenth-century churchwardens' accounts.

A rare early seventeenth-century household account book of the Fortescue family of Salden in Mursley was acquired at auction. Much of the volume consists of weekly expenses of provisions for the kitchen, apparently kept by Frances, wife of Sir John Fortescue (d.1656), who fought on the royalist side during the Civil War. The Fortescues came to Salden around 1573, and remained in possession until the 1730s. The family became and remained avowed Roman Catholic recusants.

Mr Tim Robarts deposited a large chest of deeds

and documents relating to his family's Tile House estate in Lillingstone Dayrell and vicinity dating from the seventeenth century.

Other family and estate records acquired included some wills and other papers of the Plaistowe family of The Lee, additional correspondence and papers of the Baker family of Penn; and deeds of Glory Farm, Penn, the residence of the Bovington family.

The trustees of the Cowper and Newton Museum, Olney, deposited their collection of documents of, by, or relating to, William Cowper (1731-1800), the town's most celebrated resident. The papers are an important source for the study of the poet's life and work.

Other accessions of note included: an inclosure account book for Steeple Claydon, 1796-1801; a set of First World War soldier's diaries and a set of contemporary duplicate prints of photographs of Bucks buildings and monuments made for the RCHME, c. 1912-13.

In addition to the listing of current accessions, work continued on the revision and checking of finding aids to the Ashridge and Earl Howe collections and further progress was made in bundle listing the large collection of records deposited by Parrott and Coales, solicitors. Typing of Susan Ranson's catalogue was finally completed and a copy sent to the National Register of Archives.

Statistics of use are given below (last year's figures in brackets): Readers visits 3,154 (3,079) Postal enquiries 848 (853) Telephone enquiries 1,939 (1,693) Telephone reservations, etc 1,114 (1,968) Document slips presented 6,541 (7,228) Reels of microfilm (self-service) logged 2,324 (1,952) Photocopies/printouts sold to the public: 6,390 (5,499).