

THE MUSEUM

Report 1997-1998

The period concerned was the second full year of operation for the Museum following the major refurbishment and the first full year of operation of the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery. Visitor numbers increased substantially to 95,000, and the majority visited both the Museum and the Children's Gallery. Following the award of the National Heritage Museum of the Year accolade for 1996/97, the success of the Museum was recognised by a number of further awards, including the national **Gulbenkian Award for the Most Innovative Education Work** for the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery, 'highly commended' in the category of Best Museum Education Initiative in the 1997/98 National Heritage Museum of the Year Awards, two places in the Aylesbury Business Excellence Awards: 3rd place in the **Company of the Year** category and first in the **Business Innovation** category. The Museum was also short listed in the **European Museum of the Year Award** and regularly played host to visiting groups of museum professionals from Britain and abroad. The Museum is now one of the top three tourist attractions in Buckinghamshire.

Education

The Museum played an important part in education for all sectors of the community, amply demonstrating that teaching and learning extend beyond the classroom door.

The role of the Museum as part of the Council's Education Department was shown when nearly 10,500 school children visited the Museum in 253 organised school parties. Most of the students received instruction from the Museum's teaching staff. The Roald Dahl Children's Gallery operated at full capacity for schools throughout the year. With its unique facilities, the Museum played a key part in delivering essential areas of the national curriculum, allowing children to explore and learn about many scientific, contemporary or historical topics at first-hand using a large range of

real objects interpreted through teaching, demonstrations and workshops led by skilled staff.

The placement in the Museum of a member of staff from the Continuing Education team led to a number of very successful events and workshops and allowed greater access to the Museum's collections for people of all ages.

Exhibitions & events

There was a full and active programme of exhibitions and events in the Temporary Exhibition Gallery, the Buckinghamshire Art Gallery and elsewhere throughout the Museum, including *Buckinghamshire Landscapes* a major exhibition in the Art Gallery, much of it on loan from national institutions or private individuals, the *Rock and Fossil Roadshow* and the *Shipping Forecast*, during which weatherman Bill Giles gave a very popular talk. A programme of well attended events and talks was arranged to coincide with many of the exhibitions. During the summer there were live performances of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Museum garden.

Collections

Emphasis was placed on documentation of the extensive reserve collections as part of a programme to enable greater public access to the objects and to information about them. This is a long-term project, but a significant milestone was passed during the year with the completion of the computerisation of information from the Museum's registers, started by the Society and dating back to the beginning of this century.

Amongst a number of significant items acquired by the Museum during the year was the Darell-Tucker-Dayrell Cup. This is an exceptionally important piece of late Elizabethan silver with unique links to historic Buckinghamshire families. The most expensive item ever acquired by the

Museum, it was purchased with very considerable outside assistance.

Following Local Government Reorganisation, a joint arrangement was agreed with Milton Keynes for the Museum to look after collections previously owned by the County Council but now the property of Milton Keynes Council.

Archaeology and Environmental Records

A separate report on archaeology is presented elsewhere. Both the Sites and Monuments Record and the Environmental Records Centre continued to flourish and were widely consulted by public and specialists alike. Major progress was made with data input in the ERC.

Friends and Patrons

Membership of the Museum's Friends and Patrons organisation grew strongly through the year and these bodies provided substantial support for Museum activities and assisted with the funding of many projects, as well as providing an attractive package of benefits to their members.

Muir-Trust

The year saw the foundation of the Muir Trust, a charitable body linked to the Museum with the purpose of establishing and running an Artist in Residence scheme. This has been made possible through a very generous donation from local artist Jane Muir and the first placement will occur in October 1998.

Financial crisis

The last part of the year was greatly occupied with negotiations, discussions and planning in relation to the County Council budget cycle and the cuts amounting to approximately one third of the net budget which were to fall to the Museum. The year ended with the loss of a number of key members of staff: the County Museums Officer, County Archaeologist, Keeper of Archaeology, Conservation Officer, Archaeological Finds Supervisor and a Clerical Assistant. All had provided considerable service to the County and the Society throughout their employment and their loss will greatly affect services in the coming year.

Alan Knox
Head of Museum Service

THE COUNTY RECORDS AND LOCAL STUDIES SERVICE 1997

As envisaged in the Report on the County Record Office in 1996, the establishment of the new unitary authority of Milton Keynes on 1 April 1997 and the re-structuring within the continuing Buckinghamshire County Council produced far-reaching changes.

By the time the unitary authority came into being, an agreement had already been signed between Buckinghamshire County Council and Milton Keynes Borough Council. Under the terms of this agreement, which is for a period of three years, the Record Office will provide the archive service for Milton Keynes Council and in return Milton Keynes Council will provide funding to cover three existing posts on the staff of the Record Office and a proportion of running costs.

Within Buckinghamshire County Council the Record Office was transferred to the Education Department and merged with the Local Studies Library to form the County Records and Local Studies Service within the new Library, Information, Museum and Archive Service (LIMA). The new County Records and Local Studies Manager is Julian Hunt, formerly the Local Studies Librarian, and his Deputy is Roger Bettridge, the former Senior Assistant Archivist, who also holds the title County Archivist.

At present the Record Office and Local Studies Library continue to operate at different locations within the County Offices and regular users of the Service may therefore have noticed few obvious signs of change so far, apart from some interchange of staff at the service desks and the transfer of some materials from one location to the other. It is intended, however, to bring the two wings of the service together on to a single site within the County Offices where researchers will have access to archives, books, microforms and on-line sources relating to the history of the county. The new facility will be called the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.

The end of March 1997 also saw the retirement of Hugh Hanley as County Archivist, a post he had held since 1976, having joined the Record Office staff in 1965. During his period as County Archivist the demand for Record Office services continued to expand significantly, in terms both of the numbers of researchers using the records and of the quantities of archives acquired for permanent preservation. Though greatly welcomed and encouraged, these developments inevitably put considerable pressure on staff and space alike, but under Mr Hanley's direction the Record Office was able to respond positively and effectively and to provide a service which attracted a high level of appreciation from its many users. The importance which Mr Hanley has always accorded to promoting knowledge and enjoyment of the Record Office's collections among the wider public was demonstrated in a series of exhibitions on an imaginative variety of themes, among them 'The Hartwell Comet' (Dr John Lee), 'Manuscripts and Mortar' (the history of buildings) and Buckinghamshire in World War II. All members of the Society will want to wish him a long, happy and fruitful retirement and will look forward to his continuing involvement in the study of local history in Buckinghamshire.

Regardless of all these changes, archives have continued to be received in the Record Office at the usual rate. Accessions in 1997 totalled 137 (compared with 143 in 1996). A full list can be seen in the Annual Report of the County Records and Local Studies Service.

Additional Church of England parish records were received relating to 18 parishes. Among them are: records from Dinton parish, including correspondence between Simon Mayne (son of the regicide) and the parishioners in 1723-24 about his proposed demolition of the Church Houses; Stoke Hammond National School attendance registers 1883-94; and 15 deeds relating to Burnham 1310-1612 (previously held on temporary loan),

transcripts and translations of which were published in 1913. The Archdeacon of Buckingham deposited a series of files relating to the organization, work and development of the church in the new city of Milton Keynes, c1972–1988.

A map of the Delaford estate of Sir William Young in Iver of 1770 was purchased. Other maps acquired during the year include one of Padbury, which appears to be a working map of the inclosure commissioners, c1796, and a map of the mills and other premises of Joseph Wright in Great Marlow in 1827. Papers of the inclosure commissioners for Maids Moreton with Gawcott and Prebend End comprising accounts, proprietors' claims and correspondence, c1801–1803, were purchased.

A collection of 38 court rolls of the manor of Winslow was also acquired by purchase. These rolls, which are very detailed and which include lists of ordinances for the regulation of the common fields, cover the period 1700–1719. They add to the large quantity of known Winslow manor court records. In contrast to such a busy manor, a single court book of the manor of Hogshaw, which was also purchased, covers the period 1750–1789 during which period the court never met more frequently than once every 10 years. Another manorial item acquired during the year was a rental of the manor of Cippenham in Burnham, 1621.

Records of solicitors' firms which were received included additional papers of the Cavendish family of Thornton Hall, which contain material relating to the conveyance of land for Nash church in 1857 and letters of W Selby Lowndes of Whaddon Hall over a dog-poisoning incident, also in 1857. Documents of the Weller family of Amersham include records relating to the family brewery. A large and as yet unsorted collection of deeds from Francis and How in Amersham and Chalfont St Peter was taken in.

A significant quantity of material was transferred to the custody of the Record Office from other parts of the County Council's LIMA Service, including the large collections of photographs held in the County Museum and the Local Studies Library. Most of these photographs had already been digitally scanned and copies of the images, ar-

anged in parish sequences, are available for browsing in the Local Studies Library. Catalogue details can be searched on the Museum's MODES database, also held in the Local Studies Library. The Museum deposited the collection of architects' drawings for buildings on the Mentmore estate which the Museum purchased in the 'sale of the century' in 1977. In addition a collection of papers relating to the County Council's Library Service was transferred. They include correspondence with the Carnegie Trust dating back to 1917 and records of the Middle and Steeple Claydon libraries established in the 1890s by the Verney family.

Two other significant developments of the County Records and Local Studies Service should be mentioned. First, a modern records manager was appointed with the immediate brief of setting up a records management system to administer the records of the County Council's Education Department. This new service has already been enthusiastically welcomed by the staff who use it and it is hoped that its success will encourage other departments to join in.

Secondly, a software programme for archive cataloguing was purchased, known as CALM 2000. The archivists are already using the software for their current cataloguing and plans are being drawn up for the conversion of existing catalogues. When enough data has been entered, readers will be able to use the system for free-text retrieval and ultimately it is hoped that the system will enable the Record Office to make details of its holdings available on-line for remote access.

The Service has continued to take part in more traditional but no less valuable forms of outreach. Staff attended both the Family History Open Day organized by the Bucks Family History Society and Bucks Genealogical Society's Family History Feast. At the County Show in August the Record Office conservators put on a display of paper-making and demonstrated papers made from natural but easily renewable resources, such as nettles, thistles, cow parsley and banana skins.

The annual Record Office Lecture was given by Professor P D A Harvey, an authority on maps of the medieval and early modern periods. His talk,

which was greatly enjoyed by an audience of about 60, was on Local Maps from Medieval England. This subject was particularly relevant to Buckinghamshire as the map of Boarstall of 1444, which is contained in the Boarstall Cartulary held in the Record Office, is one of only three dozen surviving local maps from the whole of England before 1500. A few months earlier, it had been lent

to the County Museum for display in the exhibition on The Buckinghamshire Landscape.

Members of the Bucks Archaeological Society who would like their names to be on the mailing list for the County Records and Local Studies Service Annual Reports and Newsletters should please contact either the Record Office or the Local Studies Library at the County Offices.

R.B.