

THE MUSEUM

Report 1998–1999

1998–99 was the third full year of operation for the Museum following major refurbishment and extension of the main Aylesbury buildings, and the second year of operation for the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery. The new features and displays continued to receive widespread acclaim and were further acknowledged with a special commendation in the *European Museum of the Year Awards 1998*.

It was nevertheless a challenging year for the Museum Service because of a 32% reduction in County Council funding. Economies included the loss of six posts at the start of the year, one of them the County Museums Officer, and these reductions had an inevitable impact on service provision. The Keeper of Natural History and Head of Museum Service both left in the course of the year to take up museum posts elsewhere. Alan Knox had only recently been appointed to the latter, new senior post, after eight years' valuable service as Head of Resources, during which he had taken a leading role in setting up and running the Technical Centre at Halton and the new facilities at Aylesbury. Oliver Green was appointed as the new Head of Museum Service and took up his post in May 1999.

There was a reduction in visitor numbers, but the first year of the Dahl Gallery had seen exceptionally high figures and the introduction of an admission charge for the main Museum may have discouraged some visitors. Overall, income generation from admissions, retail sales, room lettings and other sources rose by 19% to a record £278,081.

External Review

A report was commissioned by the County Council from independent consultants, the Arts Business Limited, in order to present options to the Council for the future funding, management and organisation of the Museum Service following the budget reductions.

The key conclusions of the consultants were:

- the Museum Service can play a vital role in assisting the Council to achieve its strategic aims in terms of education, the economy and overall quality of life in Buckinghamshire.
- the collections and facilities of the Museum Service make it particularly well placed to develop its role as a significant educational resource.
- closing the Museum Service or mothballing the collections would be a self-defeating economy which would cost between £1.5–£2M.
- further budget cuts would be likely to make the Service unsustainable and could lead to the Museum's de-registration from the Museums and Galleries Commission's national assessment scheme and substantial claims for grant repayment.
- transfer of the Museum to an independent body such as a charitable trust would offer no significant financial advantages.
- there are significant opportunities to develop new sources of external funding but as a supplement to, not a substitute for, continued core funding by the County Council.

The County Council accepted the consultant's recommendations.

Education

Education, in the broadest sense, is at the heart of everything the Museum does and there are both formal and informal learning opportunities available. Schools make extensive use of the Museum's facilities and in particular the unique and stimulating environment of the Roald Dahl Children's Gallery, where children are encouraged to learn

through investigation and discovery. The interactive displays are aimed at Key Stages 1 & 2 of the National Curriculum and offer an imaginative approach to literacy, numeracy, history, natural history, science and technology through practical hands-on activities relating to real museum objects. Group sessions, both in the Dahl Children's Gallery and in the main Museum, can be tailored to individual schools' requirements by the Museum's education staff. During the year 9,615 children visited the Museum in 238 school groups.

Exhibitions and Events

There was a full and varied exhibition programme throughout the year. Highlights in the Buckinghamshire Art Gallery included a retrospective exhibition by the renowned Speen-based artist *Benedict Rubbra*, a mouth-watering exhibition of artworks on the theme of *Chocolate* and a summer exhibition by the *Visual Images Group*, which includes some the County's finest artists.

Changing displays in the Special Exhibition Gallery included an *Aylesbury Grammar School 400th Anniversary* exhibition, *Animals at Bedtime*, which featured the real animals behind favourite characters in children's books, and a special Christmas exhibition of *Toys* from the Museum's collections.

The Museum had its first artist in residence, *Christopher Barrett*, whose month-long placement at the Museum was funded by the *Muir Trust*. This newly established charitable foundation was generously set up by local artist Jane Muir in memory of her late husband to assist the Museum in providing residences for artists on a regular basis.

Events at the Museum during the year included an acclaimed open-air production of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* in the Museum garden.

Collections

Good progress was made on the computer documentation of the Museum collections, which will make all material currently in store more easily accessible for consultation, research and display. Linked to this work was the identification of material relating to Milton Keynes which, as a result of

local government reorganisation, will pass into the ownership of Milton Keynes Council though the Museum will continue to care for it under a joint arrangement.

Over 2,200 items were added to the collections during the year. Particularly significant additions included a hoard of 38 late Iron Age gold coins discovered by metal detectorists near Buckingham, a studio pot by Rupert Spira, a watercolour of Wooburn Church by William Callow and a Bronze Age sword found in the River Ouse (this item being acquired on behalf of Milton Keynes Council).

The loss of specialist curatorial staff has led to a reduction in the level and breadth of the public enquiry/identification service that can be offered, but a new service of study visits to see the Museum collections in store at Halton was introduced and is well used. These collection access requests have been wide ranging, covering subjects from studio pots to geology and from lace to the paintings of John Nash.

Archaeology and Environmental Records

A separate report on archaeology is presented elsewhere. As part of the rationalisation of services following the budget reductions, an element of the County's archaeological service was transferred from the Museum to the Planning Department in September 1998. The Museum retained responsibility for archaeological collections and archives but no longer operated a field unit. Two archaeological posts were transferred to Planning, which thereby acquired responsibility for the provision of archaeological advice to planners and developers, and for the maintenance of the Sites and Monuments Record. In the first six months of the year enquiries dealt with by the SMR were well up on the previous year.

The Environmental Records Centre remained an important service provided through the Museum, collecting, storing and managing information on the County's wildlife and geology and making it available for the benefit of nature conservation and the planning process. Good progress was made on data input and the number of enquiries and consultations grew considerably.

Friends and Patrons

Membership of the Museum's two linked support organisations, The Friends and Patrons, continued to grow. These bodies provide valuable

assistance to the Museum both through financial support towards specific projects and through volunteer assistance in various capacities, as well as a programme of activities for their members.

Oliver Green

THE COUNTY RECORDS AND LOCAL STUDIES SERVICE

(Extracts from the Report for 1998–99 and List of Accessions for 1998)

Planned Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies

The year 1998–99 was the second year of operation of the Buckinghamshire Records and Local Studies Service, which was created in April 1997 to bring together Buckinghamshire Record Office and the Local Studies section of the County Reference Library. Plans for a Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, which will bring enhanced archive and library facilities together on one floor in the County Offices, were prepared for a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Public Record Office team which inspected the Record Office in April 1998 renewed for four years its status as a place of deposit for public records on the understanding that problems of access and lack of space for accruals of archives would be addressed by the bid. The accommodation in the basement of County Hall needed for the expansion of archive storage was vacated in October 1998.

Local Studies Library

Meanwhile, a new family history area within the Local Studies Library was opened in June 1998. It comprises 23 microfilm and fiche machines, seven of which are reader-printers. The 21,000-microfiche General Register Office Index (1837–1983) is located next to the fiche readers along with the 1881 Census Index, the National Probate Index (1858–1943) and the International Genealogical Index. Microfilms are available of most of the parish registers and bishops' transcripts for Buckinghamshire, the originals of which are held in the Record Office, as well as microfilms of pre-1837 nonconformist registers and the census returns of 1841–1891 for the county, supplied by the Public Record Office. New resources brought into the family history area include microfilms of *The Times* back to 1850, *Burke's Peerage* back to 1890, *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, the Army and Navy Lists and the

British Biographical Archive. The computer link to the Reference Library's Electronic Networking and Information Centre (ENIC) gives direct access to *The Times* Index from 1790 to 1905, *The Dictionary of National Biography* and *Who Was Who*. Other computer databases include Ordnance Survey digital mapping of Buckinghamshire and 25,000 scanned photographs of the county.

During the year, family history resources were further strengthened by the addition of the unified surname index to the 22,000,000 names in the 1881 Census Index. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints issued a licence for Buckinghamshire Records and Local Studies Service to deliver *Family Search*, the computer version of the International Genealogical Index. The 60 CD-ROMs have now arrived and two new public access computers are on order. The appearance of the family history area has been improved by the replacement of the old ceiling and the installation of new strip lighting.

Record Office Accessions

The total number of accessions of archives received in the Record Office during the calendar year 1998 was 155, compared with 137 in 1997.

Seventeen Church of England parishes deposited records under the Church of England's Parochial Registers and Records Measure, mostly additional deposits and mostly late 19th or 20th century in date. A particularly noteworthy deposit was from North Crawley, which included account books of the parish constables and the overseers of the poor dating back to the 1660s and also a large quantity of apprenticeship indentures. Some of this material is in poor condition and unfortunately cannot be made available for consultation – or indeed catalogued – until it has been repaired.

Records of a number of Nonconformist churches were also deposited, including Newport Pagnell Congregational (now United Reformed) Church. The earliest volume is a register of members, 1709–1844. There is also a set of annual reports of the Newport Pagnell College, 1812–49, a famous academy for the training of ministers and missionaries. A photocopy of the church book of Speen Baptist Church, containing entries of baptisms, marriages and burials, 1813–c.1849, was presented by Mr Christopher Stell, OBE. Mr Peter Quick presented a copy of his transcript of the register of the Aylesbury Salvation Army Corps, 1921–68.

A deposit was received from King Edward VII Hospital, Windsor, of a number of records of the Eton Poor Law Union workhouse in Albert Street, Slough. The workhouse (subsequently known as the Poor Law Institution) was also used as an emergency hospital during World War II and was renamed Upton Hospital when taken over by the National Health Service in 1948. The records include registers of births, 1837–48 and 1914–49, and of deaths, 1848–1951, copy returns of registration of births, 1893–97 and 1906–07, and of deaths, 1878–85, and creed registers, 1914–48. Although the Record Office already held the minutes of the Eton Board of Guardians covering the administration of the workhouse, these newly-deposited records are the only sources which give detailed information on the inmates themselves. Eton is only the second Poor Law Union workhouse in Buckinghamshire for which such records are held, the other being Winslow. Records of Upton Hospital since 1948 were deposited in Berkshire Record Office.

A large quantity of records of Aylesbury Grammar School were deposited in the Record Office, including admission registers and pupils' record sheets, 1844–1961, registers of applicants for places, 1851–86 and, of staff, 1903–58, and several boxes of photographs. The records were transferred though the good offices of Professor W R Mead, who had used the Grammar School records already held in the Record Office when writing his history of the School.

Mrs P M Kingsbury donated records of the Lane End Mothers and Babies Welcome, founded

by her mother, the Hon. Angela James of Fingest Grove, in 1914. Mrs James, the granddaughter of the celebrated Victorian social reformer Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, was herself a pioneer in the provision of care for mothers and babies and is the subject of a biography by Pennie Denton, *A very remarkable woman*.

The former archdeacon of Buckingham, the Ven. John Morrison, now archdeacon of Oxford, donated records of the convent of St Katherine of Alexandria of Parmoor House, Hambleden, but formerly of Normand House, Fulham. The records cover the whole history of the convent's existence from its foundation in London in the late 19th century until its closure in 1998.

Miss Pamela Tower deposited a number of albums of watercolours and photographs which belonged to Lady Sophia Tower. These are additional to the Tower family records already held in this Office. The Tower family resided at Huntsmoor Park in Iver and also at Weald Hall, Essex, both of which appear in the albums, as do Ashridge on the Bucks-Herts border and Belton Hall in Lincolnshire, homes of Lady Sophia's family, the Brownlows.

The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society transferred to the Record Office a document recording the particulars and valuation of certain lands in the possession of the king (Henry VIII), 1544, including property in Wendover Forrens, formerly of the late queen, Jane Seymour, and property in Aston Clinton and Wendover, formerly of the recently-dissolved Missenden Abbey, as well as other properties in Oxfordshire, London, Middlesex and Surrey.

Other items received during the year include the court roll of the manor of Lavendon Grange, 1727; deeds of Castle House and Castle Hill, Buckingham, 1667–1728 (purchased at auction); deeds of the Palliser family of the Vache, Chalfont St Giles, 1674–c.1840 (deposited by Farrer and Co., solicitors, of London); and nine photographs of the interior and projection equipment of the Pavilion Cinema, later the Granada, in the High Street, Aylesbury, 1937 (presented by Mr David Goble).

Information Technology

Following the purchase at the end of 1997 of the CALM 2000 cataloguing software, all new cataloguing is now undertaken on the computer database and the database now holds over 4,000 records. A project is under way to transfer existing word-processed catalogues into the CALM 2000 software.

The Buckinghamshire Records and Local Studies Service now has its own web pages. The website address is:

www.buckscc.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/archives.

County Council Records

The Service has continued to provide a modern records service to the Education Department of Buckinghamshire County Council and a modern records service to the Social Services Department was commenced in December 1998.

Conservation

The conservation of the series of marriage bonds and allegations continues at a steady rate of about one box per month, as there are roughly 300 documents in each box. Two important deposits received during the year, records of Aylesbury Grammar School and Eton Poor Law Union respectively, required dry cleaning, as did a large collection of deeds. Work continues on the sleeving of our photograph collections into inert polyester sleeves.

Annual Archives Lecture

The third Annual Archives Lecture staged by the Buckinghamshire Records and Local Studies Service took place in the Ireland Room at County Hall on Thursday 19 November 1998 before an audience of about 80 people. The subject of the lecture was the Rothschild family and their archives and the expert speaker was Victor Gray, Head of Corporate Records and Archives at The Rothschild Archive in London.

Members of the Society wishing to attend future Lectures are asked to contact the Record Office and their names will be placed on the mailing list.

Survey of Record Office visitors

The Record Office took part in a national survey from 1–30 June, organised by the Public Services Quality Group for Archives and Local Studies. Each visitor to the Record Office was asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire of which 108 were returned. Overall the impression was positive, 75% of replies rated the service at this archive as excellent and a further 24% as good. Most felt the staff were friendly, helpful and knowledgeable and there were many favourable comments on the service which individuals had received. 69% of those who had used other Record Offices felt that Bucks offered a service which was at least as good if not better. It will come as no surprise to learn that 60% of visitors were researching their family tree and 30% local or other history. Although one of the smaller County Record Offices, Buckinghamshire was judged one of the best in the country for the speed and quality of the copying service offered.

Roger Bettridge