

## **Transforming the CRO**

### **Feedback on Collection Week 23 – February 2011**

#### **Procedure**

##### **Printing from the public network PCs**

Some of you will have noticed that the iCAM system that monitors and prints from the public network of computers in the catalogue and index room has been moved to the reception area during February collections week. This is part of the preparation for later in the year when the number of staff on duty will be reduced by one. The catalogue and index room will no longer be staffed, leaving only the duty archivist and the document production assistant.

Print outs from the computer can be collected from the reception area at any time during your visit, please remember that if you wish to view them on screen before they are printed you will need to collect your CARN ticket first to get through the barrier. Printouts can be paid for at the end of your visit the same as now but we would strongly advise that if you require a lot of print outs that you collect them at regular intervals. Printing from iCAM will cease half an hour before the office closes.

##### **Building Regulation Plans**

CR4164, Nuneaton Borough Building Plans

Work has continued on adding the building regulation plans deposited by the local authority to an Access database that can at present be searched by staff on duty in the searchroom. Since the last report a further 344 plans have been added, covering the years 1961 to 1963.

##### **Strongroom Move: week commencing 7 February 2011**

From the outset was the realisation that this would not be the final push. Of the four days given over to undertaking this month's move, two were cut as staff were required in other areas and Friday was given over to moving shelving in order to enable racking maintenance.

And so, while we certainly made progress on the first day of our work not much has changed.

As has become standard to all these reports – the end is in sight!

## Maps

### Valuation maps resulting from the 1910 Finance Act

In the last two months we have managed to bring 'back to life' 20 valuation maps. This was achieved by the efforts of our Conservation Unit and the invaluable help of our volunteers. A big thank you to Marianne Horne, Kate Spencer, Jill Andrews, Maura Barnett and Kaori Hilton. They have all been working hard and passionately to fix tears and infill loss areas with Methylcellulose glue and Japanese paper. These maps will be kept in our strong rooms but are now available to all. This gives us a great sense of satisfaction and we hope our readers will find them a valuable contribution to their studies.

As you can see from the pictures these maps came to us in a really poor state of preservation. Every map can take several days work. The need to conserve these maps has been on our minds for a very long time but it was always difficult to find a gap in our work schedule. Now that we have started



we hope to run this project for at least the next 12 months and make even more maps available.

The above project by the Conservation Unit means that the following Ordnance Survey sheet numbers, which cover part of Solihull and the surrounding district, have now been added to the catalogue for CR1974 and will also appear on the next update of Warwickshire's Past

Unlocked. They cover the following locations:



19.03; 19.04; 19.06; 19.07; 19.08;  
19.10, 19.11; 19.12; 19.14; 19.15;  
19.16; 24.07; 24.08; 24.12; 25.02;  
25.03 and 25.04

## **Ordnance Survey Maps**

A milestone has been reached!

This collections week the map team has finally completed the assessing of all the various deposits of Ordnance Survey maps that have been received over the past ten years or so. As a final bonus, the team identified a further thirty maps that were needed for our collection.

The aim of this project was to make accessible various deposits of OS maps that were not currently in the map tanks, and therefore not available to the public. The whole project had the following aims:

- Survey the current holdings of all Ordnance Survey maps, both pre-war and post-war
- Restructure the contents of the map tanks (where necessary) to have a continuous sequence of maps
- Buy new map tanks to hold the ever expanding collection
- Label and number the map tanks
- Sort the unlisted maps into groups ie. 25 inch, six inch, pre-war, post-war etc.
- Identify duplicates
- Identify editions we do not currently hold
- Be certain that we have the best copies available for the searchroom
- Have heading tape attached (where necessary) to the best copy
- Provide complete and comprehensive lists/finding aids online and in the searchroom

This has been a mammoth project which has, in turn, meant further work for our conservation team, as we have identified a large number of maps which need heading tape attached so that they can be hung in the map tanks and made available to visitors. So, in addition to working on the valuation maps (mentioned above) the conservation team now has a large number of maps which are waiting for heading tape. Those which already had heading tape on have already been added into the map tanks.

Although a large proportion of this project has now been completed, there will still be ongoing work for the map team. Once each batch of maps has been dealt with by conservation, they will need to be individually labelled and then added into the correct map tanks. So completion date is still some way off!

## **DR 231 – Parish of Charlecote**

The miscellaneous collection of items in the parish of Charlecote contained in DR 231/4 has now been listed individually and will be available on the next update of Warwickshire's Past Unlocked

## **CR3554, Letters From China: The Correspondence of Thomas Adkins, 1855-1858**

In 1855 19-year-old Adkins, a native of Milcote, near Weston-on-Avon, was appointed a supernumerary interpreter at the Superintendency of British Trade with China. He was to remain with the Chinese Consular Service until 1879, rising to become a diplomat, and ultimately consul.

This Collection Week work has focused on cataloguing those letters covering the period 1858-1861, forming a dramatic, and at times harrowing, first-hand account of the latter half of the Second Opium War between the British and French Empires and China's ruling Qing dynasty.

The letters include accounts of the battles of the Taku forts in June 1859 and August 1860, at the first of which Adkins was in the thick of the fighting, tending to the wounded, at one point seeing a marine standing next to him decapitated by a Chinese round shot.

Similarly, Adkins' letters also tell of his time spent attached to the famous irregular Indian cavalry regiments raised by Walter Fane and Sir Dighton Probyn (awarded the Victoria Cross during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and in later life Keeper of the Privy Purse). Indeed, in places the letters read like pages from an adventure in the *Boy's Own* paper, describing reconnaissance missions around the walls of Peking before the city was finally entered by Anglo-French forces in October 1860. In Peking itself Adkins was to meet Prince Kung, the Chinese Foreign Minister and brother of the Emperor.

Perhaps most dramatically of all Adkins was present at the looting of the Xianfeng Emperor's Summer Palace (Yihe Yuan), Adkins himself taking the Emperor's crutch and presenting it as a gift to Lord Elgin, the commander of the British force in China.

As ever in Adkins' letter high drama is juxtaposed with the intensely personal. Between November 1860 and February 1861 Adkins was the only Englishman in the whole of Peking, charged with readying the British Embassy for the arrival of Lord Elgin's brother Sir Frederick Bruce, the magnificently titled Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Emperor of China. Unsurprisingly, still aged only twenty four, he found himself feeling terribly isolated. On Christmas Eve 1860 Adkins wrote from Peking to his mother: 'I feel very lonely this evening and would give anything I possess to have a mortal who could speak my native tongue within hail. This is certainly far from a merry Christmas as far as I am concerned'.

**CALM is the software that is used to catalogue all Warwickshire County Record Office collections.**

**Warwickshire's Past Unlocked is the publicly accessible version of this catalogue on-line**

## Record Office Staff

### Who are we and what do we do...?

Malcolm Boyns, Archivist

I am one of the Archivists here at Warwickshire County Record Office and I am specifically responsible for CALM and Online content. Firstly I should explain that CALM stands for 'Cataloguing for Museums, Libraries and Archives' and is the computerised electronic database software that we use to create both our electronic and paper catalogues of our collections. My primary duties are therefore to ensure the smooth running of the system, which involves periodic updates to the software package, as the software company releases them, and also liaisons with my colleagues regarding changes and issues with the software that they would like to see. I also deal with the administrative side of the software, contacting the manufacturer when issues arise that I cannot resolve personally and simply providing access to the software for new members of staff. The software itself is only made available to members of staff of the record office as it is one of our most vital resources and safeguarding the security of its contents is of paramount importance.

The database was introduced in 2001 and it has so far taken us 10 years to manually add to the database 25% of our library of paper catalogues of collections that can be accessed in our public searchroom; when you consider that the record office was opened in 1933 and we therefore have almost 80 years' worth of paper catalogues to retroconvert I'm sure you can appreciate the scale of the task! That's not to mention the several hundred year backlog of uncatalogued collections that do not exist in either paper or electronic format!

I am also responsible for online content, which means that I am the member of staff responsible for fixing any issues with either our website or our on-line catalogue, Warwickshire's Past Unlocked. My area of special responsibility focuses on developing our longer term goals with regard to electronic cataloguing systems. To this end I am currently implementing a new piece of software that will replace the current, rather dated version of Warwickshire's Past Unlocked and which will allow us to factor in further enhancements to the functionality of our on-line catalogue and increase the scope and content of our on-line presence.

As a team the Archivists are stretched to their very limits on a daily basis as in addition to our assigned special responsibilities we are all responsible for fulfilling a public service role, which in my case equates to two shifts a week in the public searchroom and one Saturday in six.

I also share the responsibility for the accessioning of deposits, through the sorting, boxing and labelling of the collections' components to the final stage of cataloguing the collections themselves, the result of which is a fully

structured and numbered catalogue which allows users to gain access to the contents of the collection in our public searchroom.

The accessioning process itself can range from a prearranged deposit of a single parish register from the Incumbent of a Warwickshire parish to the unexpected visit from a depositor with a large collection of documents. This scenario is rare however as most depositors like to make initial contact to gauge our interest in their documents. Sometimes I will get into my car and travel to the depositor's location to view the documents in situ where this is more appropriate. We have to make a judgement as to whether or not they fit in with the collecting policy of the office and therefore whether or not we would like to accept them as a deposit. Sometimes I will photograph the collection in its original environment, both as a whole collection and also often picking out some of the more interesting individual items within it, in order to allow for consultation with the other members of the Archive team at a later date.

In addition to the smaller cataloguing projects that we undertake in collections weeks we all have larger, longer term collections that we catalogue. I personally have several very large collections that I am currently working through, ably assisted by archive assistants and volunteers, and one of these is a collection of material from St Mary's parish office in Warwick. This collection extends to over two bays of shelving in our strongrooms (approximately 80 standard size boxes) and needs sorting, weeding and listing prior to cataloguing primarily because it contains records for three parishes administered from the same office, namely the parishes of St Mary's, St Nicholas and Christchurch, Warwick, but also as the size of the collection meant that producing a full inventory of its contents was not practical at the point of accession. The cataloguing of a large collection inevitably takes a great deal longer to achieve due to the scale of the task however the principles remain the same no matter how voluminous the collection!



Catalogues online at: [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archivesunlocked](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archivesunlocked)