

Transforming the CRO

Feedback on Collection Week 30 – September 2011

Reorganisation of Microfilms in the Searchroom

As part of trying to make the searchroom more accessible to the public the task of reorganising the microfilms was addressed. This involved removing all of the microfilms from the cabinets and arranging them so that the most popular ones (parish registers) were put in the top drawers of the cabinet and also making sure all of the newspaper microfilms were put together. New labels also had to be made to signpost these new arrangements.

This was a useful task to complete because all of the microfilms could also be audited against the catalogues. This meant that any missing microfilms could be discovered and also the catalogues could be checked to ensure that they contained the correct information. It is hoped that these new arrangements will make the location of the microfilms more user-friendly to the public.

This re-organisation was carried out by two new members of staff who joined us at the beginning of September. Lizzy Clapham has replaced Scott Pettitt in the one-year Archive Assistant post and Lara Nelson has joined us as a temporary Archive Assistant for six months. You will be hearing more about them in the coming months.



Collections

CR 51 – WARWICKSHIRE BOARD OF GUARDIANS

One of our popular collections is CR 51, records of the Board of Guardians and their successors. Although this collection is known as records of the workhouse, it deals with much more than just those admitted to the workhouse. These are the records of the Guardians who were responsible for the administration of the Poor Law within their union from 1834 until 1930 when responsibility was passed to local authorities and the workhouses

became known as Public Institutions. Work is now in progress to add this collection to CALM and create a structure to the collection which will be user friendly and include series and item level descriptions to give an understanding of the types of records within this collection. Over the past collections weeks all of the 2090 items within CR 51 have been entered into CALM and work will now continue to assess the records and add the relevant descriptions.

CR 954 – FARNBOROUGH DEEDS

This is a collection of property and family related papers containing some 50 individual items. The land mentioned is mainly in the Farnborough area, but the families also have connections in Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and also Claydon, Oxfordshire (which is mentioned as being in the parish of Cropredy, Warwickshire). There was previously an outline list of this collection, but it has now been itemised and put into a structure so that researchers can see which family owned the properties and the succession of ownership of the properties where the information has survived. This catalogue is now complete and the details will appear in Warwickshire's Past Unlocked at the next upgrade.

CR 3654 – SUTTON COLDFIELD: DEEDS

Two seventeenth-century deeds were catalogued, relating to two different messuages and their associated ground in Sutton Coldfield.

CR3437 - WOLSTON, BRANDON AND BRETTFORD BURIAL COMMITTEE RECORDS

Inside this collection are some highly informative records, including a graves register which for every grave gives the exact location of the grave, the name of the person interred and the date of their interment. From a family historian's perspective the burials register is of great historical value, detailing not only the name and age of every person, but their profession and location of death as well. Great planning of the designation of each grave is shown by the cemetery plans. Deeds of the burial ground are also within this collection, giving details of the land being sold to the Burial Committee by Charles Walford Wilcox of Wolston Manor. Other records include minute books and financial documents which provide a great insight into the workings of a parish burial committee.

CR4365 - RECORDS OF THE MASTER'S GARDEN, LORD LEYCESTER HOSPITAL

Work on the production of a catalogue for a collection of records relating to the Master's Garden at the Lord Leicester Hospital - which was reported on in detail last month - has continued and good progress has been made.

Parish Collections

Firstly, a bundle of documents relating to the Town Close Doles of **Barford** (DRB 46/105/1-18) has now been individually catalogued. It includes late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century material. There are numerous references to individuals in the parish, for example, listing those who were given the dole (eg DRB 46/105/10,11 & 12) - and sometimes those who were refused dole (DRB 105/11)!

Secondly, a small collection of nineteenth century papers from **Wappenbury** (DR 179), which were previously described as miscellaneous at the end of the parish collection, have now been individually catalogued. Amongst this I found DR 179/5/2 an invoice to overseers 'for the expences of apprehending Thomas Goode' plus a fascinating description (DR 179/5/1) of the said Thomas Goode:

About 5 feet 6 inches in height light hair has a seam inside left hand from a cut of a scickle the little finger of right hand tucked from a puncture of thorn.

Copy from an account by the late Thomas Herbert

From the parish of **Bedworth** a bundle of documents relating to Henry Smith's charity (DR 225/383) has now been fully catalogued. Bedworth was one of the twenty two parishes sharing in the profits from Henry Smith's estate at Stoughton, Leics. 'the money from which was to be laid out in calico for the needy'. These documents range in date from 1711 to 1896.

A small group of twentieth century faculties for **Bearley** (DR 818/3-8) has also now been individually catalogued.

All of these will be added to the on-line catalogue during the next up-date of CALM which is due to take place in mid-November, 2011.

Place name codes were added to a further 250 parish records entries, completing the parishes of Wishaw, Wilmcote, Willey and Willenhall, St. John. A larger parish, Willoughby, with some 400 records is well on the way to being finished and should be completed during the next collections week.

School Records

The catalogues for two more school collections have now been completed:

CR 3714 – Swinnerton Middle School. This collection consists of three folders of correspondence dating from 1972-1987, regarding three phases of alterations made to the school

CR 3808 – Brockhurst Middle School. Three logbooks for Brockhurst School dating from 1876-1976 were added to CALM. One volume records events relating to, and the reasons for, the change of the school from a First School to a Middle School in 1975. It was also delightful to read in logbook ref. CR 3803/1, page 322 that in July 1901, 'The boys are taking sewing and knitting this year – and so far the change answers well.'

CR COLLECTIONS: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND DATA PROTECTION ISSUES

Many of our collections contain information that cannot be made generally available to the public. However, the information needs to be easily identifiable in order to answer Freedom of Information requests, and in many instances the information can be made available to certain people under certain circumstances. School records and hospital records are typical of the collections that fall into this category. Over the last few collections weeks we have been working on the cataloguing backlog of these records, and this work has continued in the September week. Of the 40 collections identified, 24 have now been fully catalogued and the item level description will appear in Warwickshire's Past Unlocked at the next upgrade (regardless of whether the individual documents can be made generally available or not).

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...?

Lesley Caine, Collections Archivist

I've worked at the Record Office since April 2003, when it re-opened after the refurbishment, and I had previously worked in a completely different field and spent many years at home as a full-time mum. I am now in my third role here and work three days a week as collections archivist. Many regulars will know me primarily for the work I have done in my other roles though. I worked part time as an archive assistant for about three years, doing the job that Julie Moores now does, and then I was a full time archivist with special responsibilities for outreach and for the volunteer programme, which is the job that Sue Parsons now does.

I have a degree in Economics from the University of Warwick and I qualified as an archivist from the post graduate distance learning course at the University of Aberystwyth. Sue Parsons and I were studying this at the same time and, although we both guarded our ideas and assignments from each other like 'Official Secrets' so nobody could possibly think we were collaborating, it was mutually supportive knowing someone else was juggling their time in the same way.

My current role is a two year secondment, which started last September, and my job is fairly easy to define. I am here to address the cataloguing backlog – or at least some of it! In order to do this I manage the cataloguing priorities list and help my colleagues choose their cataloguing projects, and I catalogue collections myself. My line manager is Rob Eyre, and I help him with the scheduling of collection week work and supervise some of the collection week projects. My previous two roles involved a lot of Public Service, but I am no longer part of the main Public Service Team. I am, however, still part of the Saturday rota for the searchroom and I enjoy keeping in touch with our users this way.

I use a database to help decide what the cataloguing priorities of the office are. The prioritisation is essentially a statistical exercise, and that really appeals to the logical side of my brain – it means that the system decides really, rather than someone shouting loudly to get their favourite collection to the top of the pile! In order for the database to produce accurate and meaningful data, each of the archivists makes value judgements about the collections and enters numbers into the database according to set principles. This means that when a collection is assessed we determine whether it contains information that may be needed to answer Freedom of Information requests, or whether there are data protection issues in the documents. Anything containing such information becomes a very high priority indeed. We also assess the records for their historical relevance, the value that our users would place on the information the records contain, their social and political values, whether the records are essential to the running of local government and also the wishes of the depositor. In addition we assess whether any finding aids are already in existence and whether they could be used to supplement any cataloguing we are able to do.

To ensure the data are meaningful, there is a system of weighting the scores of the different categories and when these scores are multiplied an absolute value is given, and it's around these results that the pecking order of our cataloguing work is decided. If only that were the end! There are many collections that score the same, so then the size and complexity of the collection will be considered, as will trying to provide a balance of representation in the catalogued collections. We try wherever

we can to make sure all areas of the county, its people and activities are proportionally represented. There are difficulties though, with, for example, large collections. It's fair to say most, if not all, of these will probably never be catalogued without external funding. An example of this would be the Waller collection, for which funding was sought and a separate project with project staff recruited to undertake the cataloguing.

Of those collections that we can catalogue in house, we try and allow as much discretion as possible so that we all are able to work on collections about which we are interested or have special knowledge, as well as making sure everyone gets to work on things that provide training in working with different classes of document. There are frustrations obviously. The backlog will always be there, so progress can sometimes seem negligible with such a vast amount of un-catalogued material. A bit like being overdrawn at the bank – however much you pay back there is still the debt!

In terms of my own cataloguing, I try to protect one whole day a week for uninterrupted cataloguing time. All cataloguing archivists will say that it's the interruptions that are the biggest barriers to producing good end results, so I try and batch my work as best I can. I am currently concentrating on collections of school and hospital records, as they have Freedom of Information implications. My favourite types of record, however, have some business element or financial transaction in them, so I usually have some deeds or the records of a small business that I work on concurrently. For small collections I catalogue directly into CALM, our specialist computer package, and the information is uploaded from that into Warwickshire's Past Unlocked. For medium and large collections I spread things out on the searchroom tables and list with paper and pencil, and I then have a fair idea of the arrangement before I put the information into the computer.



In collection weeks I try and catalogue most of the time, but I have also worked with Rosalind Green, Karen Moulder, Julie Moores and the conservation staff and volunteers on the large project to integrate all the Ordnance Survey maps into one system and make them available to the public. This was a huge undertaking and we are very pleased with both the progress and the results we are now seeing. Although I will potentially work with all my colleagues during collections weeks, Rosalind, Karen and Julie are the people with whom I work most closely and they are always coming up with new ideas and methods to improve what we do and how we do it. Now that I do so little public service it is nice for me to have the opportunities during collections week to work so closely with these colleagues.

Catalogues online at: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/archivesunlocked