



Hon. Archivist's Report, 2021-2022

This is the first major report since the pre-Covid report of 2018-2019 and the return of the town's archives from the Berkshire Record Office. It is not surprising to find that the number of emails has been the most used method of communication. There have been 36 emails (36), 2 telephone calls (9), 7 visits by appointment (6), but no letters or casual visits. The numbers in brackets are the corresponding totals from my last major report dated 2018-2019 and show that emails and pre-arranged visits are holding up well.

In the category defined as local history, there were email enquiries have covered buildings in the town centre, viz cellars at Fat Face and a flat overlooking the Market Place. Assistance has been sought with the history of a house in Ock Street, one in Wilsham Road and the possible whereabouts of maps for drains in Baker Road. The Curator of Archaeology at the Museums Resource Centre at Standlake requested information regarding the existence of a mortuary and the nature of staffing at the 19th century Abingdon Cottage Hospital in Bath Street. There have been challenging enquiries relating to women in British India, the topography and maps of medieval Abingdon, the livery of Abingdon Gasworks and stained glass at Abingdon School. I have provided a translation of the Greek inscription in the Roysse Room and explained the derivation of street names on the estate built on the site of Caldecott House. I was also able to complete the missing part of the inscription under the portrait of Richard Mayott – an enquiry from a member of staff.

Preparation for this year's Heritage Open Day prompted several enquiries from members of the Civic Society relating to themed walks. There were visits from a group researching the history of the Union Workhouse and the later housing estate built on its former site in the Oxford Road.

Family history enquiries relating to the Branch family continue to arrive from America. There were two further enquiries from America: one relating to a forbear buried at Abingdon Abbey which I was able to confirm from the Abbey Chronicles but obviously

could not identify the precise location and the other concerning a Blacknall family marriage. Simpler queries included tracing the location of an address of a Mr Wosahlo in Abingdon, Barton Abbey Terrace in the Radley Road.

The completion of the drying out process in the new muniment room and installation of new racking has meant that many items donated while the work was underway, were now able to be allocated shelf space. This includes Dick Barnes' research files on Fitzharris Manor, Michael Harrison's donation of files on the history of no.3 Stert Street, and files on the Williams, Silvester and Simpson families. Donations this year have included records of the Abingdon Country Market formerly held in the Roysse Room, a CD of the Queen's visit to Abingdon in 1956, and newsletters of the Abingdon Chamber of Commerce. The town's charters, housed in specialist archival folders by the Berkshire Record Office, are now located in the new plan chest. The final stage in the fitting out will be special 'V'-shaped shelves to hold the town's map collection. Old Corporation files currently stored in a filing cabinet will be housed in foolscap size boxes to be ordered from the Berkshire Record Office and then removed to the Muniment Room.

The John Mason School Charter Day visit seems to be currently in abeyance, but I did have a request from the great granddaughter of Thomas Skurray, to arrange a guided tour for her and her sister of areas connected with her forbears. Thomas Skurray rose to be Managing Director of Morland's Brewery, served on the Borough Council and was chairman of the Berkshire County Council.

I am continuing to provide regular local history articles about Abingdon for 'Heralding the Past' feature in The Herald and led a guided tour on the subject of Abingdon's Industries during the Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

I would like to thank the Town Clerk for his support and his staff for their continuing assistance with technology. I would also like to draw attention to the advice and support given by Mark Stevens, the Berkshire County Archivist and his staff.

Jackie Smith

Hon Archivist

November 3rd, 2022.