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## Executive summary

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service holds over five miles of historic records dating from the 10th to 21st centuries. These collections cover virtually every aspect of life within Staffordshire and the city of Stoke on Trent and it is estimated that we have about 11 million items. The Archive Service is jointly funded by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke on Trent City council through a joint agreement since 1997.

The last year has been quite an exceptional year for the service dominated by the impact of COVID-19. It has also seen a considerable number of staff changes across the service due to a combination of retirements and a long-planned reorganization of the county service. The year saw the first ever suspension of public services, no physical events, all staff working from home and our volunteers unable to visit. Despite this the staff and volunteers in the service rose to these challenges and found new ways of working and engaging users with the service primarily through an imaginative and inspiring online offer.

Whilst most staff were working from home collecting activity changed significantly with far fewer accessions received. The team switched from working directly on collections to improving the information held about them in our catalogues by converting paper catalogues to online entries. This means 20,000 new entries from well over 1000 separate accessions and representing nearly 600 boxes in terms of bulk were added to the online catalogue. Some of this work has been done by volunteers (over 3100 entries). We also completed work started in the last weeks in March 2020 of putting a collection level description online for all uncatalogued accessions, for which we are now at 99.4% of collections with an online description. This is a huge achievement and makes collections far more accessible through searching online.

The key achievements of 2020-2021 were:

- Completion of the Asylum and Bawdy Courts Projects
- Recovering services during COVID-19 and digital engagement
- Lockdown Memories
- Staffordshire History Centre

Delivering these projects in such challenging circumstances demonstrates the real commitment to the service shown by staff, volunteers and our partners. This annual report shows how flexible the workforce can be and how archives and heritage collections can be used in different ways to connect individuals and communities and combat loneliness and isolation during a global pandemic.

**Joanna Terry**  
**Head of Archives and Heritage**

## Featured projects

### Bawdy Courts




**The Bawdy Courts of Lichfield Project completed**

**The Bawdy Courts of Lichfield**  
- Scandal had here, strife uncovered and beautiful buildings revealed -

ABOUT THE PROJECT | BAWDY COURTS NEWS | LOCAL HISTORY GROUPS | RESEARCH | VOLUNTEERING | CONTACT

The Bawdy Courts project, Mar 2019-Feb 2021 came to a successful conclusion following a modification to the project plan agreed with *Archives Revealed* after the first lockdown. There are now 20,555 catalogue entries on our online catalogue, Gateway to the Past, and the catalogue covers 1537 to 1899. The funders agreed that the project should concentrate on the most difficult case papers to access, the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century cases, and this period is catalogued in the greatest detail. A volunteer project to add similar detail to the later case papers will begin next year.

The project sought to engage with key audiences for the Staffordshire History Centre Project. In 2019 we launched a new volunteer group at the History Access Point in Lichfield Library, which has continued throughout this last year. The group worked from scans of selected cases, then transcribed, researched and wrote articles for the [Bawdy Courts blog](#), meeting on Teams for discussion. Also in 2019, we took the project to an external base at Keele University Archives, where student volunteers worked with the project Archivist until the University closed in March 2020. The involvement at Keele led to the successful application for a 3-year collaborative PhD studentship from the Economic and Social Research Council, 2020-2023. Susie Johns was appointed to the role and began working with us in September 2020. Susie gave her first online talk to the Bawdy Courts volunteer group in January and will be leading the group next year.



While other aspects of the project outreach plan were on hold, The Bawdy Courts blog engaged a wider audience with the collection and featured many articles by the volunteers on subjects with modern parallels from alcohol abuse, prostitution, forced marriage and domestic violence to slander and the behaviour of clergy. We have explored the language of the time, which, in immorality and slander cases, is often unprintable! The scandal uncovered by the church courts gave them the nickname 'Bawdy Courts' and the Lichfield court certainly merited the charge. The blog has reached a wide audience including academics and students, the *Times* history editor and local groups. One case that picked up local interest was the scandalous behaviour of the vicar of Trentham in 1602: he not only drank to excess and verbally abused his parishioners but among other charges he was accused of using a skull from the graveyard as a prop in sermons.

*'...the sayd Cowper continued his drinking and Calling for more potts of ale and dranke harde in soe much in the ende he rose uppe and fell to vomiting and afterward began to stagger and ryled against the buttrye dore and knocked his head to the dore and fell downe on the flore...'*



## A Case for the Ordinary: Staffordshire Asylums Project

Due to the restrictions of the first lockdown it looked doubtful that the project aims could be achieved but the Wellcome Trust generously committed a further 3 months funding, taking the project team to April 2021 and extending the project as a whole to the end of November 2021.



The project's aim was to create a research resource for researchers of social and medical history by collecting data on 38,000 patients from Staffordshire's 3 asylums from 1818 up to 1960, and to engage with the public about the history of mental health care in Staffordshire. Despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic it is a major achievement of the project team that we now have data for 40,000 patients (although only up to 1948) which will be available in anonymised form for academic research. The final stage before making the data spreadsheets available will be a research trial led by our collaborative PhD student, Lucy Smith. A database of the period 1818-1920 is ready and will be made available on the Staffordshire Name Indexes website in the coming year, allowing family historians to discover relatives who spent time in one of the County's asylums.

Through lockdown the major success of the engagement project continued to be the brilliantly researched [Staffordshire Asylums blog](#), which generated interest from academic researchers, family historians and the wider public. Topics on mental health spoke to a wide audience over this past year. The blog was created by the project assistant and researched with help from the volunteers who continue to carry out background research online. Lucy began contributing to the blog during this year and will take over as editor in 2021/2. As well as this work Lucy has completed research for the forthcoming Asylums exhibition and she will organise a trial of the data by students prior to the project completion in November 2021.

Design and development work on the touring exhibition will begin during the summer of 2021, working with Vertigo Creative. This larger scale exhibition will tour venues during 2021 and 2022 with a planned launch in the autumn at the Brampton Museum in Newcastle-under-Lyme. It will then visit the Museum of Cannock Chase, Lichfield Cathedral and the Nicholson Museum in Leek. A smaller 'pop-up' version will tour libraries, community venues and hospitals.

## **Lockdown Memories**

The Lockdown Memories Project launched in summer 2020. The aim was to collect memories, experiences and items relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Working with the Library Service, the Archives and Heritage Service received over 100 responses through an online call-out. Participants shared their stories, experiences and personal thoughts on how Covid-19, and living through periods of national lockdown, had affected them.

As part of the project funding was sought from the West Midlands Museum Development programme. This money was used to fund a series of online workshops run by Staffordshire Poet Laureate, Mel Wardle-Woodend and visual artist Jhinuk Sarkar to support our audiences to share their experiences of Covid-19 and to enable us to capture these responses for the collections. The resulting poems and illustrations will form part of the Service's collections around Covid-19 and contribute to a planned exhibition in 2022.

Further workshops with Mel Wardle-Woodend have been booked with three Staffordshire Schools during the summer term 2021; Perton Middle School, Cooper Perry Primary School (Seighford) and Westlands Primary School (Newcastle-under-Lyme).



(Illustration: Lizzie's Lockdown Story (Jhinuk Sarkar, 2021))

## Staffordshire History Centre Project

Like other projects the Staffordshire History Centre was affected by COVID-19 and the national restrictions. The National Lottery Heritage Fund were supportive and enabled the team to change the timetable for the Development Phase and move the funding to different headings. The project team commissioned the Audience Agency who completed detailed audience research to identify current and potential audiences for the project. They also used analysis of online channels, focus groups and market research to create a Marketing Strategy for the project. This research informed a new Activity Plan and Business Plan for the project.

Robin Johnson was commissioned to complete research, piloting and testing of the learning offer. He did so during the first lockdown managing to consult with teachers, colleges, Entrust (the County Council education support partner) and develop pilot learning sessions using PowerPoints. The learning sessions were downloaded by schools and there was a strong and positive response from schools to the proposals for the learning offer.

An Access Strategy was developed to identify how the project will provide inclusive access not just to the new Centre but also intellectual access to the exhibitions and activities which will be delivered.

A new business case for relocating all of the archive collections and paper-based museum collections from the Stafford outstores to the new History Centre was completed. The business case increased storage from two to four floors giving an estimated 55 years of expansion space. This was approved by Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet in February 2021 with an increased financial commitment of £1.9m in addition to the Joint Archive Service reserve of £251,000 plus grants and donations of £185,000. The County Council has also committed additional revenue funding to meet the increased costs of the new building.

The overall design of the History Centre remains the same except for the increased storage to the rear of the site. The proposals received planning permission in May 2021. The



Conservation Plan was reviewed and updated. The plans for a new website and online catalogue were reviewed and further consultation with users and partners was completed to refine them.

The revised Activity and Business Plans reflected the new research and refined the projects which will be delivered. The Interpretation Plan was substantially revised. The overall costs for the Activity Plan remained almost the same at £516,000 and costs were increased for interpretation from £149,000 to £222,000.

The final application was submitted on 1 March 2021 and a presentation was delivered to the Heritage Fund on 28 May. The outcome will be known at the end of June 2021.

## **Regional collaboration and support**

The joint Archive Service is an active member of Archives West Midlands (AWM). The head of service is one of the trustees of the charity and the Assistant Director for Culture, Rural and Safer Communities is chair of the trust. The service has used the AWM website to promote its work including the *Small Bills and Petty Finance* project in partnership with Keele University. Several members of staff attended digital preservation training during the last year. The service was also able to benefit from member meetings which moved online and focused on supporting services in planning for recovery from COVID-19.

The Museum team have continued to support Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust in the delivery of museum development work in the West Midlands. Our Museum Development Officer, Helen Johnson, advises museums across the region on collections matters, and provides support on funding, planning and Accreditation.

We are also members of the Marches Network, which represents the county museum services in the West Midlands region and those in the West Midlands conurbation. The Network's main project at the moment is the revival of an Emergency Response Network for museums in the region. Originally set up in the early 2000s by MLA Midlands, it is intended to provide a coordinated response to any emergency which threatened museum collections and buildings, with a programme of training and a regional network of support, resources and advice. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the roll-out, but it is hoped the rest of the work will be undertaken in 2021-22.

## **Onsite public services COVID-19 and recovery**

### ***Staffordshire Record Office***

Staffordshire Record Office developed a recovery plan for a phased reopening on 14 July 2020. All visits were on an appointment only basis and required advance notice ordering documents. Capacity in the searchroom was reduced by 75% to increase space for social distancing. The service closed for lockdowns in November 2020 and then from January until 13 April 2021 when the record office was able to reopen. In 2020 there were 168 out of a possible 260 visitors with an average occupancy rate of 65%. Since reopening in 2021 there were 51/52 visitors in April and 68/68 visitors in May. This is an average occupancy rate of 99% and shows increased confidence of visitors returning to our search room.

### ***Stoke on Trent City Archives***

The first phase of the Stoke on Trent City Archives recovery saw staff return to our COVID secure office from 22nd June 2020. Our reopening to visitors was delayed because we are in a shared building making access more complex to plan for safe use and additionally, we have experienced staffing issues. Three staff retired and this was followed by recruitment and training for those posts, all but one post has now been filled. A detailed recovery plan was developed to enable the City Archives to reopen. We began our appointment only, pre-ordering of documents, phased reopening from 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021. The capacity in the Search Room had to be reduced by 84% to increase space for social distancing, screens and hand sanitiser are available and visitors are required to wear face masks. We have had 25 out of a possible 32 visitors for our first 4 weeks of opening (an occupancy rate of 78.1%).

### ***Enquiry and reprographic services***

Across the service an enquiry service was maintained which increased by 17% across the financial year. This does not reflect the very significant increase from April to August until onsite services could reopen and meet demands from users. A copying service was provided to users once staff were able to return to offices in June 2020 and this met some demand from distance users as well as supplementing onsite services once they were reopened. The number of copies supplied was down slightly by 2% but photographic orders increased by 75%.

### **Consulting Users and Partners**

During the development work for the Staffordshire History Centre project NLHF bid, we commissioned the Audience Agency to undertake extensive audience research and consultation. Taking place in spring and summer 2020, this involved three strands of work: member profiling, visitor and non-visitor research, and on-line focus groups.

Member profiling involved postcode analysis of 776 regular users and reader's ticket holders at Staffordshire Record Office and the William Salt Library. The post code research indicated areas of the county where we have less engagement. Some obvious due to travel time and public transport limitations, such as Burton upon Trent, the Staffordshire Moorlands and South Staffordshire district. Others were more surprising, including villages quite close to Stafford, such as Acton Trussell and Seighford.

Visitor and non-visitor research was undertaken in order to define our core audiences and identify new audiences for development. 440 people responded to an on-line survey. Current users like what we do (97.5%) but feel our facilities should be improved. Our core audience are mature (over 55), reasonably affluent people who live in suburbs or villages, with a wide interest in cultural activities. 69% are female and 71% live within an hour's drive of Stafford, and our main catchment area is within 21 miles (36 minutes) drive. The Audience Agency used two audience segmentation approaches: 'Audience Spectrum', looking at cultural engagement, and 'Mosaic' which takes a broader view of customer behaviour. Again, this confirmed the nature of our core audience as being older and fairly well-off, but it also identified audience groups for development where we are currently below West Midlands average in particular 'Trips & Treats' and 'Facebook families' who are mainly family audiences, and 'Kaleidoscope Creativity', who mainly live in suburbs and are likely include BAME groups.



Drive time distance by quartile, 2020.

The focus group work took place on 'Zoom' and enabled us to test out ideas for exhibitions, outreach and our digital offer at a time when we could not do it in person. 12 people took part, a mixture of ages, users and non-users, living at different places in Staffordshire. We also consulted them on exhibition and collection themes. We have used all this information to inform the spaces, interpretation and activities we are proposing for the Staffordshire History Centre.

In addition, our digital offer was analysed using insights and Google analytics as well as questionnaire consultation with users. A fairly consistent theme of feedback on our current offer is that, whilst quality is often excellent, our web presence is fragmented. Bringing more aspects of our offer together through a new website with integrated catalogue and a wider range of capabilities will showcase our collections, advertise our exhibitions and outreach offer, give us a higher profile and provide more reasons to visit the site. There has been a consistent demand for improved access to visual sources related to landscape and communities. The focus for this work would be maps, photographs, and local studies books and pamphlets.

The results of all this consultation and research has shaped the activity plan and building design for the Staffordshire History Centre.

## Online services

### *Learning Blog*

The impact of Covid-19 on volunteering has been substantial; we were, however, able to react to the crisis in a positive way. Prior to the lockdown being implemented we had suspended all of our volunteering projects. The Service had at that point in excess of 135 volunteers working with us and the challenge was to stay in touch with our volunteers and to

support them where we could. Initially we had hoped to begin a programme of sending out scans and photocopies of documents for our volunteers to work on, but by 24<sup>th</sup> March we had to close the Service and the buildings to staff as well.

We were fortunate in that we do have most volunteers' email addresses, and many have signed up to our e-newsletter. However, we wanted a place where we could bring in people from beyond this restricted group and initially we came up with the idea of setting up a Facebook page for volunteers to share ideas with us and for us to join in and respond to the conversations that took place. We set this up and it has had some success, but several volunteers wrote to us and said they did not use Facebook and didn't intend to do so.

So we decided to set up a new blog for volunteers, called '[The Learning Room](#)'. It is a place where we continue to engage volunteers with our collections and with ideas that might rise out of them. We set this up with partners and support from across the county council. The aim was that it would be a space in which volunteers could spend some time looking at ideas around areas they may have been working on whilst volunteering with us, or that they might wish to explore whilst at home.

There are several strands to The Learning Room. Firstly we set up a [Palaeography class](#) with Jim Sutton, a lecturer at the Keele Latin Summer school. Jim sends us examples for people to work on and provides individual feedback on their transcripts. Prof. Alannah Tomkins from [Keele University](#), who leads one of our volunteer groups, has been contributing each week with blog posts about the [social history of medicine between 1628 and 1886](#). We have also added blog pieces ourselves on how to use our sites, such as [Staffordshire Pastrack](#), guides to maps online, recent accessions and features by local libraries and the County Archaeologist in the [Guide to Research](#) section. We also have a section that supports the work of one of our volunteer groups researching English Place-names with the [Institute for Name-Studies](#) at Nottingham University.

### ***Minton Archive: Bite-Sized History of Minton and "Folio Frivolity" series***

Beginning in March 2020 and running throughout the summer, the Minton Archive Twitter account published a bite-sized History of Minton, with the website's blog rounding these tweets up on a weekly basis for those not on social media. This was completed in September 2020 and for the remaining part of the year website updates were pushed through to increase the number of online volumes available to browse online. In the new year another lockdown spurred on a new "Folio Frivolity" series of daily tweets highlighting artworks from the Archive's Art & Design folios; as before these are also being brought together on the blog on a regular basis and the series is still ongoing at the time of writing. Behind the scenes digitisation work has continued - mainly within the Art & Design folios, in part to "feed" the Folio Frivolity series! - with more site updates, including further browsable volumes, planned for the near future as a result.

### ***Past Track and Staffordshire Name Indexes***

Staffordshire Past Track has seen a large increase in usage during lockdown. June 2020 was our busiest ever month, with 41,285 visitor sessions (up from 14,469 the for June 2019). Numbers have since dropped back but remain considerably higher than in the pre-COVID era.

Thanks to the help of our volunteers Bob Metcalfe and John Bennett, working remotely from home, we were able to continue adding new resources to the site. 1,953 new images were added during the year, which included the Arthur Lloyd Postcard Collections, around 300 images from the McCann Photograph Collection and 200 glass negatives taken by Albert Henry Yelland. In addition all 283 tithe maps digitized during 2018-19 were added to the site, each with links to their tithe awards indexes and making use of the site's improved 'zoom' facility.

### **Social media**

During the first lockdown period the service focused upon increasing the output of social media, setting up a new volunteers' blog The Learning Room, and producing two newsletters per month instead of one. As a result

- Twitter impressions were up 65%
- Facebook page views up 236%
- Staffordshire Past Track views up 128%
- Engagement became more interactive, with users commenting more frequently

A new YouTube channel was set up for the Staffordshire History Centre with launch of content timed for Staffordshire Day on 1st May 2020. The channel has had 1,432 views and 29 subscribers. The content includes 'Staffordshire Moments' highlighting interesting stories from Staffordshire's history. It also includes 'How to' guides explaining how to search records on Find My Past.

### **Complaints, comments and compliments**

Staffordshire Record Office received 165 compliments and no comments or complaints. Our users appreciated the service we have been able to provide during the pandemic.

"I'm marking dissertations all this week and next. I am just beginning Mariella's on the history of learning disabilities and was reminded of the work you offered to undertake for her after spotting your name in her acknowledgements. I'd really like to thank you for your support to students like her, especially this year with all the difficulties people have faced in terms of accessing archives. Your archive's and your efforts have made a real difference. Many thanks for your help." (Professor Jonathan Reinartz, University of Birmingham)

Stoke-on-Trent City Archives received 432 positive comments/compliments during 2020-2021, this is a significant increase on previous years, but seems to reflect the public's appreciation that the Service was still able to operate in some capacity. They generally consist of thanks from people who didn't expect such full answers when we were closed due to COVID-19, others are general notes of thanks for answers to enquiries and/or for a prompt and helpful service. For example:

"I can't thank you enough for your valuable time and knowledge... I'm now thoroughly fascinated by Spode history! Thank you very, very much."

"Thank you for your great research. I am very grateful for the time spent on it!"

## Events and Exhibitions

Staffordshire History Day did not take place due to Covid restrictions but we made a big effort to be busy on social media, through Twitter and Facebook postings and we established a YouTube channel. During lockdown with our sites closed we used our social media platforms, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to engage with the service users through a variety of activities. These included shorter tasks to engage with the collections such as mystery object puzzles, jigsaws and spot the difference games as well as longer campaigns that focused on active participation and sharing stories. The first of these took place between April and September 2020; 'Sharing Saturday' invited people to send in images of their own objects that were important to them from home, with some information around what the object was and why it was important. Stories included objects from childhood, found objects and mystery objects that the participant wanted help with identifying. Objects revealed participants interests and personalities, for example Helen in Leek shared an object she had found with her new metal detector in Wetley Rocks. This campaign was a way of highlighting the importance of collections of all kinds and offering the public a curatorial voice.

Another campaign across social media took place during the 3<sup>rd</sup> lockdown in early 2021 between February and April based on our ongoing collecting project 'Lockdown Memories' in which we asked the public to share with us their accounts of life in Staffordshire during lockdown. Participants had sent in photographs and filled in questionnaires. We used this information to create posts that showed the positive and uplifting aspects of Lockdown, The posts often focused on resilience, creativity and community. Examples include; a choir group who were able to perform over Zoom and recorded a song together, and a woman in Perton who painted stones and created a trail for children and families to follow and encouraged them to add their own.

In addition to this, we worked regularly with the initiative 'History Begins at Home' which encouraged people of different ages to connect in Lockdown through conversations about the past, asking people to share memories of the structured themes such as 'work' or 'holidays' and sharing images from our collections that people could use in their conversations.

### **CLandage: Building Climate Resilience through Community, Landscapes and Cultural Heritage**

During 2020 the Archives and Heritage Service established a partnership with Liverpool University as part of a wider project to use learning from the past to better understand how communities might adapt to future changes in places and landscapes. The project focuses on three case study areas, the River Eden catchment (Cumbria), Staffordshire and the Outer Hebrides, which are each facing differing climate hazards. This work builds on a previous collaborative PH.D programme with Liverpool University looking at Flood and Drought and its effects on Staffordshire.

The Service team is working with three creative practitioners; Storyteller Maria Whatton, poet Mel Wardle-Woodend and artist Jennifer Collier to develop a series of workshops, walks and events exploring the themes of flood and drought. The memories and stories captured by these events will form part of a planned online exhibition in 2022.

[CLandage: Building Climate Resilience through Community, Landscapes and Cultural Heritage - \(ukclimateresilience.org\)](http://ukclimateresilience.org)

## **Placements**

Due to the various restrictions imposed due to Covid 19 throughout the year we were unable to take any placements. We hope that during the next year we will be able return to having university and school placements.

## **Volunteers**

### ***At Stafford***

Prior to the lockdown being implemented we had suspended all of our volunteering projects. The Service had at that point in excess of 135 volunteers working with us and the challenge was to stay in touch with our volunteers and to support them where we could (see entry on the Learning Blog). Throughout the first lockdown we worked with over 40 volunteers, sending out photocopies and digital copies for them to work on. The appetite for this type of volunteering diminished over the summer and into the second lockdown. We still have volunteers working with us and send out email updates and add to the blog and hold remote meetings, we are now looking forward to returning to onsite volunteering.

### ***At Stoke***

Due to COVID-19 we had to suspend volunteer activity, but in early 2021 we began working with one of our long-term volunteers remotely for the first time. This pilot project was made possible as a series estimate books for Minton pieces produced for International Exhibitions had just been digitised from the Minton Archive. The volunteer began enhanced cataloguing, and interpreting this series of volumes, which will provide invaluable information for researchers (both remotely and during a visit) interested in pieces which featured in the International Exhibitions of the mid-to-late 19th century. Welcoming back further volunteers remotely or physically is sadly not currently a function we are able to accommodate, while undertaking a phased reopening of the service under COVID-19 restrictions, training new staff and recruiting to a vacant post, but when we return to full capacity we shall look forward to re-introducing volunteers.

### ***Partnerships with Universities***

Our partnerships have held us in good stead throughout the last year. The *Small Bills and Petty Finance* project with Keele University continued to delivery volunteer activity throughout the first half of the year. Our Victoria County History partnership led to their volunteer project continuing all year, remotely. Although the *Clandage* projects aims of delivering an exhibition were delayed we have managed to move that activity into the current year with workshops and craft activities taking place. Nottingham University supported our online blog by providing course content for the place-name volunteers. Others provided blog material to help us populate the blog with quality content.

### ***From Lichfield***

The History Access Point at Lichfield, St Mary's remained closed throughout the year as restrictions meant it was unable to open to the public.

### ***At the Museum***

Volunteers have continued to support the development of the museum collections through working remotely over the last year. Bob Metcalfe and John Bennett have both contributed to researching and uploading new content to the Staffordshire Past Track website. Val Hollins and Jean Metcalfe have been transcribing oral history interviews. This has all been extremely valuable to the Service, enabling us to keep our online offer fresh and interesting. Collections Management and Development

## **New Accessions**

### ***Staffordshire Record Office and William Salt Library***

The COVID-19 restrictions meant that we received far fewer new accessions than usual. But as people were at home and sorting out possessions, some personal collections did come to light, whilst some organisations deposited collections during periods when the office was open. We continue to look out for under-represented types of collections, aiming to reflect the County and City in all aspects of its life and people.

In 2020/21 we received 41 accessions at Staffordshire Record Office, including from the Diocese. The total volume of all permanent accessions was 18 boxes (0.54 cubic metres). Every new accession was fully catalogued or had a detailed summary created. No accessions were taken at Stoke City Archives due to the closure of the office for the entire year. Additionally across the Service we had 64 contacts from or to members of the public and local organisations holding records but where no records have as yet been deposited, or where people have been referred to different repositories. So the total of accessions and approaches was 105.

We have continued to receive a wide variety of records reflecting all aspects of Staffordshire life. This included, among personal papers, a set of touching letters (photocopies) from Phillip Gentry, then working at English Electric in Stafford, to his wife Mollie who had become unwell after the birth of their first child in 1937 and was staying first at a sanatorium then with her parents (7805). We also received an album belong to the Sneyd Kynnersley family, one of whom was Commissioner of the Nelson South-West Gold Fields in New Zealand in the mid-19th century (7807); an order relating to the Stourbridge Canal connected to the Gibbons family, 1828 (7817), and a reference file for Drake Hall Training College for Men, belonging to George Highmore, then lecturer in History, 1946-1947 (7839).

We were grateful to our Friends organisation for purchasing three appointment diaries of Charles Bill of Farley, 1876-1880, showing details of the leisured life of a comfortably-off Staffordshire gentleman with social and sporting interests (7820).

Accessions from current organisations included Rolleston-on-Dove Parish Council (D7809), Consall Parish Council (D7818), Anslow Parish Council (7833), Stretton with Claymills parish church (D7827), Betheney Chapter No.376 Rose Croix (Order of Freemasons) (D7815), Staffordshire Quakers (D7835). The largest collection was six boxes of parish magazines from Trysull and Seisdon recording over 100 years of local history, 1899-2019 (D7823). Other civil parish records for Hollinsclough and Alstonefield came from a private source (7806). We also had earlier records for Eccleshall Cricket Club, a scorebook of 1904-1906 (7837), and annual reports of the Staffordshire County Police Court Mission, 1912-1963 (7811).



We were pleased to receive a collection from Walton Hall Special School near Eccleshall from 1948, including attendance records, financial records, plans, photographs and other memorabilia (D7831).



Walton Hall Special School, near Eccleshall, 1958 (D7831)

As usual we had several unusual miscellaneous items. Some items found at a farm in Draycott included a programme for an agricultural exhibition in 1903, an invitation to the dedication of a new organ in 1895, to be played by the organist of Westminster Abbey, and a programme for Tutbury Wesleyan Sunday School 'sale of work' (7810).

Other items of local interest included rent and sale documents from the Wombourne area dating back to 1738 (7836); additional photographs relating to the Edalji case in Great Wyrley with original captions (7838), and photographs of a brand-new County Mobile Library van, formerly in the possession of Will Ingham who was involved in establishing this service in the years after WWII (7832).



Wombourne rent book, 1750-1751 (D7836)

From the furthest distance, we received a deed of 1760 relating to land and a pew in Cheadle, that came from America, having been found taped to a piece of furniture (7813). Other deeds

related to the Tean, Checkley and Forsbrook area, including "Mrs Holbroke's joynture" of 1708, our oldest document received in 2020/21 (7816).

A total of 142 new accessions, which included fifty-five book purchases, were acquired by the William Salt Library over the year. Most of these purchases related to Staffordshire, railways, pottery industry, crime, histories of individual places in the County as well as biographies of Staffordshire people.

### **Stoke on Trent City Archives**

Due to the absence of an Archivist and the fact that we were unable to actively bring in accessions as we normally would due to COVID-19, only one item was accessioned.

During the first lockdown thanks to the generosity of our Friends (FoSSA), an auction lot was purchased for us. It was a Log Book for Meir Council School, Stoke-on-Trent, 1928-1948 (SD 1880). This log book is the latest in the series of the three log books which are now held at Stoke-on-Trent- City- Archives, recording the contemporary history of the school as it unfolded, in the form of a diary.



Meir Board School Mixed Department Log Books (1877-1900 and 1900-1928) and the newly purchased Meir Council School Log Book (1928-1948).

This particular log book documents performances, celebrations, local anniversaries and sporting triumphs. It contains several programmes. The Christmas 1945 play programme, is closely followed in the volume with the announcement of an influenza epidemic which seriously affected the staff, the headmaster became ill and 5 staff were absent at one point! On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1929 Empire Day (24<sup>th</sup> May) was celebrated early as it fell during the holiday period: "The Infants and Mixed Departments combined for the singing of suitable hymns and saluting the Flag". The school was also involved in the Wedgwood Bicentenary Pageant.

There are also useful observations regarding not only the school, but of Meir itself, including this entry about the large increase in pupils in 4 years between 1924/25 and 1928/29 attributed

to a large amount of house building. There are also many references to the use of the chapel in addition to the school building to accommodate some classes, so it was interesting to read here that new school buildings had finally been completed.

We received 24 approaches during 2020-2021 which we put on hold until we had an Archivist in post, those approaches will be followed up and actioned in due course.

### ***Staffordshire County Museum***

54 objects were accessioned, including objects, samples and marketing materials from Universal Grinding Wheel in Stafford. Two large photograph collections were acquired: 700 images from Codsall & Bilbrook local History Society and 1,300 photographs of Kinver Edge and Rock Houses. We were also able to purchase 'Shepherds in Arcady', an early painting by Mabel Frances Layng.



'Shepherds in Arcady', oil on canvas, 1906-07, Mabel Frances Layng (1881-1937)

## **Cataloguing Progress During Lockdown**

### ***Staffordshire and Lichfield Collections***

During lockdown we completed the major task of making all our outstanding paper catalogues available through Gateway to the Past. Over 20,000 new entries from well over 1000 separate accessions and representing nearly 600 boxes in terms of bulk. There are now only a handful of outstanding paper lists to be input representing only a very small percentage of our holdings at Staffordshire Record Office. Some of this work has been done by volunteers (over 3100 entries). We also completed work started in the last weeks in March 2020 of putting a collection level description online for all uncatalogued accessions, for which we are now at 99.4% online. This includes collections formerly at Lichfield Record Office. As well as greatly improving the accessibility of our collections, this project will contribute to Archives Accreditation in the next review.

Meanwhile, the museum team have been working on updating location codes on CALM following the move from Shugborough to the new stores at Beacon Business Park in Stafford.

With the help of volunteer Eleanor Copp, this work is now 95.3% complete, well ahead of schedule.

In terms of William Salt Library additions to the on-line catalogue a total of 4,981 new item records were created during the year. In addition to this 1,667 new name authority records were also created to support the entries on the catalogue. Work on the existing William Salt Library collection has centred around editing existing catalogued records on the online catalogue through the removal of many shelf specific references, which will be irrelevant when the collection eventually moves out of the current building, as well as enhancing references elsewhere in the collection.

Considerable work has been carried out on the cataloguing backlog. This included the work carried out as part of the development phase of the NLHF project to repackage and box in archival standard materials the Mottram collection which is one of the largest collections within the backlog. This also created a brief content listing to the collection, which will be useful when the cataloguing eventually takes place. Work has also taken place to reduce the backlog through the cataloguing of eleven separate journal titles along with their constituent articles and these series have now been added to the collection. Collection level descriptions have been created on the online catalogue for collections that are currently waiting to be catalogued, thus making the identification of these collections in the back log much easier. This work generated almost five hundred individual records to the catalogue and culminated in total of 844 retrospective records being completed during the year.

### ***Volunteer support for cataloguing projects***

**Bawdy Courts Project:** the Tuesday faculty volunteers needed access to the original case papers but two members of the group continued to support the cataloguing work remotely by typing up descriptions of over 1,100 faculty case bundles and adding detail about architects from online resources. They have now begun the task of creating a new resource for Staffordshire Name Indexes using the online catalogue. Staff have also been able to work remotely to support the Bawdy Courts project by converting old card indexes to basic catalogue entries.

**Quarter Sessions Rolls project:** The volunteers' work on this long-running project entered a new and very challenging phase, working from home on photocopies or scans of Quarter Sessions rolls, without the support of fellow volunteers. With the help of Teams and the prospect of getting back on site this project continues to make headway.

**The Bradford Collection:** volunteers have continued to work remotely using scanned documents and staff have added all the Bradford volunteers' detailed descriptions of 91 key documents/bundles of correspondence to the catalogue, improving the searchability of the collection for a wide range of subjects, as diverse as military history, architecture, mental health and bereavement. Cataloguing on the collection has progressed this year thanks to the input of the William Salt Librarian who has added descriptions of 529 maps to CALM.

**William Salt Library:** Through the efforts of one of our volunteers, who has been remotely working during the pandemic, the contents of sixty-six volumes of the Transactions of the North Staffordshire Field Club journal have been listed during the year and have been subsequently added to the online catalogue. This comprised a total of 1,257 individual articles being added to the catalogue and will greatly enhance the accessibility of this important Staffordshire journal.

## ***Services to the County Council***

The County Archive Service is responsible for the day-to-day management of the County Council's deeds of property and associated legal documents, as well as the formal archives of the County Council. This service includes: the accessioning, cataloguing and indexing of deeds of new properties and other legal documents; the identification and retrieval of deeds and other records for officers in the County Council for day-to-day business activity; and provision for the ongoing security of the County Council's legal documents.

Over the last year the deeds clerk came on site every week in order to support legal staff working from home. She located and scanned relevant documents so that fewer deeds left the site and to minimise contact. During the first lockdown she also took the opportunity to catch up with accessioning new deeds to reduce the backlog as much as possible prior to the anticipated reduction in staffing following the service restructure

Figures for the previous year, 2018/2019, are given in brackets.

Number of deed packets retrieved and issued: 567 (583) and 10 issues to Fire Service

Number of files retrieved and issued to H.M. Coroners: 27

Number of new deed packets accessioned and indexed: 367 (413)

Volumes of SCC committee minutes catalogued: 10 (21)

## ***Stoke on Trent City Archives***

For the majority of the last year (2020-2021) the Archivist post at Stoke-on-Trent City Archives has been vacant, so there was generally no capacity for cataloguing, although one item was catalogued which was an auction purchase during the period (covered separately in the report). However, progress is now being made, as in Spring 2021 Meriel Lees and Rebecca Jackson took up the post as a job share, and since then 10 outstanding accessions have been accessioned and catalogued and are available on the online catalogue. Thanks also to the new Archivists, an additional catalogue is now available on Gateway to the Past, which is the Records of James Brindley High School and predecessor institutions (181 new records on Gateway to the Past since April 2021).

## **Preservation and Conservation**

During our lockdown periods regular building inspections were undertaken. These included building walk rounds – internal and external – opening up each room within the buildings, including strongrooms, checking for leaks, etc. Regular flushing of taps and toilets, along with regular buildings checks to include fire testing, etc. These checks were carried out by two members of staff, twice a week at each site. Contractor visits continued throughout this period, strictly by appointment, to ensure regular servicing and any subsequent repair work was undertaken.

Twice weekly checks in the museum and archive collection outstores were undertaken to make sure that our environmental and pest mentoring programmes were maintained, and that the buildings continue to provide good conditions for the care of objects, photographs and documents.

The Strongrooms at Stoke-on-Trent City Archives have been regularly checked throughout the Pandemic. Our Archive Assistants have been ordering, box listing and repackaging various

collections including the slides in the Godden Collection and the Minton, Solon and Doulton Libraries.

No conservation work was completed on collections in 2020/2021 due to the retirement of the Senior Conservator in July 2020. The vacancy was held until completion of the service restructure was completed. A new conservator is due to take up their post in June 2021.

## Staff changes and training

The service saw an unprecedented number of staff changes due to retirements, resignations and a service reorganization. The following staff left the service as a result of retirement: Chris Latimer (City Archivist) and Liz Cooper (Archive Assistant) at the end of March 2020, Beryl Jones (Strongroom Assistant) in April, Richard Nichols (Senior Conservator) and Catherine Nichols (Archivist) in July, Moira Lewis (Public Service Manager) in March 2021 and Tim Groom (Senior Archivist) in April 2021.

Jenny Lewis (Archive Assistant) left through resignation for a new role in October 2020.

In April 2021-May 2021 the following staff left as a result of the reorganization: Anita Caithness (Archive Assistant), Kevin Briggs (Archive Assistant), and Howard Dixon (Digital Officer).

The loss of so many longstanding staff was sad but all were wished success for their future. We were also able to arrange handover sessions to ensure valuable knowledge was handed onto the new staff in the service.

A number of new staff joined the service or moved to new roles at Stoke on Trent City Archives: Louise Ferriday becoming Archives Manager, Meriel Lees and Rebecca Jackson job share the archivist role at Stoke, Hayley Underwood is the new Archive Assistant. Hayley and Meriel are both covering the vacancy of Public Service Manager pending recruitment later this year.

At the county Archives and Heritage Service all staff moved to new roles from 1 May with implementation of the new structure:

Chris Copp Collections Manager	Liz Street, Dominic Farr, Rebecca Jackson - Collections Officers Conservator is currently vacant
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Matthew Blake Engagement and Access Manager	Helen Johnson Community Engagement & Partnerships Officer, Volunteer Coordinator Mel Williamson, Digital Officer Ben Cunliffe
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Julie O'Neill History Centre Supervisor	Laura Clarke, Henni Martinez, Jo Peck, Bev Sutherland and one vacancy - History Centre Assistants
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During the year staff managed to attend a number of online training courses including digital preservation, iManage management training for county staff, data protection and cyber security training.

## Performance

The Joint Archive Service works to a three year forward plan and developed a ten-year vision in 2015 which was reviewed in 2018. 2020–21 is the second year of delivery of the revised plan. The key objectives are focused on:

- ❖ Developing an active partnership approach.
- ❖ Delivering resilience and sustainability.
- ❖ Reaching and engaging with a wide range of people and building new audiences.
- ❖ Sharing knowledge across the UK.
- ❖ Increasing our online presence and remote access.

The Archive and Heritage Service collects detailed statistics about all areas of its work shown at Appendix 1 to the report. This covers personal use, distance use and online use of the service. There are five local performance indicators which the service measures against:

1. Use of the service
2. Attendances at events, talks, education and community visits
3. Volunteer hours
4. Customer satisfaction
5. Use of Collections (changed indicator)

During 2020/21 in person visits were significantly reduced or zero at sites due to COVID-19 restrictions. Online activity was increased and this resulted in more online visits and enquiries. In total this meant use of the service increased by 38% compared to the previous year.

There were no physical events, group visits or talks during 2020/21. Two online talks were delivered by museum staff which generated 68 attendances.

Onsite volunteering was suspended during the year but a new remote offer was developed which engaged approximately 40 volunteers. The number of hours contributed is reduced by 36% but given the difficult circumstances this is still a really positive level of engagement with the service.

Customer satisfaction has been measured through the audience research survey completed this year outlined earlier in the report. Responses rated the current service at 97.5% satisfaction though users wanted to see improvements to the offer. This is a slight increase on the previous year.

The indicator for collections has been changed this year to reflect how many items are consulted or on loan. This is to reflect use of the collection rather than how many items are added each year. An outturn for 2019/20 has been calculated to compare against 2020/21. Whilst the number of items on loan dropped slightly the reduction in documents consulted decreased significantly due to onsite service closures as a result of COVID-19. In total it was a 63% reduction.

## Acknowledgements

Without the support, dedication and sheer hard work of our staff and volunteers the Archive and Heritage Service could not deliver such a wide range of work all towards the aim of bringing archives to the widest audience possible. The support from members of the Joint Archive Committee is also very much appreciated. I would like to thank everyone for their contribution in 2020-2021.

### Staff

Staffordshire Record Office: Matthew Blake, Laura Clarke, Ben Cunliffe, Howard Dixon, Tim Groom, Rebecca Jackson, Beryl Jones, Catherine Nichols, Richard Nichols, Julie O'Neill, Liz Street, Bev Sutherland, Mel Williamson.

Lichfield: Kevin Briggs, Anita Caithness, Jenny Lewis, Henrietta Martinez, Joanne Peck.

Stoke on Trent City Archives: Louise Ferriday, Andrew Dawson, Meriel Lees, Moira Lewis, Mandy Pover, Hayley Underwood.

William Salt Library: Dominic Farr.

County Museum: Chris Copp, Helen Johnson, Mel Williamson, Howard Dixon.

### Volunteers

Normally a full list of all the volunteers in the service would be listed. This year as a result of COVID-19 it was not possible to maintain contact with all of our volunteers. We thank everyone who volunteered their time for the service this year and fully appreciate the difficult circumstances everyone has experienced. We were really pleased to receive feedback from our volunteers on how they have welcomed keeping in touch with us.

### Friends of the Archive Service (FoSSA)

Our thanks to the committee and members for their support throughout the year: Dianne Barre, Andrew George, Sue Gregory, Val Gannon, Malcolm Price, Andrew Sargent, Richard Totty.

### Joint Archive Committee 2020/2021

Elected members of Staffordshire County Council: Victoria Wilson (Vice-Chair), Gill Burnett, Mike Davies (Observer).

Substitute members: Mark Sutton, Janet Eagland

Elected members of Stoke on Trent City Council: Lorraine Beardmore (Chair)

Substitute member: Janine Bridges



# Appendix 1

## Part 1

### Public Service Statistics – Financial Year 2020/2021 (2019/2020 in brackets)

	STAFFORD	STOKE	BURTON	TOTAL
<b>PERSONAL USE</b>				
Total number of individual visits	204 (3,476)	0* (1,791)	0* (164)	204 (5,431)
Total number of documents produced	2,186 (11,769)	0* (994)	N/A	2,186 (13,719)
Total number of museum objects on display				4,204 (4,800)
Total number of Ordnance Survey maps and local studies items produced for consultation	256 (494)	0* (1,026)	0* (315)	256 (1,341)
<b>DISTANCE USE</b>				
Total number of email/postal enquiries	2,734 (2,328)	829 (715)	N/A	3,563 (3,043)
Total number of telephone enquiries	266 (1,109)	0* (695)	Not recorded	266 (1,804)
<b>REPROGRAPHICS SERVICES</b>				

Total number of photocopies/ microprints supplied and total number of orders (including scanning)	1,459 (1,458)	284 (312)	N/A	1,743 (1,770)
Total number of photographic orders	173 (113)	25 (N/A)	N/A	198 (113)
Total number of photographic permits issued	68 (193)	0* (43)	N/A	68 (236)

\*Nil due to service closure during  
COVID-19

#### **RESEARCH SERVICES**

Total hours of research for the public, and	91.98 (72)	3.4 (20.5)	N/A	95.38 (92.5)
total number of orders	68 (107)	5 (10)	N/A	73 (117)

#### **ONLINE USE**

Total number of website visitor sessions				77,449 (47,386)
Total number of visitor sessions to online catalogue				22,776 (21,205)
Total number of visitor sessions on Staffordshire Name Indexes website				22,312 (15,305)
Staffordshire Past Track				347,537 (212,432)

Social media streams (FB reach, Twitter impressions and Instagram likes)

2,365,998 (1,966,822)

#### **OUTREACH ACTIVITY**

Total number of attendees at Archive & Heritage Service events

68 (659)

Total number of volunteer hours (from 2020/21 includes museum volunteer hours)

4,024 (5,112)

#### **Part 2**

#### **Performance Monitoring against Service Targets**

**Monitoring was suspended during COVID-19 for 2020/21 figures are shown for the previous year 2019/20**

	<b>STAFFORD</b>	<b>STOKE</b>	<b>BURTON</b>
Postal / email enquiries Reply within 5 working days (simple)	100%	81% (96%)	N/A
Postal / email enquiries Reply within 20 working days (complex)	100%	100% (N/A)	N/A
Photocopy orders Reply within 8 working days at Stafford Reply within 6 working days at Stoke	98%	79% (100%)	N/A
Accession receipts Sent out within 12 days	100%	0* (100%)	N/A

**Part 3**  
**Local Performance Indicators 2020/21**

Performance indicator	Outturn 2019/2020	Outturn 2020/2021
<b>1. Use of Service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal visits</li> <li>- Online visits</li> <li>- Email, postal and telephone enquiries and orders</li> </ul>	1,085,369	1,505,087
<b>2. Engagement with the Service</b> Attendances at <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Events and celebrations</li> <li>- Talks by our staff</li> <li>- Educational and community group visits to our offices</li> </ul>	659	68
<b>3. Number of volunteer hours</b>	5,112	3,274
<b>4. Customer satisfaction</b> Percentage of users expressing satisfaction with overall services and facilities	96% (for distance use)	97.5% (from audience research survey)
<b>5. Use of collections</b> (new indicator) Number of documents/objects consulted and on display	17,261	6,390