

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee 23 February 2012

Digitisation of key family history collections

Recommendation(s)

1. That this report informing the Committee about the proposal to digitise key family history sources is received.
2. That the Committee agree to the Joint Archive Service commissioning a commercial partner to deliver this project as a partnership.

Report of Director for Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Place (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Adult and Neighbourhood Services (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The reasons for recommending that Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service pursue this project include:
 - World wide access to the Archive Service's most heavily used collections
 - Generation of income to help support the care of these archives
 - Meeting user demand for online access
 - Enables the Service to devote more time to developing work with communities to raise awareness of archives that relate to their place and raise pride in their local heritage
 - Ensures Staffordshire is not left behind as other archive services deliver access online in this way (London Metropolitan Archives, Dorset History Centre, Liverpool, Manchester, Warwickshire and Cheshire are amongst services which have already launched their content online).
 - Meeting objectives of the government policy on Archives

Background

4. The Joint Archive Service has been preserving archive collections and making them available for public access in a variety of ways for over 65 years. The heavy user demand for access to family history resources has meant that these collections have previously been microfilmed to provide a surrogate so that original can be preserved and allow access from several service points around the county and city. There is increasing demand to view these resources online through commercial family history websites such as Ancestry.com and Find My Past. This trend was initiated by the National Archives over ten years ago when the 1901 census was published online and they have continued to develop their online service. The government policy,

Archives for the 21st Century, encourages local authority archive services to do the same.

5. The scope of the project will cover digitisation of the most heavily used and name rich sources for family history. These will include:

- Parish registers for the historic county of Staffordshire including Stoke-on-Trent and the Black Country. These records are held at the County Record Office and cover approximately 170 ancient parishes and 170 modern parishes which equates to around 3,417 registers and several million names. Only registers deposited with the Archive Service will be included; those still held by parish churches or in other archive services will not be included. The records date from 1538 to the present day and are the key source for family history from 1837 backwards as they record baptisms, marriages and burials within the established church. The cut off date for the project will be 1900 to avoid issues with Data Protection and protect privacy.
- Marriage bonds and allegations for the Diocese of Lichfield which are held by Lichfield Record Office. These records are the papers which survive when a couple apply for a marriage licence to enable them to marry more quickly or with more status. There are approximately 180,600 records which cover Staffordshire, Derbyshire, northern Shropshire and parts of Warwickshire which offers a regional dimension to the project. These records date from 1617 to 1900.
- Wills and inventories for the Diocese of Lichfield held at Lichfield Record Office. Alongside the parish registers these records are also a key source for family history recording information about families and the descendants of the testator. The wills date from 1521 until 1858 when the process of proving a will passed from the ecclesiastical courts to the civil courts and so this will be the cut off date. Again because the Lichfield Diocese is large it covers more than just Staffordshire. There are approximately 250,000 wills which is approximately 1 million names (based on models used by another archive service). In addition the Archive Service volunteers at Lichfield have been indexing these records which currently cover 1650-1730. These indexes are currently available on the Staffordshire Name Indexes website but would be included in the project to add value, quality and maximise income generated.

6. For the past ten months the Archive Service has been working on ensuring that permissions for the use of the original material are required. As all of the records come under the remit of the Lichfield Diocese the Service has carried out consultation with the Diocesan Registrar and the three Archdeacons who cover Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. The process has been aided by the full cooperation of the Diocese who agreed to the project on behalf of the parishes in the county and the city rather than consulting with individual parishes. Parishes have had the opportunity to comment through the visitation process carried out by Archdeacons. Further permissions are being sought to include the marriage bonds and allegations and wills within the scope of the project. The Archive Service has also already received presentations from the

two main companies, Find My Past and Ancestry.com, as part of the exploration of this channel of access.

7. The Legal Services team have been working on the Proposal Document with the Archive Service using a model document from Dorset History Centre. It is intended that this proposal will be completed by April with a view to inviting commercial family history companies to bid against the proposal to become the partner in this project in May. Estimated timescales are completion of contract details by mid summer ready to start digitisation in late summer/early autumn. The digitisation process can take about 9-12 months depending on how it is carried out.

8. Digitisation will mainly be from existing master microfilm or fiche which the Archive Service holds from its own microfilming programme and also from those carried out by other organisations pending clearance of permissions. This is the preferred method by the commercial companies as it is quicker, limits handling of the original documents and simplifies the process. There are microfilms/microfiche held for some parts of the three series of documents. However there will still be digitisation from originals where there is no film copy or where the quality is insufficient to provide a suitable image.

9. The commercial partner will be responsible for digitisation, indexing of the sources, quality assurance, delivery via their commercial pay per view or subscription site, and marketing and branding the site as the Archive Service content. Royalties will be paid based on terms agreed in the contract and their estimation of the image views. Estimates of likely income are difficult to provide as other similar archive services are bound by commercial confidentiality. However it is anticipated that this will generate an additional £10-15,000 income for the service. It should also be noted that the launch of content online will also affect existing income generated through the provision of photocopies and research which needs to be factored into any predictions.

10. Clearly there are many other benefits including meeting customer demand for content online and reaching a far wider audience than is currently possible. This has been tested through surveys, consultation groups, monitoring customer comments and also national surveys such as the Taking Part Survey 2011 which stated that people want to access archive sources online. This represents a very significant step forward for the Archive Service and a new way of delivery involving a commercial partnership.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

The digitisation of key sources accessible through a commercial website will offer alternative channels of access but not replace the free onsite Archive Service. The proposal stipulates free online access to be available at Archive Service sites.

Legal implications:

The proposal has been developed with the Legal Services team who have ensured that the Joint Archive Service contract with an external supplier is robust and offers the Service value for money.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The proposal places the most emphasis on achieving the best royalty deal for the Archive Service and will require guaranteed royalties for at least three years. The Head of Procurement has also been consulted to ensure that the Archive Service achieves value for money with the project. The project will require Archive Service staff time to manage it and ensure that the end product is of high quality.

Risk implications:

The cost and risks of digitisation, development of front end delivery will be on the commercial partner's side. The Archive Service will ensure that the contract enhances the reputation of the Service and its parent authorities through close involvement in the management and delivery of the project.

Climate Change implications:

Direct delivery of online access to key sources will help to minimise some travel around the county.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

No significant implications.

Report author:

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List of Background Papers

Papers	Contact/Directorate/ext number
Proposal to Digitise Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Sources	Joanna Terry/Place/ x8370
Local Customer Survey Nov 2011	
Taking Part Survey 2011	