

The National Archives Accreditation Visit to Suffolk Archives at The Hold

Archive Service Accreditation is a UK wide quality standard which offers a benchmark for gauging performance, recognising achievement and driving improvement within the archives sector. It is awarded by the UK Archive Service Accreditation Committee, representing the entire archive sector. It is supported by a UK-wide partnership of The National Archives (TNA), National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Welsh Government through its Museums Archives and Libraries Wales Division, Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), Scottish Council on Archives, and Archives and Records Council Wales.

Archive Service Accreditation recognises good performance in all areas of archive service delivery. Accredited Archive Services ensure the long-term collection, preservation and accessibility of our archive heritage.

By achieving Provisional Archive Service Accreditation status in March 2019 Suffolk Record Office now Suffolk Archives (SA) demonstrated it met clearly defined national standards relating to management and resourcing; the care of its unique collections and service offered to a range of users. The National Archives were originally planning to visit The Hold in Spring/Summer 2020 to present the then Suffolk Record Office with its Provisional Accreditation Certificate. This was delayed due to Covid and is now happening today.

Progression to full Accredited Archive Service status was in 2019 subject to areas of planned development and transformation as part of the project entitled *The Hold: A Suffolk Archive Service for the 21st Century*, being delivered to the latest national guidance and the highest standards of care. For example by completing the new Heritage and Archives Centre in Ipswich – The Hold - to replace the existing Ipswich Record Office in Gatacre Road and moving the collections into this improved accommodation.

The Hold is a partnership between Suffolk County Council (SCC) and the University of Suffolk (UoS). It has been made possible thanks to support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), SCC, UoS, Coastal Communities Fund, New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership for Norfolk and Suffolk, Ipswich Borough Council, The Garfield Weston and The Wolfson Foundations, TNA and the generosity of many local heritage organisations, other bodies, and individuals across Suffolk.

Alongside a new bespoke heritage facility for the county's archives, The Hold project provides greater access to Suffolk's archives through a wide range of events and activities across the county, bringing people closer to Suffolk's history than ever before.

In 2019 The Archive Service Accreditation Panel *"admired the vision and extensive development activity which were making The Hold project possible. The new premises would mark a step change in preservation management for the county's archives and offer an exciting venue for audiences. They welcomed the project's positive recognition of the need to reach out to broader communities across the area, with a varied access offer that meets their needs, and at multiple locations."*

They stated that *“The Hold is more than a building project, it is clearly seen as a development opportunity for the service, its partners and stakeholders, and the communities of Suffolk’... The investment in the service from external partners, national funders and Suffolk County Council is a welcome recognition of the value and impact of the service’s work.”*

The Hold was formally opened in September 2021 by HRH The Duke of Gloucester and the whole project is due to be completed later this month. The project helped safeguarded the collections in passive state of the art strongrooms with accrual space for 20 years. As a result of preparation work undertaken for the move, the collections are now better packaged and, in some cases, documented. In addition, The Hold has facilities, which allow SA to carry out new preservation and collections management functions e.g. Conservation, Digitisation and Cataloguing workrooms. There has also been some contemporary collecting which helped to make the collections more representative.

The searchroom at Lowestoft was also refreshed and remodelled in 2019-2020 to offer a brighter, more visitor-friendly and flexible space, including new interpretation, whilst the public spaces at the Bury St Edmunds branch were reconfigured and a new display area introduced in 2021-2022.

The project has successfully engaged with a wide range of people introducing them to archives – particularly through exhibitions, volunteering, and Sharing Suffolk Stories community projects and events. This has also led to the collections starting to become more representative of Suffolk. There is good evidence of the strong impact of the activity plan projects on individuals and communities, especially in terms of developing the skills and confidence of participants. They have enjoyed new experiences and there is strong evidence that volunteers feel volunteering at Suffolk Archives has enabled them to develop new skills, make a difference, feel part of the local community, meet new people and improve their well-being.

Visitor surveys suggest The Hold is attracting a younger audience than previously - 59% of respondents were aged 45 and above (compared with 78% at the Ipswich branch in 2016). 94% of respondents had a Suffolk postcode. There is also evidence that events and activities attracted a younger audience who were new to Suffolk Archives. The Archives on Tour travelling exhibition trailer has been particularly effective at engaging new and countywide audience.

Some of the success of this engagement and increased representation is due to the strong partnerships and collaborations the service developed especially with a larger number of departments within the UoS. The University (one of the UK’s newest universities) was founded by and for the community and their partnership with SA provides the university with unique resources right on its doorstep encouraging students and lecturers from across the various faculties to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise and gain work experience.

The project also employed 7 paid internships (12-week placements) and 4 trainees (one year each). There is evidence these roles helped develop the skills and confidence of the internships/trainees.

SA's new school's projects support learning giving pupils a wider perspective into Suffolk and the world. Feedback on the school sessions and learning resources developed online, loan boxes etc from the teachers and pupils is very positive. (22 new school and other learning resources were created during the project and Continuing Professional Development sessions for teachers delivered).

Suffolk Archive Service will be using the lessons learned from the project to support its application for full Accreditation in March 2023 and should hear the outcome in July 2023.

VIP attendees

- Jeff James the Chief Executive and Keeper of The National Archives (TNA)
- Dr Val Johnson, Director of Research and Development who is also on the Executive Team of TNA
- Baroness (Ros) Scott of Needham Market who is a non-executive member of TNA Board
- [REDACTED], Sector Development Manager East and Arts
- Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk - Clare, Countess of Euston, Custos Rotulorum and President of The Friends of Suffolk Archives
- Geoffrey Probert, DL
- Sir Christopher and Lady Howes, DL
- Councillor Robert Everitt, Chairman of SCC
- Councillor Bobby Bennett, SCC Cabinet Member Equality and Communities
- [REDACTED], Executive Director of Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, SCC
- [REDACTED], Head of Economic Development, SCC
- Professor Helen Langton, Vice Chancellor of The University of Suffolk (UoS)
- Mark Pendlington, DL Chair of the Board of Directors for the UoS
- Tim Greenacre, Chief Operating Officer, UoS
- Councillor John Cook, Mayor of Ipswich
- Dr Peter Funnell, Chair, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
- [REDACTED], Chair of Suffolk Pride

Programme

Morning Private Tour by The National Archives

Greeting party:- [REDACTED], Operations Manager, [REDACTED], Marcomms Officer, [REDACTED], Commercial Manager, [REDACTED] Senior Archivist, [REDACTED] Strategic Manager.)

- The National Archives Team arrive for their private tour starting with coffee c10.30 in the Wolfson/Education Room
- 2 minutes silence observed at 11.00 with social media photo op for TNA to post.
- Informal chat in the Wolfson/Education Room with [REDACTED], Volunteer Engagement Co-ordinator, and [REDACTED], Community Learning Officer (West) on the Volunteering and Outreach Programme and [REDACTED] on the Commercial Opportunities.

- TNA Team tour The Hold building 11.30-13.00 (Tour guides, [REDACTED], Marcomms Officer, [REDACTED], Operations Manager, [REDACTED], Strategic Manager)
 - The Street including the Café, Shop, current exhibition in The Gallery, and semi-permanent exhibitions including The Reveal Wall, Valarie Irwin Waterfront charcoal sketches, Kirby Map, Suffolk Medal. ([REDACTED] in The Shop).
 - Walk through the garden and in through the loading bay to follow the flow of the archives into the building including, Transit, Cleaning and Drying, Accessioning and Cataloguing rooms ([REDACTED], Senior Archivist in Cataloguing with some treasures from SA collections).
 - Upper strongroom, Conservation and Digitisation Workrooms ([REDACTED], Conservator, with examples of recently repaired/cleaned maps in Conservation).
 - Staffroom, Office, Meeting Room with view of John Blatchly Local Studies Library from above introductions to any staff enroute. ([REDACTED] Heritage Trainees, likely to be in the Office during the tour.)
 - Downstairs strongroom, Productions Room, Searchroom and John Blatchly Local Studies Library ([REDACTED] on the rota.)
 - Breakout area at the top of the Auditorium, Auditorium and Seminar Rooms.
 - 13.15 Finish back at the Wolfson Room for lunch with invited guests.

Afternoon Programme with invited VIP, UoS, Heritage Organisations, Community Partner etc guests

- Volunteers on duty in The Hold Car Park to meet and greet guests 12.45 onwards.
- Guests start to arrive 13.00.
- Buffet lunch 13.15-14.00 (SA attendees [REDACTED], Operations Manager, [REDACTED], Marcomms Officer, [REDACTED], Commercial Manager, [REDACTED], Senior Archivist, [REDACTED], Strategic Manager, [REDACTED], Volunteer Engagement Co-ordinator, [REDACTED], Community Learning Officer (West), and [REDACTED], Conservator.)
- Introductions
- Video update on the work of Suffolk Archive Service – one year on from the Royal Opening in September 2021
- Presentation(s) from University of Suffolk on partnership developments between Suffolk Archives and University Schools – [REDACTED], Course Leader, BA (Hons) History and [REDACTED], Associate Professor English and Creative Writing, Associate Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange (School of Social Sciences and Humanities).
- TNA Presentation of the Archive Accreditation Certificate to Suffolk Archives including photos.
- Tea
- Guests depart