

A YEAR IN ARCHIVES

2018



TRUST

Democracy and society are strengthened by scrutiny of the archival record, holding institutions and individuals to account.

Gloucestershire Archives have completed an 18-month project to appraise and catalogue the records of Gloucestershire County Council, focusing on records created by the Social Services and Education departments. The project developed against the national background of historic abuse enquiries, and the council seeking reassurance that they were responding appropriately to these investigations.

Following a voluntary examination of the council's record-keeping practices relating to the safeguarding of children and the handling of historic abuse allegations, Gloucestershire Archives was able to secure additional corporate funding towards cataloguing these records. Two of the service's most experienced archivists worked in tandem on the project for 18 months, utilising their extensive experience of Gloucestershire's corporate structure, and surveying over 5,000 files. Records relating to the care of children were prioritised and catalogued, while existing catalogue descriptions were enhanced, and new descriptions were created for previously uncatalogued material. This cataloguing framework can now be utilised across the council's corporate record collections, allowing for future efficiency and accuracy when describing these records. Consistent closure periods were also established and applied across the collections. The project helped to establish exactly what Social Service and Education records have survived, and has highlighted gaps in collections. In the future, knowledge of these gaps will help to inform the ongoing development of collections.

Because of the project, full catalogue descriptions are now available and comprehensive administrative histories compiled for institutions, organisations and services. This has enabled the council to demonstrate the extent of their historic administrative responsibilities, identifying those institutions that were, and were not, responsible for in the past. Gloucestershire County Council now have a comprehensive and accurate resource that they can use effectively when responding to historic abuse enquiries.



The project has enabled Gloucestershire County Council to speak with authority as to their children's care records.

Heather Forbes, Head of Archives Service,
Gloucestershire County Council

ENRICHMENT

Archives enhance and enrich our society intellectually, culturally and economically.

As part of ongoing collections development work, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies realised that their collections did not sufficiently capture and document the lives of ordinary people across the county from the 1950s onwards. This was particularly true of records documenting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) lives. For example, although the Chester section of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality was one of the most active, and despite the group's origins in North West England, relatively few of these records have survived locally.

As well as a public appeal for documents reflecting LGBT histories to address gaps in collections, the service has been involved in a Heritage Lottery funded project 'From Prejudice to Pride' led by Body Positive Cheshire and North Wales, a charity working for and with people who want to improve their sexual health, sexuality or those living with HIV. 'From Prejudice to Pride' resulted in the organisation depositing their records with the service, a research guide and an exhibition at Weaver Hall Museum, the first time that archives had been used to celebrate LGBT lives locally. The project also involved knowledge exchange with Silver Rainbows, Body Positive's network for the older LGBT community. Following oral history training, the group interviewed one another to collect testimonies that will help the service to include voices that were previously missing from the stories told by Cheshire's collections.

The annual 'Take Pride in Ageing' conference for health and social care service providers across the North West celebrated the achievements of the project and archive staff were on hand to promote the value of archives. They were able to suggest records that could remind the community of past LGBT venues and spaces in Chester for reminiscence work, allowing future health and social care initiatives to be more inclusive and reflective of different life experiences.



© Body Positive



From Prejudice to Pride has helped to unlock a treasure trove of stories and hidden histories, highlighting an incredible past of activism and celebrating Cheshire's LGBT communities.

Claire Mooney, Patron, Silver Rainbows

OPENNESS

Archives cultivate an open approach to knowledge and are accessible to all.

Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives developed the Women's Hall project in partnership with four organisations: Four Corners, Alternative Arts, The East End Women's Museum and Numbi Arts. Named after the East London Federation of Suffragettes' (ELFS) former headquarters in Bow, the Women's Hall went beyond the famous individuals of the movement by exploring lesser-known suffrage stories from East London.

The project featured two exhibitions and a series of weekly events based on the inclusive and proactive work of the suffragettes. Events included banner-making activities, a workshop on delivering activist speeches and a talk about Indian suffragettes, which provided a different perspective and resonated with new audiences. The events were supported by 95 volunteers and were free of charge to ensure that everyone could participate.

The community spirit and support demonstrated by the suffragettes was central to the Women's Hall and so collaborating organisations created events inspired by the federation's welfare initiatives. While fighting for working women's rights during the First World War, the East London suffragettes had opened a toy factory with a crèche so that working-class mothers could earn a living. In honour of this, Four Corners funded childcare for women to attend a photography skills workshop and to share their stories. Tower Hamlets Archives replicated a suffragette cost-price restaurant by opening a pay-what-you-can café and serving over 500 meals. Run in collaboration with Fare Share, a food redistribution charity, the café drew attention to the ongoing issue of food poverty in East London and fostered a welcoming atmosphere. Before visiting the café, many new visitors toured the service's exhibition about ELFS and discovered that the service kept records of their ancestors, encouraging new relationships with the collections to grow.



© Rachel Kolsky



It has been such a joy to honour the memory of the East London Federation of Suffragettes with our own activism. Some people living in modern day East London still struggle to afford food and childcare or find work, and we have provided opportunities on all scores.

Lauren Sweeney, Volunteer Manager, The Women's Hall, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

DIGITAL

Creating and sustaining archives in the digital age.

As the world's largest human rights organisation, with more than 700 staff across 20 international offices, Amnesty International has been at the forefront of the fight against human rights abuses worldwide since 1961. The organisation's activities range from observing the 1962 trial of Nelson Mandela to its current work advocating for justice on behalf of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The archive of Amnesty's International Secretariat provides a service to staff regardless of their location or time zone, but despite their global focus, the service faces similar challenges to many others, in responding to changing digital technologies and increasing amounts digital data.

For Amnesty, digital evidence collected by its researchers and campaigners comes in many different forms, from snippets of YouTube videos to tweets and satellite footage. Protecting, preserving and ensuring the authenticity and integrity of these records is of the utmost importance, as it allows Amnesty to hold governments and organisations accountable for their actions, while supporting communities and individuals affected by human rights violations.

The service was already using Axiell's Calm software and SharePoint to manage and catalogue records but required a solution that would integrate these platforms into a full digital preservation solution. Responding to this challenge, archivist Bryony Hooper is building a global digital repository, using Preservica's Enterprise Private Cloud platform. This repository will allow Amnesty to retain and ingest content of enduring value, allowing staff worldwide to access records that they need in order to present evidence to international bodies and human rights stakeholders, and to contribute to campaigning activities. Metadata enrichment will improve the efficiency of searching across collections, opening up access to Amnesty's digitised and born-digital archives, and allowing staff the opportunity to learn more about the organisation's history and how it can be used to further the cause of human rights for all.



© Amnesty International



Digital evidence can come in all shapes and sizes. By providing a search platform, we can enable staff to discover relevant resources while maintaining appropriate access rights to sensitive data.

Bryony Hooper, Archivist, Amnesty International

RESILIENCE

Evaluating different service delivery models for archives and fostering innovative approaches.

Wolverhampton City Archives (WCA) partnered with Black Country Visual Arts (BCVA) to collect, digitise, and provide access to more than 2000 photographs of Wolverhampton's Sikh community as part of the Apna Heritage Archive, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

BCVA brought together family photographs and memorabilia relating to Punjabi migration to Wolverhampton between 1960 and 1989, leading to the development of a community archive space at the Guru Teg Bahadur Gurdwara in Wolverhampton, where the collections are stored and made available. WCA supported the project from the outset, providing advice on preservation and digitisation of the original material, leading to the deposit of the digitised material. Children from a primary school, where around 50 percent of the school population is of Punjabi origin, visited WCA, and created their own school archive, developing heritage research skills. This enabled WCA to document and establish strong links with a large, yet previously under-represented, community in their collections: the Punjabi community are around 15 percent of Wolverhampton's population, totalling some 40,000 people, the second largest population of Punjabis in the country. The project culminated in an exhibition at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, which proved so popular that it was extended by two weeks.

Since participating in the project, BCVA have used their experience to advocate and offer advice to a wide range of community groups on the practicalities and benefits of working with archive services, encouraging community engagement with collections. The interest generated by the project enabled them to strengthen their advisory board, recruiting local stakeholders and academics who now play an active role in widening engagement and developing future projects. As well as generating opportunities for further art-focused projects, BCVA was recently awarded funds by the British Council for a three-week tour of India, talking about the project at universities and photographic festivals.



I went to the City Archives and stood in front of 30,000 images of Wolverhampton. I asked how many were from the South Asian community, and there were none.

Anand Chhabra, Director,
Black Country Visual Arts

IMPACT

Ensuring the full value of archives is recognised.

The National Fairground and Circus Archive (NFCA) holds more than 150,000 images and thousands more items relating to travelling entertainment. Following the donation of the Circus Friends Association Archive in 2016, the NFCA began looking for new ways to introduce these collections to the public, with the 250th anniversary of the modern circus in 2018 providing the perfect opportunity.

The service developed a broad programme of events, including the exhibition 'Circus Performers: Extraordinary Feats from Ordinary People' at the service's home at the University of Sheffield Library. The NFCA also participated in the university's Festival of the Mind, where the public were invited to an aerial performance inspired by research into female body image and the archive collections.

Expanding the reach of the collections, the service worked closely with Museums Sheffield, Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums, and Norfolk Museum Service to conserve and loan material for three exhibitions, 'Circus! Show of Shows'. The different exhibition spaces used records from the service to explore the histories of black and female circus artists, the changing attitudes towards animal performances, and the enduring impact of the circus in global culture.

The NFCA also collaborated with the children's charity Artfelt by hanging colourful circus posters in the local paediatric hospital. This offered a new audience the chance to enjoy archive collections while brightening their environment. Recognising the value of engaging broad audiences, the service has also brought collections out to other communities at Weston Park and Sheffield Fayres, sparking conversations with people unfamiliar with the NFCA's work and leading to an increase in visitors to the service. The NFCA plans to continue exploring opportunities like these in the future, developing new audiences to recognise the impact of archives.

© National Fairground and Circus Archive, University of Sheffield Library



We've been delighted to share our unique collections with new audiences this year and build networks that mean we can continue to expand our reach.

Angela Houghton, Head of the National Fairground and Circus Archive, The University of Sheffield



A Year in Archives 2018 brings together stories from organisations across the country, celebrating the innovative and exciting work happening in the sector.

2018 was another successful year for the archives sector, and notable for the ways in which the sector has embraced and delivered on the themes of the strategic vision, Archives Unlocked. The ambition of Archives Unlocked is to release the full potential of archives, demonstrating how archives can inspire trust, enrich our lives and be open to all. These stories reflect these ambitions, illustrating how our vibrant sector is embracing current challenges and opportunities, from building digital capacity and resilience to demonstrating impact, driving forward the many benefits of archives to different audiences.

As we continue to build the platform for future success, A Year in Archives demonstrates that the archives sector continues to work hard in demonstrating the importance of archives through innovative ways of collecting and making collections accessible, preserving our past for the future.

Dr Valerie Johnson

Director of Research and Collections, The National Archives



I am always inspired by the range of activity across the sector which demonstrates how the impact of archives is felt right across society, underpinning academic research, fuelling the digital economy and inspiring innovation and creativity. In short: archives matter!

Jeff James, Chief Executive and Keeper, The National Archives



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