

SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE, IPSWICH

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IP1 2LQ

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CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Suffolk Record Office (SRO) operates as an integrated county-wide service based in three locations: Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft. A local access point is also provided in Sudbury Library.

The Suffolk Record Office Manager has an identified budget and reports to the Head of Service Development (Culture, Sport & Communities) which is part of Culture Information Inclusion & learning services within the Adult & Community Services Directorate.

Alternative governance arrangements have been under consideration since July 2010. A public consultation was run between November 2011 and February 2012 seeking views on a proposal to create a new heritage organisation for Suffolk initially incorporating the Record Office, the County Council's archaeology service and the Museum of East Anglian Life, and on further work to investigate the feasibility of a new Suffolk heritage centre.

Proposals to create a unitary structure of local government for Suffolk were dropped in 2010. The area therefore retains a two tier structure of a County Council with nine district and borough councils.

STAFFING

Suffolk Record Office has a staff complement of 22 FTE which includes 6 qualified archivists across the three sites.

A management team which is responsible for the service across the three sites consists of three Registered archivists, the SRO Manager, the Collections Manager and the Searchroom Services Manager.

Ipswich provides a base for the SRO Manager and the Collections Manager. Staffing consists of an archivist and a public service manager who is responsible for the team of searchroom assistants, including a pool of casual staff.

The Conservator is also based at Ipswich.

The management team are based in Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds managing operations for all sites; however, co-ordination of record office business activity and other professional issues (business planning, collections management, appraisal etc) requires regular travel across the county to each site. This makes it possible to provide some limited staff cover and also ensure that supplies and resources including exhibition material are moved between the separate locations.

Previous inspections have noted that for a record office of this size with large and complex collections distributed across three sites and high visitor numbers plus a wide range of outreach activity this level of staff is barely adequate. Problems can arise due to unavoidable absence and the record office is forced to draw on the professional and managerial staff to maintain the frontline public service and outreach activities.

Staff training and development

Staff participate in in-house training within the directorate and beyond, have access to funding for formal training courses and activities related to professional development. Two members of staff have recently been supported through studies to gain professional archival qualification.

Training is also provided on document handling and other preservation subjects.

Volunteers/community links

SRO has developed very good links with its community of users, depositors, local groups and volunteers. These links are a conscious and integral part of the way in which the SRO maintains and develops its services, its collections, acquisitions, and undertakes outreach.

There is an active Friends of SRO (established 1983) which contributes to a wide range of record office activities, alerts staff to archives at risk and purchases documents.

SRO has a large number of volunteers and runs an extensive range of projects which bring significant benefits to the service, its users and the volunteers themselves. The volunteer experience at SRO is a rich one and provides individuals with numerous opportunities for personal development, learning new skills and participation in rewarding projects. SRO won ARA's first Archive Volunteering of the Year Project in 2010 with the 'Making a difference' volunteer cataloguing backlog project involving 69 volunteers.

In addition to individual volunteers, three volunteer groups meet in Ipswich - NADFAS, Suffolk Family History Society and Suffolk Local History Council Group and undertake a variety of tasks including cataloguing and preservation projects and transcribing. Volunteers have completed name indexes to Poor Law, Quarter Sessions, Wills and Inventories and Gaol records at Ipswich and are continuing to work on the *Ipswich Journal* newspaper name index.

SRO continues to build up an extensive network of links with local and community groups, such as Ipswich Heritage Group and Suffolk Local History Council parish recorders. These links are being extended to communities that have no previous experience of or contact with the SRO and traditional archive organisations and this contributes to the wider inclusion and participation aims of the County Council. The links are often built upon collecting and outreach activity which in turn promotes further opportunities in these areas of activity.

SRO works closely with local schools, colleges and universities to offer work experience placements to students, ranging from GCSE age to post-graduate.

SITE AND BUILDINGS

SRO Ipswich is a converted board school (1880s) with a purpose built repository block attached. It came into operation in 1989 and was formally opened in 1990.

The school section is shared with Eastern Angles, a touring theatre company.

The single storey, grade two listed former school contains the public services (reception area, search rooms), conservation work rooms, education room and scanning room. The school section is linked to the repository block by two glazed corridors, one of which includes the public entrance.

The two storey repository block (with staff offices) is of concrete and brick construction with double cavity walls designed to achieve high thermal inertia; an innovative approach at the time. The walls have tall, narrow, deeply recessed windows and a pitched roof with a large overhang to prevent solar

gain and ensure rainwater run-off does not affect the exterior of the walls. The design of the interior roof space and other features are also intended to promote high thermal inertia and obviate the need for air conditioning in the strong rooms. However, it has proved difficult to maintain stable environmental conditions within the recommended ranges and as a result alterations have been made to the strong rooms and mechanical controls have been introduced. Much of the remedial work has been based on the recommendations of a risk assessment by a specialist in 2003 and previous TNA inspections.

Overall, the conversion has worked well and further incremental improvements to the record office could be of benefit; nevertheless, with the storage areas rapidly nearing capacity this is a good time to consider alternative options for the storage of and access to the County's invaluable archive collections. In addition, the architectural features (whilst attractive) and the listed status of the school have proved to be an obstacle to efficient use of the building and further adaptation and improvement of the public areas to meet the changing needs of record offices and their users will be challenging.

Maintenance of the building is good and all systems have maintenance contracts.

The proximity of the site to the flood plain has been addressed by fitting a flood barrier at the entrance to the lower strong room. Nevertheless, flooding remains a risk. The site is free from other hazards and access for emergency and maintenance purposes is good.

The record office is located in a mainly residential area some distance from the town centre and mainline railway station. It is within reasonable walking distance and bus routes pass along Bramford Road. Car parking space is available on the site to the rear of the repository block and includes one disabled parking space.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Opening hours, reception and admissions arrangements

SRO Ipswich is open Monday to Saturday, 9am-5pm. Documents are not produced at lunch time. Documents for use on Saturday must be pre-ordered by 2pm on the preceeding Friday.

The Record Office is a member of the CARN scheme; visitors without CARN cards are permitted to use the search room facilities but not to order or use archival material.

Entrance to the search room is through a reception area which contains lockers and can be used for refreshments. The glass corridor which links the

search room and reception area to the repository contains small displays and noticeboards.

The staffed reception point has been moved into the search room where readers sign a register.

The building is accessible for disabled users.

Search rooms

The single, large search room has space for approximately 30 readers at 5 tables and 1 map table. An adjustable height table and a magnifier are present in all SRO search rooms. Preservation equipment is available and search room rules are displayed.

Windows are single-glazed and fitted with blinds and uv film protection. Fluorescent tube lights are also used.

Part of the Local Studies Library is on open access shelves which run around part of the room. There is a good local studies reference collection, including selected local studies reference material relating to neighbouring counties. Each branch has its own collection of boxes of 'topographical ephemera' (non archival material relating to parish/place/subject) to be used alongside primary material.

Access is available to resources on the internet and to the County Council's network via 6 pcs. Free access is provided to online resources such as Ancestry, Find My Past, 19th century newspapers and other reference material. There is also a stand alone pc and a laptop for viewing CDs etc. There is one reader printer.

There are reproduction OS maps and parish packs (popular with schools) for sale in front of the reception desk. Conservation supplies are also sold.

Childrens' furniture, books, drawing material etc have been provided in the search room to help keep children amused while parents undertake research.

Microform room

The microform room has 20 microform readers. The microform material is on open access. The library of the Suffolk Family History Society is also housed in this room. Windows are fitted with blinds.

Map room

The map room is used by searchers studying OS and some other printed maps on open access whilst manuscript maps are looked at in the main search room.

Finding aids

A good range of finding aids is found in the search room. This includes card indexes, summary lists and paper catalogues.

CALM is used for accessions, cataloguing and documenting conservation work.

In the self-assessment exercise 2010 12.35% of the collections were described as box-listed or had collection-level descriptions only, with an additional 23.01% unlisted.

Returns to TNA's annual survey of accessions have been regularly submitted.

Rate of use

Overall, during the 2010-11 reporting year SRO received 29, 441 visits, made 30, 387 productions and received 12, 343 written enquiries. These are very high figures in comparison with other county record offices.

The Office at Ipswich received 10, 961 visits, made 18, 677 productions and responded to 5, 094 written and phone enquiries.

Catalogue information is available online through Suffolk Heritage Direct, A2A and the indexes to the National Register of Archives.

SRO staff have good links with the FOI unit in Suffolk County Council and have worked closely with public record depositors on guidelines for access to sensitive personal information (eg, mental health trusts) to ensure that s60 consultation is effective and data protection requirements are met.

Security

Website and publications

There is a useful record office presence on the County Council's web site which provides a wide range of information on collections, using SRO and research guides, policies, services offered and events. Essential information for making a visit is also included. SRO local studies stock can be searched using the Suffolk Libraries catalogue on the website.

The Record Office manages Suffolk Heritage Direct – a searchable gateway to Suffolk's heritage collections which also includes the Britten Pears Library, some museums and Archaeology Services. It includes images of objects, artefacts, photographs and documents, resources for teachers and lifelong learners and key contacts for heritage organisations.

Research service

A remote research service is available and details are available at the Record Office and on the website. A total of 476.86 hours of paid research was undertaken across SRO during 2010-11.

Reader consultation

The Record Office participates in the PSQG visitor satisfaction survey, the latest being in March 2011. Overall rating is 98% good or very good.

Feedback is also sought from the Friends' Group, researchers and other stakeholders.

Other public areas

The main public areas are the reception (where tea/coffee making facilities are available and refreshments can be taken) and education room. Public toilets are available.

The education room is used for outreach events, meetings and volunteer projects, and is available for hire. An interactive white board, laptop and data projector are available for use in the room as well as a normal projector, screen and flipchart. The former meeting room located off the search room is used by staff and volunteers working on a number of projects and administrative tasks.

STRONG ROOMS

General

There are two strong rooms in the separate repository block, one above the other (approximately 26m x 16m), which provide good conditions for the preservation of collections.

They are constructed on a concrete frame encased in double cavity brick walls with an insulation layer and air bricks designed to achieve high thermal inertia. The ceiling of the upper strong room is a concrete slab with another layer of insulation. The roof space is ventilated and contains extraction fans to minimise the build up of warm air through solar gain.

The tall windows are double glazed and made of toughened glass.

A number of noteworthy modifications have been made to the strong rooms since 1989 and these are noted below under the relevant sections.

All systems are maintained and regularly tested.

Security arrangements

Flood and damp prevention

The risks of flood and damp affecting the collections have been minimised to an acceptable level. There are no obvious hazards in or around the strong rooms and the record office's location on a flood plain has been re-assessed and counter measures taken.

The hot water pipes originally running around the walls to provide low level heating during cold weather have been removed.

Air conditioning plant was installed in the roof space which has been tanked. Daily visual checks are made of the roof space; however, no water sensors and alarms are fitted.

A flood barrier has been fitted to the entrance of the lower strong room. Deployment of the flood barrier; however, is dependent on staff being notified of the flood risk. Staff are have Floodline contact details for monitoring flood warnings.

Air bricks in the walls have been sealed to prevent ingress of water to the lower strong room and non-return valves have been fitted to the drains.

Fire protection

Fire protection and counter measures are of a high standard.

The construction of the strong rooms provides a very high degree of fire protection, and although it may not amount to four hours this was not a requirement of BS5454 in 1989. Points of weakness associated with doors and windows have been addressed and improvements made in recent years.

A gas automatic fire extinction system was installed in 2007 and hand-held fire extinguishers are present.

Smoke and heat detectors are fitted and alarms linked to council staff and the fire brigade which is in the vicinity.

Windows have been blocked. Electrical power supply to the strong rooms for non-essential equipment can now be isolated out of hours. Control panels have been renewed and upgraded.

Environmental controls

It had proved impossible to maintain stable environmental conditions within the ranges recommended by BS5454 by relying on the thermal inertia of the strong rooms and air conditioning units were introduced in 2007 following a thorough diagnostic investigation. The chillers are located outside in the car park.

Additional measures have also been taken to improve environmental conditions, such as blocking the windows and fire doors and including an insulation layer.

Record office staff work closely with Suffolk County Council engineers and contractors to improve understanding and operation of the BMS. Winter and summer temperature set points have been revised and new alarm reporting and other controls have been introduced.

Environmental conditions are independently monitored using Eltek sensors to verify the BMS recordings and check specific locations within the strong rooms rather than the performance of the air conditioning system. A discrepancy can occur between the BMS and datalogger recordings.

Environmental monitoring data has been supplied for 2005 to 2010 and the period April 2009 to March 2010 has been used for the report. The introduction of air conditioning has improved the stability of the temperature which remains within the recommended range with minor seasonal variation.

However, relative humidity is more difficult to control and tends to fluctuate between 50% and 60% with lengthy periods above the recommended upper limit, particularly during summer months when it moves between 60% and 65%.

Storage arrangements

Records are mainly stored on mobile metal racking. Rolled maps and plans are placed on static wooden shelves along walls.

Additional racking units have been acquired over time for both strong rooms to increase storage capacity; however, the point has been reached where further additions are impossible.

New fixed shelving is being fitted along external walls to provide valuable extra space. It is not recommended that shelves and records are positioned against an outside wall; however, the level of insulation in the walls may mitigate the risks. Monitoring will be required to ensure there is sufficient circulation of air and no detrimental impact on documents.

Most records are in appropriate boxes and enclosures. Boxes are not placed in unsuitable locations, such as the top of racking and on the floor. In general, the strong rooms appeared clean and tidy.

A programme of appraising collections prior to deposit to rationalise holdings and weed out inappropriate items or duplicates is being undertaken in consultation with depositors (eg, the Diocese). This is based on a micro-collection policy. There are also plans to move some local studies stock out of the strong rooms into public areas to free up some archival storage space; however, it cannot be seen as a long term strategy for addressing the rapidly shrinking amount of accrual space.

Document location information is being transferred to the CALM database from card indexes.

Any major problems

The lack of expansion space is becoming a pressing issue.

Shelving the strong rooms to capacity and rationalising collections can only provide a short term solution to the lack of space on the Ipswich site.

Special storage

No special storage is provided for photographic and other media.

Outstores

No outstores are used.

CONSERVATION

The Conservation unit is based at SRO Ipswich and serves all sites.

Three linked rooms along a wall of the former school building and next to the education room have been converted for conservation facilities. They are suitably equipped but somewhat cramped.

The disaster kit is in the education room.

The Conservator is responsible for monitoring strong room environmental conditions and providing advice on preservation best practice. He also

assesses the condition of accessions when necessary and any conservation requirements.

Work experience opportunities are available in the Conservation unit.

The Conservator also provides advice to external bodies, such as the Cathedral Library at Bury St Edmunds.

STAFF OFFICES

Staff offices and workrooms are located in the former school and new block.

On the first floor of the new block are offices for the SRO Manager and Collections Manager and a staff room. The ground floor has a County Council Archive office (which also contains the BMS display and data logger equipment), a store room (used for isolating deposits) and an office/work room for the Public Service Archivist, Public Service Manager and Conservator.

The school building has an education room (which is used for outreach, meetings and volunteer projects) and off this is the scanning room which contains a scanner, A1 printer and laminator for producing copies for researchers and exhibitions. It is also used to store information on out of county collections and research reports.

Space for sorting, arranging and cataloguing large and complex collections is limited. The education room has to be booked for sorting of large or complex collections.

EXPANSION SPACE

It is estimated that accrual space will run out in 2016.

Shelving the strong rooms to capacity and rationalising collections can only provide a short term solution to the lack of space on the Ipswich site.

Across all three locations there is approximately 5 years of expansion space and reliance is already placed on an outstore in Bury St Edmunds. It has become necessary to store some Bury and Lowestoft collections at Ipswich.

DOCUMENT RECEPTION/SORTING/ISOLATION FACILITIES

The repository block does not include a dedicated reception area for receiving, assessing and treating new accessions. New accessions arrive at the staff entrance from the car park and the store room off the County Council Archive office or the freezer in Conservation is used for isolation purposes.

When required the Conservator advises on the condition of new deposits.

Accessions are recorded on CALM and depositor information is kept up to date.

Information on SRO's terms of gift and deposit are published.

MODERN RECORDS /INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

SRO is not responsible for the records management function in Suffolk County Council; this is located alongside other legislative compliance functions under the Head of Corporate Information and Records. The Record Office is located in the Adult and Community Services Directorate whilst Information and Records is part of the Resource Management Directorate. This has led to a divergence between the two services which may be frustrating the efficient transfer of Council records of historical value for permanent preservation. The records management unit provides a service to the County Council, Ipswich Borough Council, Mid-Suffolk District Council and University Campus Suffolk which includes operation of storage facilities and commercial outstorage.

County Council records for permanent preservation have been regularly transferred until recently and represent a sizeable proportion of the total holdings (c21%). A part-time County Council Archive Officer is based at SRO Ipswich providing an enquiry service and delivery service to council departments 5 days a week. Assistance is also provided with enquiries received in the search rooms. A guide has been published to the County Council Archive.

Changes to the retention and review process in the last two years have resulted in appraisal decisions being taken by departments and business units without the benefit of consultation with the Record Office to ensure that appropriate records are identified for transfer. This may represent a weakness in the management and transfer of the Council's records. Attention also needs to be given to the long-term management of the Council's electronic records and mechanisms for their preservation and accessibility.

SRO seeks to maintain a good working relationship with the corporate information and records team and works closely with the county solicitors and others to support the information needs of the Council, including the need to meet obligations under information legislation (Freedom of Information Act etc). Currently, extensive use is made of records held by SRO by the rights of way team and also by the legal section for the voluntary registration of council property which has led to savings for the Council.

There is a critical need to clarify the relationship SRO has with Suffolk County Council's Corporate Information and Records team and IT provider to ensure that records of historical importance continue to be transferred to the archive and made available to researchers and Council officers. This is particularly the case at a time of rapid organisational change when consideration is being given to alternative models of service delivery for the Record Office and other County Council services. The risks associated with organisational change,

including staff turnover, and attendant financial pressures need to be fully understood and addressed.

COLLECTING POLICY AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARCHIVE COLLECTORS

SRO has a sound and holistic approach to acquisition and developing its collections which recognises that success in this area rests on the strength of its relationship with the creators of records and the local community, and that this can take time to come to fruition. This approach makes the collecting policy a 'living' and dynamic document.

SRO holds the usual range of collections for a large and active county record office covering a large area, and their subject matter reflects the evolving nature of the county's history. The British Library Preservation Advisory Centre Preservation Assessment Survey provided a snapshot of the quality of SRO's collections in 2008 which found that:

- 98.31% of collections are unique or are likely to be so;
- 99.76% of the collections are judged to be part of the national heritage.

Significant collections include those for the County Council and predecessor local government bodies (which includes schools), the Diocese, landed estates, businesses, local associations and charities, courts and hospitals. These collections include controlled categories of record subject to the Manorial Documents Rules and Public Records Act. SRO also holds the archive of the Saumarez family of Shrubland Park which was accepted by the government in lieu of tax liabilities and allocated to the record office in 2007.

The collecting policy is published on the website and is supported by appraisal guidelines for the main types of deposit to ensure consistency of approach across the county.

Whilst there has been little surveying undertaken in recent years it would be inaccurate and unfair to describe collecting as reactive. The local press is monitored for information about the closure of local businesses and SRO is referred to records at risk by the Friends Group and other Ipswich heritage groups.

An analysis of accessions was carried out in 2000 to identify strengths and weaknesses in collections. The results were reviewed in 2004 and 2008 and continue to inform the SRO approach.

An area of particular attention in 2012 will be sport to tie in with the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London. A survey will be undertaken of sports clubs and societies.

The foundation of SRO's collecting strategy is the building of relationships with local organisations, individuals, creators and depositors and the

community as a whole. This includes black and minority ethnic groups and Suffolk/Ipswich Pride.

Staff also identify current social trends to support contemporary collecting (for example, the records of a book reading club will be acquired).

Good connections exist with public record depositors, such as local NHS hospital trusts.

OUTREACH, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

SRO undertakes an impressive range of education and outreach activity based on its collections throughout the county. Programmes of activity are co-ordinated centrally and are delivered by one site, across all sites or in collaboration with other partners, tutors and authors. These activities contribute to the priorities of the Adult and Communities Services Directorate demonstrating the value of the Record Office and its collections to the wider objectives of the County Council and the cultural life of Suffolk. Evidence of the impact of these activities is considered within SRO.

Many of these activities demonstrate interesting and innovative developments of more traditional forms and are often consciously integrated into other core functions of the record office, such as collections development.

Acquisition of a collection can lead to outreach initiatives which can in turn foster relationship building with potential depositors thereby encouraging further deposits which are promoted to researchers and included in outreach and education. There is therefore an explicitly dynamic and proactive relationship between the Record Office's engagement with local communities, its outreach and collecting.

The Record Office is also interested in building links with people undertaking research on its collections and researchers have given talks and held book launches at Record Office locations. SRO staff create displays from the material used in the research which are run in conjunction with these events. This allows SRO to open up and expand knowledge of collections that might have been poorly researched in the past or appear to be of less obvious interest to researchers amongst its user community and other groups.

Education, outreach and promotion is undertaken by SRO staff who work with other bodies and commission delivery of certain programmes (eg, general history courses at Bury and elsewhere) to maximise use of limited staff resources and impact. At Ipswich the Education Room is used for outreach events and activities as well as volunteer meetings and project work.

It is possible only to give a summary overview of the range of activities undertaken and highlight some of the important and innovative aspects of SRO's approach.

All Record Office locations run lectures, talks, courses and guided walks, attend heritage open days and similar events, produce parish/town packs and put on displays, some of which tour the county. Displays are also mounted at Sudbury Library.

At Ipswich 5 and 10 week courses are offered, including topics directly related to Record Office sources. The workshops cover beginners and advanced family history, palaeography and other subjects employing a mix of information about sources, looking at originals and the opportunity to consult experts before finishing with a tour of the office. The Advanced Paleography Group meets informally between April and September in the education room.

SRO engages with schools and higher education students on specific subjects and projects. A leaflet advertising the school workshops has been developed, but it is increasingly difficult for schools to arrange visits, so workshops have been adapted to be delivered in the schools. The Record Office has run successful projects to create resources for schools to use. Learning packages for Home Front Heroes and Sea Heroes are available on the Suffolk Heritage Direct website. As part of the Suffolk Voices Restored Oral History project, the Record Office worked with schools and ran two workshops using the recordings at Bury and Ipswich Record Offices and two further workshops at Copleston High School.

The first group of University Campus Suffolk 3rd Year BA History students completed their Professional Practice in the Humanities module in the Ipswich and Lowestoft Offices during the autumn and winter of 2010. This linked the learning experience in the formal education sphere to work experience in the public sector assisting with preparation for future employment.

The Curry and Culture HLF-funded project addresses community issues and gaps in the Record Office's collections. This three year project has been developed in partnership with the Bangladeshi Support Centre, Colchester and Ipswich Museums and local schools. It will record and disseminate the economic and cultural contribution of the Bangladeshi community in Ipswich and Suffolk through research, cultural events, educational materials and the establishment of an oral history archive and related collections.

The Record Office works closely with the Tourist Information Centre in Ipswich especially for Heritage Open Days and worked closely with TICs to arrange walks as part of the Learning Revolution Festival.

SRO and some of its collections have featured on a number of television programmes in the past 12 months, including further episodes of *Who do you think you are*, Michael Wood's *Story of a nation*, Professor Diarmaid McCulloch's *How God made the English*, *Time Team*, and *A Renaissance Education: the schooling of Thomas More's daughter*. Stories about the Record Office and its collections feature regularly in the local press and on local radio.
