

TYNE & WEAR ARCHIVES SERVICE

ANNUAL REVIEW 2005/2006

1 Introduction

As usual 2005/6 has been a busy year for the archives service, with developments in a number of areas.

The first phase of the Best Value action plan was completed, and information on Best Value targets is given throughout the report. A further plan was in course of preparation at the end of the year.

Unfortunately a PFI bid for new accommodation in South Tyneside was unsuccessful, but at the end of the year the result of a further bid to the Big Lottery Fund was awaited.

2 Searchroom and other public services

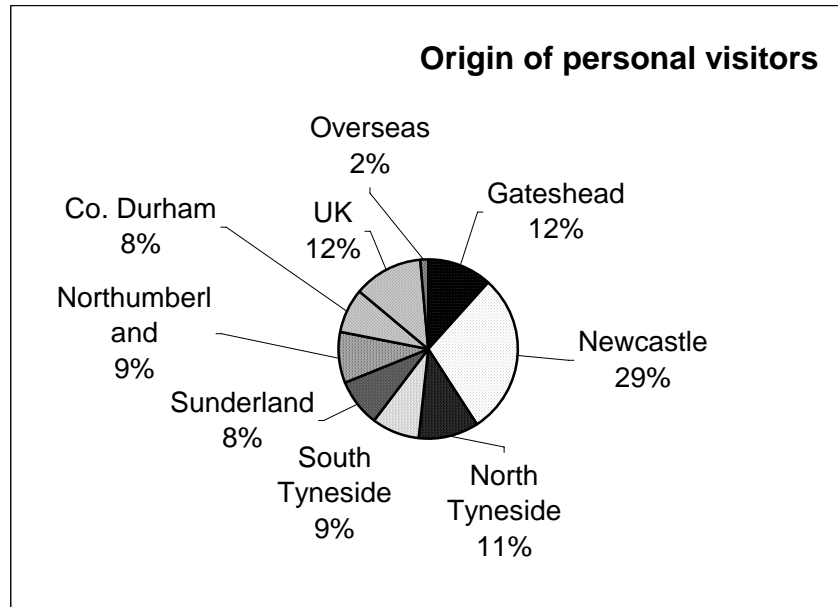
Direct usage of the searchroom decreased this year, from 7668 personal visits in 2005/5 to 7105 this year (7% down). However, this does conceal a marked upward trend in the last three months of the year. In February in particular the number and proportion of family history users increased greatly, probably due to the return of the BBC series *Who do you think you are?*

The number of visitors on the open Saturdays has also picked up and compares well with daily averages.

In January we joined the County Archives Readers Network (CARN) and began registering our users for the first time. In the first three months we registered 630 individuals and issued 682 day-tickets to those who did not have sufficient ID for the issue of a full ticket.

For the first time we have some idea of the number of individuals using the archive service, as opposed to the number of visits. However, this is still not a complete picture, as there is some overlap between the day tickets and full tickets issued at a subsequent visit, plus a small number of users who already have CARN tickets issued by another archive. In practice this overlap has been found to be mainly with Cumbria.

The following chart shows the home address of service users. The percentage of users from within Tyne & Wear is slightly down this year. The percentage from Northumberland, 9% overall, increased to 13% later in the year, presumably due to the fact that the Northumberland Record Office has been closed since September in preparation for a move.



Users from Tyne & Wear (including groups) are broken down in the following chart in line with the Best Value performance targets.

Use of the service's website has increased exponentially, particularly following the re-launch in October 2005. Because of technical difficulties we weren't able to produce full year statistics last year, but comparison of month on month figures shows that the number of hits in October 2004 was 21,796, while October 2005 recorded 125,137. There were over a million hits (1,162,046) in the course of the year compared with the 163,640 we were able to count last year. Since October each visitor to the website has looked at an average of 13 pages, although it is noticeable that only 9% of visitors go in through the home page.

Percentage increase in the number of hits on the Tyne and Wear Archives Service Website (www.tyneandweararchives.org.uk)

Target	9.5%	267543	Actual	334.34%	1162046		
	2005		2006				
	October	November	December	January	February	March	Total
Views	57394	152335	128997	26188	171702	189074	725690
Average per day	1851	5078	4161	844	6132	6099	3934
Average per visit	7.14	20.76	19.4	2.52	14.49	17.34	13.07
Hits	125137	211949	176325	113582	260080	274973	1162046
Average per day	4037	7065	5687	3663	9288	8870	6313
Home page	6081	20647	16650	5828	21246	24475	94927

During the year we also answered 1,862 enquiries received by post or e-mail, 9% up on last year. The percentage of e-mail enquiries has increased from 69% to 77%.

Types of enquiries are very disparate and range from the official to the very personal. To take two examples:-

One lady wrote to ask about her family history and found that her great-grandmother had committed suicide.

Through your help I was able to obtain a copy from the library of the report in the South Shields paper on the inquest of my great-grandmother. I learn how she spent her last 24 hours and also a little bit about my grandmother who I never knew, although it made for very sad reading, it something I never thought I would be able to do.

On the official side, records of Bishopwearmouth Cemetery helped to disprove a claim that an individual was buried on private land, and enabled planning consent for an apartment development.

3 Access to Archives

This year, having got 100% of catalogues to current standard online (an increase from 75% at the end of last year), we have concentrated on bringing other small catalogues up to this standard so that they too have become searchable online. By this means we have increased the percentage of all catalogues (including those not to current standard) available online from just under 60% at the end of March 2005 to 65% in March 2006.

Increasing online access has been facilitated by a third project under the A2A umbrella whereby the National Archives organise retro-conversion of paper catalogues. The phase 3 project *Bell, Book & Candle* was a regional collaboration between Tyne & Wear, Northumberland and Teesside Archives to improve access to records of educational and religious organisations. Funding was provided by the archives themselves and the North East Regional Archives Council.

205 new catalogues, including both backlog and new material, have been completed in the course of the year. In addition a further 41 catalogues have had additional material added to them.

The number of catalogue records created, measured against the target, was 7247 against a target of 7000.

In October 2005 the archives service launched a new website www.tyneandweararchives.org.uk, providing online access to catalogues and other information about the service, as well as links to educational resources. Statistics on the usage of the website are given above, and the increase in the proportion of hits to users suggests that the catalogue search facility is proving popular.

The Heritage Lottery Funded project to improve access to shipbuilding archives (ARK) was completed in August 2005. A report on the scope and content at collection level, as well as the needs and potential use of the shipbuilding collections was presented. Unfortunately the first attempt to build on this work was rejected by the Heritage Lottery Fund as not fitting with their current priorities. However, structures have been put in place to enable catalogue information on parts of the shipbuilding collections to be contributed by volunteers with expertise on the industry.

The Tyne & Wear Archives Service maritime collections were featured in *Heritage Counts, the state of the North East's historic environment*, the regional section of English Heritage's annual report.

Access to records relating to public health was also improved as a result of a grant from the Research Resources in Medical History programme funded by the Wellcome Foundation. Records, primarily of local authorities, were identified and catalogued for the first time. Among records discovered and made accessible were some relating to smallpox outbreaks in Gateshead in 1903-4 and 1925, parts of a national survey on air pollution in the 1960s, and papers relating to an outbreak of psittacosis in 1930, part of an international pandemic, in this case caused by three parrots and two monkeys brought back from sea.

Further opportunities for externally funded cataloguing projects are being pursued as they arise.

4 Accessions

We have received 96 separate deposits, transfers or donations of records in the past year. Although most of these were small they represented over 60 metres of records in total.

Among the more significant acquisitions have been:-

- additional records of the Allendale meeting of the Society of Friends (part of the Newcastle meeting) 1862-1960
- records of Tate Brown & Co, quarrymen, Heworth 1856-1970
- records of the Sunderland Empire Theatre 1908-c2000
- papers of the Spence Watson family 1807-1925
- papers of the Robson family of Sunderland 1768-1932
- personal papers of Sir William Leech 1930s-1990
- papers relating to the erection of the Chinese arch, Newcastle 2002-5
- papers of Ruth Dodds of Gateshead, author and councillor
- letters to and from Richard L. Pemberton relating to the North Durham parliamentary election of 1874
- records of the Action for Arthurs Hill lobby group 1996-2005
- photographs from Diversity North East

- additional records of Scottish & Newcastle Breweries 1888-1965, following their move from Gallowgate
- records of the Whitley Club, Whitley Bay 1908-1993
- 14 volumes of ship photographs from Hawthorn Leslie were brought in after publicity in the *Journal* for the ARK project on shipbuilding records.

We acquired from E-bay an account of a voyage in 1900 by Joseph Arthur, cabin boy, having spotted it by chance, and also bought a volume of letters, including a sketch by A W Pugin, relating to St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Newcastle.

5 Conservation

The conservators have continued with their long term projects, including repackaging and phase boxing, although continuing lack of space hampers progress.

Work on the Bell collection of plans has continued and hands-on conservation was also required on a new collection of Sunderland Empire Theatre bills.

The conservators have also been responsible for increased input into customer orders for digital photography, following the purchase of a camera upgrade, and this has also been useful for exhibition work.

6 Education, Learning & Outreach

During the course of the year the Learning & Outreach Manager worked directly with 71 groups, involving over 1500 individuals.

The *Their past, your future* programme commemorating the end of the second world war continued for the first part of the year, with more of the successful evacuee sessions held jointly with Tyne & Wear Museums.

Other work included a contribution to two "Hands on" days at Beamish, involvement in NEMLAC's "School Gates" programme

The secondment of the Outreach Development Assistant was continued for a second year, funded from income. This has enabled her to consolidate the volunteer programme begun last year, and to organise two further series of introductory and developmental workshops.

Subjects of workshops included *Lost in Latin*, *Genealogy on the Internet*, and *Tracing the History of Your House* repeated from the first series (the first twice) as they were so popular, three sessions on shipbuilding and maritime research, *Enemies of Preservation* on looking after personal and family archives, *Irish Ancestry* and *Criminal Records*.

The Best Value target of 80% of people attending a talk “very satisfied” with it was exceeded at 88.34%.

The volunteer programme celebrated its first anniversary in February, when a number of the volunteers came to tea at the archives service. As they generally work on different days, not all of them knew one another beforehand, but they were keen to share their experiences.

Volunteers have mainly been involved with indexing of records and inputting data, but volunteer mentors have also helped a deaf user with her first visit, helped a disabled person with work experience, enabled primary school children to use a scanner during a group visit, and generally helped with new searchers on busy days.

The “Vagabonds and Ruffians” group of young people from the Northumbria Coalition against Crime visited and recorded some of their views in our exhibition guest book.

It was realy mint & cool.

I really enjoyed it. Excellent.

I thought this was really great.

The chief archivist took part in two programmes on BBC Radio Newcastle following up the BBC television series *Who do you think you are?*, and another archivist presented four workshops on family history at the BBC Family History Weekend, held in Sunderland this year.

We have not produced any publications of our own this year, but sources from the archives featured prominently in Nigel Green's *Tough Times and Grisly Crimes*. A follow-up article in the National Archives' *Ancestors* magazine focused on child abuse and child crime, including under-age drinking, in 19th century Newcastle

The same material featured in the February 2006 issue of *Practical Family History*, with photographs of prisoners in Newcastle forming the basis of the lead article by Roy Stockdill, *Prisoners & Prostitutes*, as well as featuring on the cover.

A new exhibition was produced in collaboration with a volunteer, Peter Collings, a deep-sea diver, who also delivered a workshop. Peter dives and photographs shipwrecks in the Red Sea, and the exhibition featured his beautiful underwater pictures alongside images relating to the ships' building from the archives. Ships sunk in the Red Sea include the *Dunraven*, built by Charles Mitchell in 1874 and sunk in 1876, J L Thompson's *Thistlegorm*, bombed in 1941 and Laing's *Turbo*, sunk in 1942.

The *Rogues Gallery* exhibition, mounted last year, toured to the Newcastle Courts building at the Quayside.

7 Special projects

The ARK project on shipbuilding records has been noted above. The final report is available on the archives service website, and will inform further development of the shipbuilding collections.

The Legacy project continued to focus attention on cultural diversity in the archives, and to build links with community groups. A very successful launch evening for *Eye on the Past* was held during Black History Month in October, when four writers gave readings of their work based on characters from the archives.

Andrea Macdonald and Sheree Mack of *Identity on Tyne* subsequently worked with the Charlie Johnson character in a number of primary and secondary schools. Teachers commented that they were surprised by “the quality of work produced by the less able”, and “the students’ open-minded approach”. One said “it helped me to think about the delivery of the history curriculum in a more creative way”. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

The Legacy project was featured in the National Council on Archives report *Giving Value, funding priorities for UK archives 2005-2010*.

The archives service worked in collaboration with the North East Museums Hub to improve access to archives in museums in the region. Helen Arkwright was based with us, but visited museums throughout the region to gain an overview of archive holdings (building on a previous survey by NEMLAC) and to help museums catalogue them to appropriate standards and make them more accessible.

9 Records Management

The main development during the year has been the withdrawal of a major private sector client, following a change in their own circumstances. The return of their records placed some extra strain on the service, and the staff, but was accomplished within the agreed target.

In line with the recommendation to cease the service to private clients, some of the spare capacity has been taken up by new public sector clients.

A further review of the service will take place during the coming year, taking into account a number of changes in circumstance since the Best Value review.

10 Northern Region Film & Television Archive

The Northern Region Film and Television Archive is now a not-for-profit company, NRFTA Ltd, and is currently working towards charitable status. The archives service remains a major partner, alongside Teesside University, and

is represented on the board by the chairman of the joint committee and the chief archivist.

During the year NRFTA acquired and conserved an important film of the launch of the Whitley Bay lifeboat in 1912, now the earliest film in the collection.

11 Conclusion

Good progress has been made with most of the Best Value targets, the general work of the service and the priorities identified last year.

However, all of the priorities identified last year continue into the coming year.

- Continuing work on the funding package, business plan and design of new premises
- Work on the existing collections to prepare for a possible move
- Increased digitisation of content (100% electronic access to catalogues now achieved)
- Continuing work on electronic archives and liaison with local authority records managers
- Work towards measurement of the archives service as part of the culture bloc inclusion in Comprehensive Performance Assessment.