

Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 28 June 2018

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service: Volunteers

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Committee note the work of the Service with volunteers.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

Background

2. The Archive and Heritage Service works with volunteers to enable delivery of its work. The number of volunteer hours has grown from 6,266 in 2013/14 to 8,571 in 2017/18. The Service has expanded the types of roles that volunteers fulfil and the variety of projects that they work on.

3. During the development phase of the Staffordshire History Centre project volunteers were consulted on their current work and the potential for future volunteer opportunities. This work fed into the Activity Plan for the project and there is a work stream on volunteer activities and training.

4. This report highlights key pieces of work by volunteers and examples of good practice guidance. It demonstrates how they feed into the People Helping People approach taken by Staffordshire County Council and the value added by their work.

Consultation during Staffordshire History Centre Project

5. Two workshops with current volunteers in May 2017 revealed that they value and enjoy the work they do. Volunteers currently work on a range of projects often around the cataloguing, indexing or conserving of our collections. They particularly enjoy working with the academic partners. However, they would like to receive more training, have better facilities for refreshments and have more staff interaction. Some volunteers were interested in new volunteering opportunities.

6. The workshops were followed up by a volunteer skills and training audit. The volunteers have strong traditional heritage skills – archive cataloguing (42.5%), research (60%), transcribing (58%) and family history (33%). Many also have good skills in customer care (64%), working with volunteers (56%), scanning (36%) and working with young people or schools (36%). Very few have skills in social media or digital media, working with families or working with people with dementia or other special needs.

7. Volunteers expressed an interest in receiving training in cataloguing, conservation, and research. However, the majority (62%) were not interested in obtaining a qualification as part of their training. Lichfield volunteers expressed concerns about what would happen once the record office closed – they want to continue to volunteer in Lichfield. They value the support provided by the service and see this as essential for their work:

'It would be nice to have a dedicated member of staff for the volunteers'

As part of the History Centre project there will be a Volunteer Coordinator role.

8. The consultation included Support Staffordshire. Support Staffordshire promotes, enables and supports organisations in Staffordshire who work with volunteers. They also support volunteering in the public sector through their Volunteer Centre Associates scheme. During consultation they identified two groups where there is a strong need for volunteering opportunities – supported volunteering opportunities for people with learning difficulties and young people aged 16-24 not in employment. Training was also seen as important for volunteers both for their own development and seeking employment and to benefit the service:

'I'm new to Volunteering, but would like to use these opportunities to further my education & interest so any opportunities for training & qualifications would be gratefully appreciated!!!'

9. A training programme has been developed to meet the challenges of a changing organisation, with new staff and many more volunteers and to equip the whole team for the ambitious Staffordshire History Centre (SHC) project and associated activities. Training will be offered in 19 areas including practical skills, collections management, research and conservation, customer care and working with people with special needs.

Examples of best practice

10. Stoke-on-Trent City Archives has in the past year benefitted from the work of 27 volunteers, some working on individual projects but the majority working in two groups, each connected to a particular archive. These groups, former Michelin employees working on the company's archive and former Lancers working on the regimental archive have allowed the Service to make much faster progress in making these major collections available than would have been possible from our resources alone. A method of working has been established in the Lancers' collection, which has proved very effective. The Service's professional staff carry out an initial cataloguing exercise to establish the structure and getting the nature of the document correct. Volunteers provide more detail, an itemised description and contextual information.

11. At Stafford the long-running Quarter Sessions Rolls project has completed cataloguing back to the 1640s. This project involves a group of now very experienced volunteers, cataloguing standard document types to templates created by the professional staff. The detail added to the catalogue allows searches by name, place, occupation, offence and a vast number of key words. It is very time-consuming and so could only be undertaken with volunteer input.

12. These two volunteer projects have been included as examples of best practice in The National Archives' publication '[Guidance for Volunteer Cataloguing in Archives](#)'. The document highlights projects that involve knowledgeable volunteers, trained and guided by professional staff working together to produce high quality catalogues.

13. Building on our success with volunteer cataloguing projects, we have trialled an innovative project to train depositors to provide more information about their own collections prior to deposit. The Kinver Edge Committee (which from 1917 managed the Kinver Rock Houses) contacted us to ask for guidance about sorting and cataloguing their collection. With training and continuing guidance from professional staff, they have sorted, weeded, arranged and catalogued 140 files of correspondence, plans, minutes and reports. We have already edited and imported their catalogue spreadsheet into the online catalogue and they will formally hand over the collection, ready catalogued on 9 July this year. Although time-consuming for staff we hope to be able to build a model from this that we can take forward at different levels with depositors, depending on their knowledge, experience, interest and willingness.

14. This year the Museum Service volunteers have been focussed on the collections move from Shugborough to our new out store at Beacon Business Park, Stafford. They have been condition checking, packing and labelling objects prior to removal, and updating location codes on CALM once the objects are in their new home. Others have been making calico covers for hanging costume items. The volunteers have continued to help with cataloguing new accessions, and have also added over 1,300 new resources to the Staffordshire Past Track website.

15. Our place-name project in conjunction with the University of Nottingham has developed a new and innovative system to help our volunteers upload data directly through an online portal; this has proved to be a great success. Nottingham has recently paid for several training sessions for volunteers and we have now extended the project to Lichfield, the university paying for the support role. This work will lead to an AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) bid next year. The *Staffordshire Paupers* project with Prof. Alannah Tomkins of Keele University was the pilot project for a successful AHRC bid to extend the research to Sussex and Cumbria. We have supported those record offices to offer advice on how to deliver this type of volunteer engagement with academic involvement.

Next steps

15. There will be ten volunteer roles as part of the Staffordshire History Centre project:

- Public Facing Volunteers
- Learning and Activity Volunteers
- School, College and University placements
- Archive Hacks
- Digital Volunteers
- Collections Volunteers at SHC
- Exhibition Volunteers at SHC

- Conservation Volunteers
- Family History Volunteers
- Volunteers at the Access Hubs at Lichfield and Burton

This will be a significant increase in the range and type of volunteers. The Volunteer Coordinator will lead on recruitment and training for the History Centre.

16. The hours contributed by the volunteers during the development phase of the project has an in-kind value of £56,000 based on the Heritage Lottery Fund rates of £150 per day. For the delivery phase of the project it is estimated volunteers will contribute hours with a value up to £746,000 over four years. Without the support of volunteers the project and the work of the service could not continue.

17. An extensive training programme for staff and volunteers has been produced as part of the Activity Plan for the SHC. The Service will continue to reward and recognise the contribution volunteers make through its annual Christmas Lunch, training, and opportunities to attend Archive and Heritage Service events at the record office for free.

18. A review of the Volunteer Policy will be brought to the Joint Archive Committee to prepare for the development of new volunteer roles to support the Staffordshire History Centre.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

The History Centre project will increase and diversify the roles and types of roles for volunteers.

Legal implications:

Volunteers sign an agreement before starting work on a project. They received an induction and training relevant to the project.

Resource and Value for money implications:

Volunteers add value to the work of the Service but do require management. They are not a free resource.

Risk implications:

Risk assessments are in place which includes volunteer projects.

Climate Change implications:

No implications.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

No implications.

Report author:

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List of Background Papers

Papers

Contact/Directorate/ext number

Staffordshire History Centre Activity Plan June 2018

The National Archives', ['Guidance for Volunteer Cataloguing in Archives'](#).