



**Archives & Records
Association**
UK & Ireland

ARA Archive Volunteer Award 2020 Announcement

The annual award recognises outstanding work involving volunteers in an archive and records service. The award is organised by the Volunteer Committee of ARA and sponsored by the ARA, the National Archives (UK) and sector partners.

After much deliberation, the panel of judges chose WYAS' [Anne Lister Diary Digitisation and Transcription Project](#) as the overall winner with Surrey Heritage being highly commended as runner up for its project titled [Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers \(SGW\)](#).

Anne Lister Diary Digitisation and Transcription Project



WYAS's Anne Lister Diary Digitisation and Transcription Project is a ground-breaking project which set out to transcribe the diaries of Anne Lister of Shibden Hall, 1806-1840, often known as the 'first modern lesbian', and the inspiration for the BBC drama 'Gentleman Jack', written by BAFTA Award winning Sally Wainwright, which aired in 2019. The project was launched in July 2019 and is an ongoing project which is expected to require an estimated 16,000 to 20,000 volunteer hours.

Anne's diaries, which consist of around five million words, cover all aspects of her life in intimate detail; her relationships with women, her business dealings, estate management, education, and her personal health and well-being. They also provide a wealth of information about politics, business, religion, education, science, travel, local and national events, medicine and health. The diaries have the potential to be a significant resource for a wide range of researchers on a huge number of topics and, consequently, were inscribed in UNESCO's UK Memory of the World Register in recognition of their substantial cultural significance. However, the true extent of Anne's diaries remains hidden in her abbreviation filled handwriting and her coded 'crypt-hand'.



WYAS wanted to make Anne's diaries increasingly accessible and extend their world-wide impact by making complete transcripts available on their online catalogue. To achieve this, they engaged more than 150 volunteer 'Code Breakers' globally to help transcribe the diaries. WYAS created a Twitter hashtag – #AnneListerCodeBreaker – to allow the creation of an active social media community where the volunteer 'Code Breakers' can share advice on transcribing, stories from the diaries, and their own personal and emotional interactions with Anne Lister and engage a

wider audience of potential Anne Lister researchers and volunteers.

The transcription project webpages have received 26,000 views since July 2019 as part of 131,000 views of the online Anne Lister exhibition since its launch in April 2019.

Sally Bevan, Secretary of the ARA's Volunteer Committee, comments: "This year's award attracted applications from a wide range of organisations, including local record offices, a national research institution and an archive at a higher education institution. Each application had many merits on its own, but the ones that stood out were those projects that had reached a significant level of maturity or had shown great innovation in the use of technology. It was very interesting to see applications where the project had focused on remote volunteering which is a relatively novel concept, or projects which adapted quickly to remote volunteering in the light of COVID-19.

"The panel really liked WYAS's Anne Lister Diary Digitisation and Transcription Project because of its clear focus, and how well planned it is. It is an excellent example of a remote volunteer project which enables both local and international engagement. It has attracted an audience who may never have used archives before, as well as raising the profile of the archive service. The project allows individuals to learn more about Anne and interact with her story on an emotional level. It also enables WYAS to engage with a large online community both locally and internationally, in addition to encouraging diversity. The value of the volunteers in the project was particularly strong. The panel is excited to see the development of the project as it continues."

Dan Sudron, Calderdale Archivist at West Yorkshire Archive Service, comments:

"We are delighted to have been awarded the ARA Archive Volunteer Award 2020. We have over 140 volunteers who have actively engaged online in what is an exciting and challenging transcription project, and we have been amazed by their enthusiasm and dedication.

"Many of our 'Code Breakers' have a personal and emotional connection with Anne's story and the project has enabled them to interact with an active community of fellow transcribers. They will be thrilled to learn about this award. It's a fantastic acknowledgement of their hard work and a great recognition of the huge significance of this important archive collection and the power of archives in general to bring people together."

Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers (SGW) - Surrey Heritage



Highly commended in this year's award was Surrey Heritage for its project titled Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers (SGW). Surrey Heritage, part of Surrey County Council, is based at Surrey History Centre (SHC), Woking, and incorporates the county archive service, local studies library, archaeological unit and museums advisory service for Surrey.

Volunteer Tom helping at a school workshopThe five-year project, which will conclude in August 2020, aims to galvanise and bring together the responses of Surrey's current-day communities to their county's role in the First World War. Through a range of volunteer activity, the project explores the war's impact, particularly on the home front, and reveals the extraordinary contributions of Surrey's people throughout the conflict.

Fundamental to the project's ethos was the involvement of individuals, families and groups from across Surrey and beyond. A particular aim was to engage people who had previously not been

involved in heritage. Specific audiences for engagement included young people, especially those undertaking Duke of Edinburgh Awards, a range of school-age students, post-16 students, Muslim communities, and people with learning disabilities. The project has facilitated voluntary contributions from all of these audiences. However, this project's target audience for inspiring an interest in Surrey's heritage was also worldwide via the Surrey in the Great War website, and indeed volunteer participants from across the world have contributed data and stories.



The project was fortunate to draw together a team of committed volunteers, incorporating over its lifetime 220-plus individuals of varying ages, interests and backgrounds. They have supported the project in many ways, including: indexing war-related articles in contemporary local newspapers, photographing memorials, giving talks, helping with school workshops, researching Surrey's wartime people, delving into SHC's archives to uncover information, writing articles and biographies for the project website, interviewing Surrey residents about their families' war and helping at events.

Explaining why Surrey Heritage was a close runner up, Sally Bevan said:

"This was a very strong application. The project made a real impact on the volunteers and staff development. There were a wide range of volunteer activities for a wide range of ages and a diverse volunteer group, which was well-managed and flexible. The panel really liked the way volunteers were able to contribute to the project and were able to develop their own ideas, such as the oral history element and the mentorship aspect. The project produced a great online resource and the experiences and skills that staff have learned have had a beneficial impact on the service and will continue to be of value in future projects."



Kirsty Bennett, Senior Project Officer to the Surrey in the Great War: A County Remembers project, comments:

"We are absolutely delighted that our Surrey in the Great War project was awarded highly commended in this year's awards. Our volunteers and project staff have been tirelessly enthusiastic throughout the project and we are very proud of what we have Volunteers in searchroom of Surrey History Centre accomplished. This public recognition will inspire us all to take the skills and lessons learnt into new projects to share the endless fascination that encounters with the past can provide."

We asked Gloucestershire Archives Service, the winner of last year's Volunteer Award, to share their thoughts on how winning the award had benefitted the service. Sally Middleton, Community Heritage Development Manager at Gloucestershire Archives Service, said:

“Winning last year’s ARA Volunteer Award was a huge tribute to all the work of the staff and, especially, the volunteers at Gloucestershire Archives. To receive national recognition, in the archives sector, for volunteering was a great reason for celebration amongst our volunteers, and highlighted their work and our vision: it raised our profile, and led to some interesting discussions with volunteers on why they do what they do. Everyone benefitted at Gloucestershire Archives, and we’d like to say thank you to the ARA.”

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