

Nomination Form

ARA Archive Volunteering Award 2021

Required fields are marked*

1. Title of the project *

WOVeN (Warwickshire Online Volunteer Network) with Mining the Seams

2. Institution conducting the project *

Warwickshire County Record Office

3. List of key partners involved in the project (if applicable) *

Wellcome Trust

4. Names of team members working on the project

David Hodgkinson, Digital Archivist

Sharon Forman, Project Archivist

Laura Orriss, Project Archivist

Katie Holmes, Mining the Seams Project Assistant

Beck Hemsley, Mining the Seams Project Assistant

Sarah Hann, Volunteer Coordinator

5. Final year *

Ongoing

6. Project start date *

April 2020

7. Project end date *

Mining the Seams - March 2021

WOVeN - Ongoing

8. URL link to project website

Mining the Seams volunteer recruitment page:

<https://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/projects-queries/mining-the-seams/volunteer-online-with-mining-the-seams>

Mining the Seams final searchable database of compensation payments:

<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/miners-health/mcomicSearch>

9. Description *

WOVeN encompasses several projects combining the use of digital technology and archive material to reach new audiences and improve access to collections. One of these is the Wellcome Trust-funded project Mining the Seams, which included a volunteer element to digitise and transcribe

compensation registers from the Midland Colliery Owners' Mutual Indemnity Company. The resulting database enables statistical analysis of compensation payments due to mining incidents across the Midlands. Using the WOVeN model of remote volunteering, Mining the Seams aimed to recruit 20 volunteers, using social media and other online publicity to reach a wider, non-traditional audience.

Digitised images were shared with volunteers via cloud-based servers, along with pre-prepared spreadsheets with which to collect the information needed to create a searchable index. The system requires only basic digital experience as we hope to improve the digital skills and confidence of our volunteers.

The database of compensation database, containing 71,206 entries, was selected as one of *Who Do You Think You Are?* magazine's top 50 New Digital Family History Resources for 2021.

WOVeN continues to develop projects suitable for remote volunteering and is currently recruiting new volunteers at an average rate of one to two a week.

10. Target audience

We have no entry criteria and we welcome anyone who wishes to be involved and particularly those who respond to publicity online and via social media, who may previously have been unaware of our service and of archives in general.

11. Aim *

WOVeN aims to widen participation in local heritage and improve access to archive collections. By using a cloud-based system to share historical materials online, we can reach new audiences and enhance the skills and confidence of our existing volunteers, who are generally older and less experienced with new technologies. It offers volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and abilities the opportunity to learn and engage with heritage in their own time and in the comfort of their own home.

Volunteers can work at home, or anywhere with an internet connection, potentially helping to combat loneliness and isolation resulting from illness, retirement or other reasons. They are able to feel part of a larger group with a common goal. To further support this, they can participate in social and training events and email communication with staff is encouraged. This has proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic. We experienced a rapid rise in volunteer numbers during the initial phase of the lockdown.

An equally important goal was to meet increasing demands for online material. Being able to recruit a larger number of volunteers than could be accommodated inhouse means we are producing output at a greater rate than previously possible.

12. Process *

Monitoring

- We continually reflect and revisit progress to monitor the health of the project and the well-being of volunteers
- Each completed indexing task has a 3-stage checking process, producing the most accurate output possible

Maintaining a community

- Volunteers are intended to come together when possible (twice a year) for training and social events to share hints and tips they have developed for working on the project as well as discussing problems or difficulties
- Staff members working on the various WOVeN projects provide project advice and interaction via email
- Prior to the pandemic we had planned to organise a celebration of our volunteers' achievements, and we continue to supply references on request

Learning opportunities

- A range of tasks have been developed, including indexing and checking the work of other volunteers as well as working with different kinds of documents to expand knowledge and avoid repetition
- We welcome individuals who face workplace barriers, and have found that a volunteer on the Autistic spectrum finds our structured tasks suit his needs perfectly
- Volunteers are continuously supported by project staff, according to individual needs and abilities

13. Number of participants in the project or visitors to date *

We have welcomed 176 volunteers for the project. Of these, 111 have been involved with indexing Quarter Sessions depositions and 1910 Finance Act Valuation Books, while 65 worked exclusively with Mining the Seams. Thirteen volunteers worked at various times on all the projects offered.

Remote volunteering has proved to have a wide appeal, with the age of participants ranging from 17 to 90 from locations in Warwickshire, the UK, Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia.

14. Impact and outcome of the project *

Outcomes:

- Improving digital skills and confidence
- Isolated volunteers have found a way to explore their interests and feel like they are making a worthwhile contribution
- One volunteer with workplace barriers has discovered the kind of work which suits his natural abilities and can use them to contribute to a larger project
- Volunteers with no previous knowledge of archives or archive functions have gained an understanding of historical documents and their preservation, as well as the work involved in enabling online access
- Volunteers have discovered a new way of looking at history and feel that they have 'a window onto the past'
- Volunteers with research experience feel that they are able to 'give something back', by facilitating access to the kind of information from which their research has already benefited

A new database of compensation payments made to coal miners available online for academic research

Impact:

- Improved public access to important archive collections
- Improved profile for collections and WCRO
- New links developed with the Eco-Workshop CIC, CAVA and other charity and community organisations within Warwickshire.
- Staff have advised other UK heritage organisations on adapting the WOVeN model for their own projects

15. Evaluation *

The success of this project has been due to the robust system to support remote volunteering that was developed in-house as well as the enthusiasm of our volunteers and the supportive environment created by project staff to encourage their engagement and participation.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided a boost to our online volunteering. Those affected by furlough and job cuts felt that they were able to use their time in a constructive way.

Here are some of the views gathered from our volunteers:

"I trained as a historian in my youth but due to personal and family circumstances chose not to pursue academics as a career. However, it seems more feasible now for me to get back into fields related to History and remote volunteering has been a godsend in facilitating this move. It has allowed me to dip my feet back into the area in periods that I can control."

"The Deposition Project has been a wonderful addition to my life! Really, no exaggeration. Your diligent planning enabled someone like me with very limited knowledge of spreadsheets to easily and accurately enter data. Although I am not from the UK but rather from New Jersey in the US, I can't thank you enough for the countless hours of pleasure I derived from doing my transcribing."

"I never thought when I answered the call in Who Do You Think You Are magazine how much fun I would have. Originally, it was a worthwhile way of giving back something in return for all the help I have received in tracing my own family history. It was/is addictive and "spare time" is now a thing of the past."

"It has brought history to life. Often history is only about the ruling classes or the people of note. This experience has given a flavour of the lives of the working people of Warwickshire and their troubles. I am not isolated but I do care for my sister who has severe learning disabilities and cerebral palsy so it is refreshing to get involved with something interesting like this."

Some positive comments from volunteers at the end of Mining the Seams:

"Thanks for all the help and encouragement I've had from you over the past several months. Doing this work has helped to preserve my sanity over the last year of lockdowns!"

"I have enjoyed the work and think it has helped to keep me sane since I was furloughed then made redundant last year, the only down side is that it has made me want to re-visit Big Pit in Wales, The National Coal Mining Museum in Yorkshire and Poldark Mines in Cornwall which I assume are currently not open to the public."

"I have enjoyed working on the project and it has been most enlightening."

"I'm sorry that the project is coming to an end as I've really enjoyed working on it."

"How sad that we are coming to the end. I just want to say a big thank you to Laura and Katie for being really patient and supportive as I learned how to do this. I have found the transcribing to be really interesting and also relaxing,

especially during these strange times and would be very happy to continue as a volunteer on any other future project.”

16. Tips *

Recruitment from communities of socially isolated individuals and those looking for workplace training would have been ideal, but a lack of time and resources prevented a more targeted approach in these areas. However, contacts have been initiated and now that the provision of remote volunteering opportunities will continue, it may be possible to follow these up.

17. Future Developments *

The WOVeN initiative will continue to develop and embrace further projects to improve the availability of important and otherwise difficult to access collections. The system in use can accommodate more volunteers and a wider range of projects, providing something to interest to as many participants as possible.

The information indexed by the volunteers will be combined into a searchable database which will be made available online, widening access to this collection and enabling original documents to be preserved by reducing their use in the searchroom. The Mining the Seams database is already available.

We will continue to disseminate our experience to colleagues in the sector and advise on ways to adapt our model for their own purposes.

18 Domain *

Select (using underline) one or more from the list

Archives

Arts organisations

Historic environment

Libraries

Museums

Other:

19. Role in developing the sector

Select (using underline) one or more from the list:

Advice

Advocacy and strategic marketing

Commissioning

Evaluation

Funding

Liaison

Partnerships

Policy

Research and Evidence

Standards

Other:

20. Social groups

Select (using underline) one or more from the list:

Children and young people

Older people

Disabled people

Ethnic minority groups

Homeless people

Prisoners and ex-offenders

Looked-after children and those leaving care

Lower socio-economic groups

Refugees and asylum seekers

New communities

Unemployed people

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

Other:

21. Social outcomes

Select (using underline) one or more from the list:

Community cohesion & inclusion

Celebrating local identity

Local economy

Health & well-being

Learning & skills

Local infrastructure & regeneration

Tourism

Community empowerment & active citizenship

Raising participation

Positive outcomes for vulnerable groups

Other:

Innovation

22. Higher level geographical coverage *

Select (using underline) one or more from the list.

International

Europe

Ireland

UK

Wales

Scotland

Northern Ireland

England

East Midlands

East of England

London

North East
North West
South East
South West
West Midlands
Yorkshire and the Humber

23. Main person leading the project *

Sharon Forman, Project Archivist
Warwickshire County Record Office
01926 738959
sharonforman@warwickshire.gov.uk

24. Alternative contact

Richard Lewis, Collections and Development Manager
Warwickshire County Council
01926 738950
richardlewis@warwickshire.gov.uk

25. Estimated budget*

£26,000

26. Final budget

£24,512

27. Funding source(s)

Wellcome Trust
Warwickshire County Council

Photos



MINING THE SEAMS CAKE AND COFFEE SOCIAL

at Warwickshire County Record Office



Monday
24th February
2pm-4pm

- Meet the team ↙
- See our mining records ↙
- Go behind the scenes ↙
- Share your memories ↙

Please RSVP by 20th February to
MININGTHESEAMS@WARWICKSHIRE.GOV.UK

