

# Volunteering in Archives

## A Report for the National Council on Archives

By Louise Ray  
June 2009

*'The projects I have been involved in (during the past 20 years!) as a volunteer have given me more satisfaction than I can fully describe. I feel that everything has been extremely worthwhile, enjoyable in itself and of great value both to the staff and other users of the Record Office. I have made many new friends, finding with some that common interests extend beyond the obvious archival links - something I had not foreseen, but which now means a lot. Most retired people believe they have a lot to contribute to society but not everyone is fortunate enough to find the right channel for this. As I was in the volunteers group before I finished work, I knew precisely where the first call on my leisure time would take me. In short - I love it!'*

*Female Volunteer (65-74)*

## Acknowledgements

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This report draws heavily on the findings of the Institute for Volunteering Research report on '*Volunteering in Museums, Libraries and Archives*' (2005), commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It is also informed by The National Archives Self-Assessment Performance Management programme returns for 2007 and 2008. Other sources are referenced throughout the text.

Louise Ray, June 2009

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### Abbreviations

FARMER - Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research  
HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund  
IVR – Institute for Volunteering Research  
MLA – Museums, Libraries and Archives Council  
NCA – National Council on Archives  
PSQG – Public Services Quality Group

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# 1 Executive Summary

The current economic climate, along with the growth of a range of organisations supporting best practice in volunteering at a national level, make this the perfect time to both celebrate and reinvestigate the role of volunteering in the archive sector.

## 1.1 Who is the archive volunteer?

An archive volunteer is defined as *'someone who works for an organisation, without being paid, undertaking some form of activity involving archives'*.

There is a complex interplay within the archive sector between the archival professional, volunteer and user. Archival professionals undertake a range of activities in a voluntary capacity, volunteers act as archivists, users take on voluntary work to gain experience to join the profession, users contribute their knowledge, skills and time to support archives, volunteers see their contribution to the archive service as supporting their own, or others research, and users set up their own archives in a community context.

The survey for this report found that **64% of archive volunteers are female** and **67% are over 55**. **44% will have approached the archive or record office directly** to offer their services, and **34% are members of a networking group** (e.g. Friends, NADFAS, local history group or community archive group). **77% identified 'interest in history' as a factor** in motivating them to volunteer with **59% seeking to learn or improve their archival or conservation skills**. These statistics reinforce the view, expressed in many of the comments from respondents, that most volunteers start as users and see volunteering as a way of developing their own research, archival, and conservation skills, and supporting access to collections for others, whilst repaying the support they have received from staff and other volunteers. There are also a significant number who are using volunteering as a way of gaining experience to enter the archival profession. Whilst there are examples of services seeking to diversify their volunteers, and investigating the possibilities of youth volunteering, if archives are to attract a broader range of volunteers it is necessary for them to be more pro-active in promoting these opportunities to 'non-users'.

## 1.2 What are the benefits of volunteering in archives?

For archive services it allows work to be undertaken that existing staff do not have the capacity to deliver. Most of the activities undertaken by volunteers are seen to be additional services, i.e. volunteering is not currently considered as a money-saving activity or a substitute for appropriate staffing levels. Archive services view volunteering as enabling them to deliver added value to existing services, e.g. more detailed finding aids, additional support for users, or providing valuable opportunities to engage users and wider communities with the archive in an active way. **81% of volunteers felt that they had improved their historical knowledge** through volunteering. **64% had learnt or improved archival skills, and 24% had learnt or improved conservation skills**. Significantly the benefits of volunteering in improving general workplace skills and confidence in the workplace were felt much more widely than amongst those who had specifically volunteered for this purpose. Only **12% cited improving IT or workplace skills as a motivation for becoming a volunteer, but when asked about the benefits of volunteering this figure increased to 28%**. Of those surveyed, **just under half identified social benefits** to volunteering in archives.

### **1.3 How are volunteers managed effectively?**

There is evidence that the number of archive services with volunteer policies is increasing. **75% of organisations surveyed as part of The National Archives self-assessment performance management programme have a volunteer policy.** Many archive services are covered by wider organisational policies, however it is unclear how many policies currently conform to the key principles of the Compact Volunteering Code of Good Practice, or attempt to achieve the Investing in Volunteers indicators of good practice. Guidance is available for services providing work experience for future archivists and records managers. Other work placement opportunities are increasing, though the numbers involved are limited and usually involve a partner organisation that takes the primary role in the support, mentoring and evaluation of the placement holder. There is evidence from the survey responses and examples of practice within individual services that volunteers do feel that their contributions are recognised, however there appears to be little formal evaluation of the impact of volunteering underway at an organisational level.

### **1.4 Recommendations**

This report makes eight recommendations to support future volunteering activity within the archive sector:

1. NCA to work with key organisations within the sector to support volunteering in archives
2. Engage with the All Party Group on Archives and Opinion Formers
3. Encourage national recognition of volunteers contribution to archives
4. Share good practice within the archive sector
5. Encourage work experience opportunities through volunteering in archives
6. Promote diversification of archive volunteers
7. Provide training opportunities within the sector to promote good practice
8. Improve evidence gathering and evaluation in relation to the use of volunteers in the archive sector

The report offers a number of proposed actions to deliver these recommendations. These will become the basis of an ongoing 'Action Plan for Volunteering in Archives'.

This report includes ten case studies demonstrating a range of practice within the archive sector. The English case studies will be made available online via the Museums, Libraries and Archive Council's Research Database.

## 2 Definitions and national context

### 2.1 Definition of Volunteering

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a volunteer as ‘a person who freely offers to do something’, or ‘a person who works for an organisation without being paid’. Volunteering England, the national volunteering development agency for England, and a member of the UK Volunteering Forum, defines volunteering as ‘any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.’<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report an ‘archive volunteer’ is defined as ‘someone who works for an organisation, without being paid, undertaking some form of activity involving archives’. This includes people undertaking a whole range of activities including research, cataloguing and indexing, conservation, outreach and customer services. They may be working in an organisation that identifies itself as an archive or record office, or working with archive material in a wider organisational setting. In this report, individuals undertaking time commitments of various lengths and for a whole range of reasons are included, from those who have been volunteering for decades to short-term work experience placements. Types of volunteering activity within the archive sector are explored in more detail in Section 3 of this report.

### 2.2 National initiatives around volunteering

Volunteering in the archive sector must be seen in the context of a range of government measures designed to increase the number and diversity of volunteers, many of which are supported by the Office of the Third Sector, created in 2006. Recent initiatives include:

- 1998 – Compact, the agreement between Government and the voluntary and community sector in England established
- 2000 – Compact ‘Volunteering Code of Good Practice’ published
- 2002 - Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service created in celebration of the Queen’s Golden Jubilee
- 2003 – UK Volunteering Forum took over guardianship of the Investing in Volunteers Standard
- 2005 – Year of the Volunteer; Russell Commission report ‘A National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement’ published
- 2006 – v the independent youth-led charity providing volunteering opportunities for young people between 16-25 set up
- 2007 - Volunteering champion appointed (Baroness Neuberger)
- 2008 – ‘Report of the Commission on the Future of Volunteering an Manifesto for Change’ published; National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships (England) include priority NI6 ‘Participation in Regular Volunteering’
- 2009 – ‘The Learning Revolution’ The Government White Paper on Informal Adult Learning published

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering England website  
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhoWeAre/About+Volunteering+England/aboutve.html#vol>. Accessed March 2009

In addition to the desire to increase volunteering, there has been a growing focus on the dual benefits of volunteering, for the individual and the organisation, as well as on the rights of the volunteer. There has been a growth in the range of good practice guidelines. These have been designed to provide a better framework of support for the objective of engendering a climate where voluntary activity is a key part of individuals' engagement with civil society. Although volunteering in archives has a much longer tradition, archive professionals do need to consider their volunteers and volunteering opportunities in the context of this national picture. Increasingly, and particularly in the public sector, there will be an expectation amongst both volunteers and parent organisations that good practice guidelines are being implemented in relation to volunteering in archives.

Over recent months the economic situation has led to increased interest in the role of volunteering in supporting people returning to work after periods of unemployment, and organisations such as The National Trust and Timebank are reporting increased interest in volunteering opportunities in this recession<sup>2</sup>. Although it is recognised that sustaining this engagement once the economy recovers will be a key challenge, the archive sector is very well placed to use this renewed interest in volunteering at both a personal, organisational and national level. Harnessing this interest effectively can provide useful opportunities for individual volunteers; enable services to devise work programmes that would be unfeasible under current budgeting constraints, and to celebrate at a national level the important role archives have in engaging with local communities and in meeting broader social and learning agendas.

The publication in March 2009 of 'The Learning Revolution', the Government's White Paper on Informal Adult Learning<sup>3</sup>, provides another opportunity for the sector to consider how archives can deliver on this agenda, particularly the role of volunteering opportunities in supporting the Informal Adult Learning Pledge.

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<sup>2</sup> For an example of the media coverage of this issue see the BBC Radio 4's iPM website for 7 Feb 2009

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ipm/2009/02/ipm\\_this\\_week\\_volunteering\\_emp.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ipm/2009/02/ipm_this_week_volunteering_emp.shtml), Accessed March 2009

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging\\_learners/informal\\_adult\\_learning/~-/media/publications/L/learning\\_revolution](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/engaging_learners/informal_adult_learning/~-/media/publications/L/learning_revolution) Accessed March 2009

### 3 Extent of volunteering in the archive sector

The archive sector has always been reliant to a large extent on volunteering to support its work, even though this makes up a relatively small percentage of overall volunteering activity in the UK. According to Taking Part, the DCMS' survey of leisure, culture and sport in England, under 3% of the population volunteer within the cultural sector, and of these just over 4% volunteer in archives.<sup>4</sup> The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) 2005 report for MLA estimated that 79% of archives involved volunteers<sup>5</sup> and that the average weekly hours committed by all the volunteers within individual archives was 32 in 2005 (compared to 29 in 2001). There is currently no mechanism for capturing data about the use of volunteers across the whole of the archive domain and so statistics and case studies, both in this report and elsewhere, tend to focus on the local authority sector, as this is where evidence is most consistently captured. CIPFA's Archive Services Statistics<sup>6</sup> for 2007-8 recorded 2,742 volunteers working in local authority services across Great Britain, contributing 211,094 volunteer hours. Compared to the statistics for 2006-7 with 2,136 volunteers contributing 188,333 hours this represents an increase of around 22% in the total number of volunteers and around 11% increase in volunteer hours. Taking the minimum wage (£5.73 per hour) as an indicative measure, this would represent something like a £1.2 million in-kind contribution of additional human resources to the archive sector in 2007-8 alone, clearly characterising the considerable impact volunteering has on the sector.

#### 3.1 Types of volunteering work

The types of volunteering within the archive sector can be broken down into a number of areas. These represent a complex interplay between individuals' motivations to extend their historical knowledge, learn or improve their archival skills, and share their knowledge or skills with a wider community. Different types of volunteering are based on the relationship between the individual's existing skills and knowledge, their motivations and their capacity to provide unpaid labour. In addition, there are a number of additional motivations, or benefits, to volunteering that underpin this relationship.

##### 3.1.1 Archive professionals as volunteers

Archivists, records managers and conservators themselves, whilst being paid for their 'day job', undertake a wide range of volunteering within the sector. This can include giving time to the work of professional organisations and support networks, providing voluntary advice and guidance for local history or community groups, providing voluntary guidance to organisations on basic collections care, as well as giving talks, writing articles and other activities undertaken in their free time to promote their collections or disseminate research. For example there are over a hundred individuals named on the Society of Archivists website as being part of one of its committees or working groups

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<sup>4</sup> *Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport, Archives Workbook*, 2007, Department for Culture, Media and Sport

<http://www.dcms.gov.uk/images/research/TP-archive0607.xls> Accessed May 2009

<sup>5</sup> Howlett, Steven, Machin, Joanna and Malmersjo, Gertrud. *Volunteering in Museums, Libraries and Archives*, Institute for Volunteering Research, December 2005, p.3

[http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/volunteer\\_survey\\_2006\\_9500.pdf](http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/volunteer_survey_2006_9500.pdf)

Accessed Jan 2009

<sup>6</sup> *Archive Services Statistics 2006-7 Actuals and Archive Services Statistics 2007-8 Actuals*, CIPFA, <http://www.cipfastats.net/>



(excluding regional committees and special interest groups), and many of these individuals are undertaking multiple roles.<sup>7</sup>

*'Getting involved in the activity of the Society of Archivists and other professional groups gives me a sense of contributing in a wider way to the world of archives, looking beyond my own day-to-day job to bigger issues.'*

### 3.1.2 Honorary Archivists

There is a tradition of individuals taking on the unpaid post of archivist within an organisation, often on retirement. These individuals may not necessarily have archival qualifications but often have an extensive knowledge of the organisation and its related activities built up over their working life. In other circumstances a professional archivist, on a voluntary basis, might take this role or someone with another form of close link to the organisation. It is very difficult to estimate the number of people undertaking such the role of Honorary Archivist, as there are limited means of identifying all these individuals. The extent to which they might engage with the broader archival sector varies, with some actively engaging with networking groups and attending training events, whilst others will remain very much focused on their own organisation and its activities in isolation.

*'Having recently retired from the post of records manager/archivist, I was asked by a former colleague who used to be my boss, if I would be interested to work one or two days' a week on a voluntary basis for a national charity to advise on the review of a file classification scheme and the development of an archive.'*  
Female, 65-74

*'As former pupils of the school both the Honorary Archivist and myself, as Assistant Honorary Archivist, have a link to the establishment. The School Archives are probably the most extensive of any archives for a state school'*  
Male, 55-64

### 3.1.3 Work experience

All the post-graduate archives and records management courses in the UK recognised by the Society of Archivists require prospective candidates to have some pre-course experience. Therefore, in addition to paid traineeship posts, voluntary opportunities for individuals to undertake a range of activities in an archive setting are vital for the renewal and growth of the profession.

*'I am a graduate looking to do a post-grad course and pursue a career in archives and records management. I felt that volunteering was the best place to gather initial experience'. Female, 18-24*

Increasingly archives are being recognised as appropriate working environments to provide wider opportunities enabling individuals to improve their employment prospects, even where they do not seek to work specifically within the archive sector.

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<sup>7</sup> Society of Archivists website [www.archives.org.uk](http://www.archives.org.uk) Accessed March 2009

*'Being unemployed volunteering keeps you sane and that your existence is worthwhile, it fends off depression, plus potentially you are networking. Also it looks good on the CV!' Male, 45-54*

#### **3.1.4 Regular volunteering**

Many welcome the opportunity to volunteer on a regular basis. Volunteers can focus on one type of activity, or take on a range of voluntary tasks over a longer period. Regular volunteering often benefits the volunteer in supporting a social element to the work, providing opportunities for volunteers to get to know each other and staff, provides a sense of belonging within the archive or record office, as well as a sense of purpose through the work. Regular volunteering can have the benefits to the archive in upskilling individuals who can work in a relatively unsupervised way.

*'Voluntary work enables me to retain a certain structure to the week. After half a century of working its not easy to stop and "put my feet up" that way lies dusty death. To find a task that is proving to be of value and is also deeply interesting is an added bonus.' Male, 65-74*

#### **3.1.5 Project based volunteering**

Volunteers can be recruited specifically by the archive to work on a particular project. This might allow the archive to bring in new skills, or encourage different types of people to volunteer. Projects can provide a fantastic focus for volunteering. With specific outcomes and a finite timescale, projects can ensure that the work of volunteers is fully recognised in project evaluation and in celebrating the success of a project. Project based volunteering has been particularly encouraged by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). With participation a key strategic aim of the HLF, it has ensured that archives seeking lottery funding have had to consider involving volunteers. Since 1994 the HLF has identified 142 projects with a major volunteering element led by the 'traditional' archive sector, with a further 119 community-led archive projects<sup>8</sup>. The attachment of a nominal cost to volunteering hours, as part of an organisation's non-cash contributions to a project, has led to further recognition of the financial benefits that volunteering offers to the organisation.

*'Following a successful village project to help the Archives Service buy early maps of the village, the Archive Service asked the local history research group of which I was a member for help in cataloguing a particular large archive. I volunteered for this is a one-off project. I work usually only one day a week and the task has already run for some years, but is nearing completion.' Female, 65-74*

#### **3.1.6 Community archives**

There has been an explosion of interest in community archives over the last few years, with many more individuals becoming involved in the development and management of community archives. In the vast majority of cases this activity is undertaken in a voluntary capacity. There are strong linkages between the work of community archives and more 'traditional' archive services, and often voluntary work in an archive setting might lead individuals to join, or indeed, set up a community archive. Conversely involvement with a community archive might lead people to take up voluntary work within

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<sup>8</sup> Data supplied by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the period April 2004 to March 2008.

an archive service. Volunteers working exclusively in a community archive setting will not be directly considered as part of this report. Their role has been more fully covered in a number of recent reports including the Community Archives Development Group report on the 'Impact of Community Archives', a report on 'Community Archive Landscape Research' by Cultural Consulting Network for MLA, and 'Community Archives and the Sustainable Communities agenda', a report by Jura Consultants for MLA<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.1.7 Voluntary providers of content

A recent development, harnessing the potential of Web 2.0 technology, has been the opportunity for individuals to volunteer content and ideas to organisations via online contribution sites. This is something that has been highlighted as part of wider changes in business practice<sup>10</sup> and has great potential in the archive sector. Examples of the exploitation of this potential include, enabling the opportunity to comment on archive project blogs, such as that for the London School of Economics and Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive joint project '1967 and All That'<sup>11</sup>, contributing to online resources, such as the 'Tell us your story' option on the 'Moving Here' website<sup>12</sup>, to sharing knowledge related to archival resources through The National Archives' 'Your Archives'<sup>13</sup>. The nature of this type of volunteering and its impact on the archive sector requires much further investigation<sup>14</sup> and is beyond the scope of this report.

## 3.2 Profile of volunteers

### 3.2.1 Gender

The Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) 2005 report identified the gender profile of volunteers in the archive sector as 41% male and 59% female. This gender split was the same as that reported in a previous study in 2001. These figures were based on

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<sup>9</sup> 'Impact of Community Archives' 2006, *Community Archives and Heritage Group* [http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/category\\_id\\_63\\_path\\_0p6p.aspx](http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/category_id_63_path_0p6p.aspx). Accessed March 2009. Norgrove, K., Mirchandani, S. and Goddard, J. *Community Archive Landscape Research*, Report by Cultural Consulting Network (for MLA Council), June 2008 <http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/view-publication.php?dm=nrm&pubid=950> Accessed May 2009. 'Community Archives and the Sustainable Communities agenda', Report by Jura Consultants (for MLA Council), March 2009 <http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/view-publication.php?dm=nrm&pubid=949>. Accessed April 2009. Further research will be made available from the AHRC-funded project at University College London on 'Community archives and identities: documenting and sustaining community heritage'

<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/icarus/community-archives/>

<sup>10</sup> for further discussion see Cook, Scott. 'The Contribution Revolution: Letting Volunteers Build Your Business', *Harvard Business Review*, Oct 2008

<sup>11</sup> '1967 and All That' blog, <http://1967andallthat.blogspot.com/>, Accessed March 2009

<sup>12</sup> Moving Here website <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/> Accessed March 2009

<sup>13</sup> "Your Archives" website <http://yourarchives.nationalarchives.gov.uk> Accessed March 2009

<sup>14</sup> For example, University College London (UCL) and The National Archives are supporting an AHRC-funded doctoral student to undertake research into 'Harnessing collaborative creativity to archival practice; implications of user participation for archival theory and practice.' <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infostudies/research/icarus/> Accessed May 2009

asking organisations responding to the survey to identify the percentage breakdown of male to female volunteers and considered to be generally indicative of the gender split. The responses received by individual volunteers as part of the research for this report identified the breakdown as 36% male and 64% female<sup>15</sup>. The different methods of capturing these figures make it difficult to argue that this represents an increase in volunteering amongst women, but it certainly bears out the statement that a volunteer in the archive sector is more likely to be female than male.

### 3.2.2 Age Profile

The chart overleaf illustrates the age profile of volunteers in archives. It uses the 2001 and 2005 figures from the IVR report alongside the 2009 survey responses. The results show a fair degree of consistency in the figures, suggesting that the majority of volunteers tend to be aged between 55 and 74.

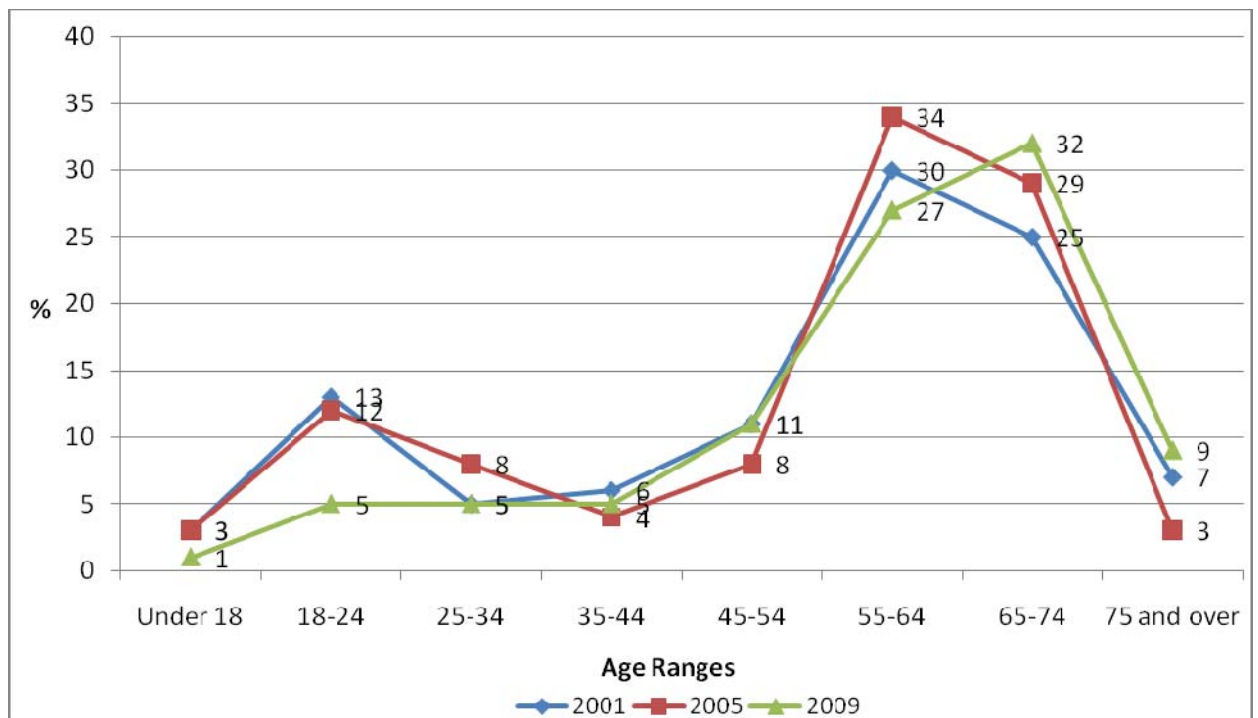


Chart 1: Age Profile of Archive Volunteers 2001-2009 (%) <sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Based on a self-selecting group of 411 individuals responding to the survey. (See Section 8 for more detail of the methodology and findings)

<sup>16</sup> Source for 2001 and 2005 statistics: Howlett, Steven, Machin, Joanna and Malmersjo, Gertrud. *Volunteering in Museums, Libraries and Archives*, Institute for Volunteering Research, December 2005

[http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/volunteer\\_survey\\_2006\\_9500.pdf](http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/documents/volunteer_survey_2006_9500.pdf) (Accessed Jan 2009). Source for 2009 statistics: NCA Survey. See p.55-56 for breakdown by figures, percentages and error range.

### 3.3 Routes into volunteering

There are a number of ways that people become involved in volunteering in the archive sector. In the IVR 2005 report, where organisations were asked how they normally recruit volunteers, 79% of archives mentioned volunteers approaching them and the importance of this direct individual contact is borne out by the fact that 44% of 2009 survey respondents stated that they had approached the archive/record office directly. In 2005, 42% of archives stated that volunteers came to them via 'Friends Groups' or 'Intermediary organisations'. In the 2009 survey responses 34% referred to being a member of a Friends group, NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies), a local history group or a community archive group. Word of mouth was mentioned as important to 63% of archives in recruitment in 2005 and although this was not given as one of the main options on the 2009 survey, 4% referred to this as another factor in recruitment.

*'I have been interested in family history for many years. I was discussing this with a friend. He told me he was involved in the [Record Office] Tithe Map Project. He made it sound so interesting that I joined forthwith!!' Male, 65-74*

These findings, in particular the comments collected from volunteers as part of the 2009 survey, suggest a hypothesis that an individual's perception of the archive or record office prior to volunteering is a critical factor, whether that perception is formed from their own personal experience, through the archive's relationship with an associated group, or through the experience of others. The majority of volunteers are making the decision to actively contribute to the work of an archive because they have a pre-existing understanding of its role and activities based on their experience as a user. It may be useful to investigate whether there might be a proven link between the statistic, from the IVR 2005 report, that only 6% of archives cited 'difficult to find and to recruit volunteers' as a factor in preventing them take on more volunteers (compared to 29% in libraries and 23% in museums), and the high satisfaction ratings received for user services in the PSQG Survey of Visitors to UK Archives.<sup>17</sup>

*'to pay back in some form, all the information and advice on researching family history given so freely by all archive staff.' Female, 75 and over*

*'Being [a] member of the Local History Society [!] really did feel it could help with further research, as well as being pleased to help the local Record office, which at all times I have found very helpful' Female, 55-64*

33% of respondents had been actively recruited by the archive or record office, with 67% of those being recruited to work on a specific project. Volunteers referred to being targeted through talks, articles in newspapers or in magazines such as 'Family Tree Magazine'. In general it would appear that the even with targeted recruitment, in most cases this is reaching a similar audience of existing service users, mostly retired. If

<sup>17</sup> 96.8% 'very good' or 'good' rating for 'quality and appropriateness of staff advice', and the '97.7% rating for 'helpfulness and friendliness of staff', Public Services Quality Group Survey of Visitors to UK Archives 2007 available to download from [http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/research\\_and\\_development/survey/](http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/research_and_development/survey/). Accessed March 2009.

archives and record offices wish to involve younger volunteers, or use volunteering as a way to introduce people to archives, then different, and specific, targeting will be necessary.

### 3.4 Motivation for becoming a volunteer

Archive services must consider what motivates individuals to volunteer in order to provide volunteering opportunities that meet the needs of the volunteer as well as the service. Not surprisingly 77% of respondents to the 2009 survey identified 'interest in history' as one of the factors that had originally motivated them to volunteer with 59% also referring to actively seeking to learn or improve their archival or conservation skills.

As well as the personal benefits from volunteering a significant number of respondents referred back to their own experience of using archives, emphasising to motivation of enhancing access for other future generations of users.

*'As a family historian, as well as being interested in local history, I very much appreciate the ability to access records via the internet and I felt the need to give something back to assist others with similar interests.'* Male, 55-64

In addition to the factors that are directly related to working in an archive, respondents identified a range of other motivating factors that led them to volunteer; these are outlined in the chart below.

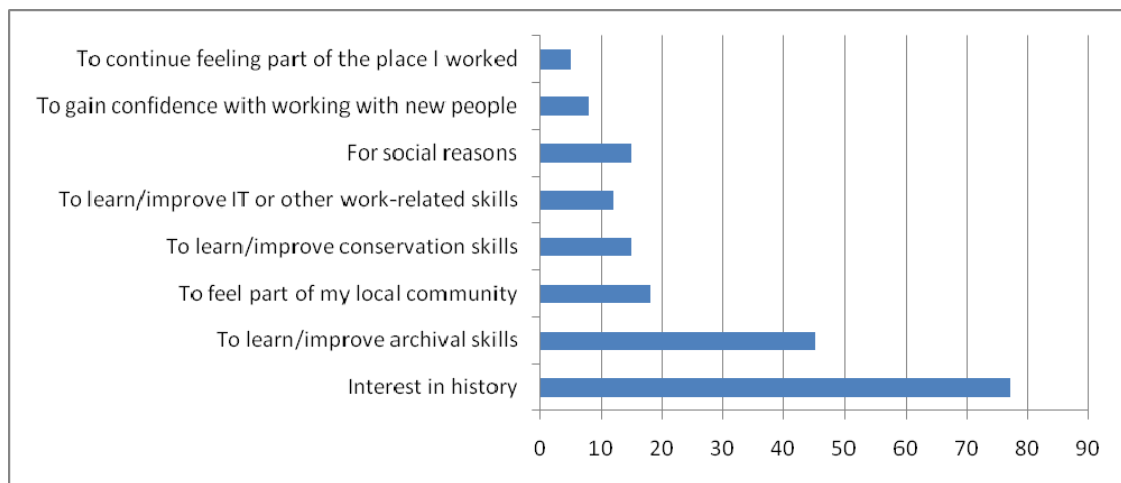


Chart 2: 'Why did you want to become a volunteer?' % responses <sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Source: NCA Survey 2009. See p.56 for breakdown by figures, percentage and error range (at confidence interval of 95%)

## 4 Benefits of Volunteering

### 4.1 Benefits to the organisation

The Institute of Volunteering Research 2005 report asked archives what were their main reasons for involving volunteers. The top four were responses were:

- 'It allows us to do things we would not normally do' – 85% (88% in 2001)
- 'It promotes user involvement' – 50% (63% in 2001)
- 'To give people a route to employment' – 32% (44% in 2001)
- 'It gives our work added value' – 32% (35% in 2001)

Interestingly only 11% stated that 'It saves money/can't afford to pay staff'. This compares to 43% of responses from the museum sector. Although this difference is primarily due to the number of totally volunteer-managed museums that responded to the IVR survey, it also indicates that volunteering in the archive sector is essentially seen as providing added value in service delivery, rather than plugging funding gaps. As the current economic climate begins to impact upon services, it will be interesting to see if this situation alters and this issue should be considered when bodies, such as MLA and The National Archives, are capturing data around the impact of the recession.

The idea of providing a service that the archive cannot currently afford to deliver is clearly very important in the motivation of volunteers themselves. As discussed in Section 3, many are also users of the archive or record office, and so have a keen awareness of what records are difficult to access, and have also benefited from resources created by other volunteers.

*'I realized that due to staff shortages, county record offices and local history centres would not be in a position to provide the public with transcript of historical documents and over use of these documents would seriously damage them so transcribe & preserve' Male, 75 and over*

*'I have been researching my family history for a number of years and had found indexes compiled by others very useful aids. (This was particularly the case prior to so much being made available on the internet) I thought that by becoming a volunteer in an archive I would be "doing my bit" to help future family historians.'*  
*Female, 45-54*

Providing voluntary opportunities can have a range of knock-on effects for archive services. Within local authorities in particular it can demonstrate how archives are meeting broader targets (See Section 5). It can also provide useful publicity for the service, for example the Lancashire Record Office 'Will Flatteners' project has been feature in at least fourteen different publications and media outlets (See Appendix B).

### 4.2 Nature of work undertaken by volunteers

The 2005 IVR report asked organisations what were the specific tasks completed by volunteers in archives. The top four responses were:

- Description of Records (89%)
- Conservation and Preservation (43%),
- Research (41%)
- Public Events (28%)

There is a direct correlation between the types of activities that volunteers are engaged in and the benefits of volunteering as perceived by the 2009 survey respondents. 81%

felt that they had improved their historical knowledge through volunteering. 64% had learnt or improved archival skills, and 24% had learnt or improved conservation skills. Creating detailed finding aids, transcription and basic conservation have been traditional areas where volunteers have been used, but increasingly archives are incorporating volunteering into a wider range of activities.

#### 4.2.1 Description of Records

Volunteers often enable detailed listing and indexing that would simply not be feasible for staff to undertake. For example volunteers in Leicestershire are helping to index building plans, workhouse records and prisoners' lists. At Nottinghamshire Archives volunteers are sorting and cataloguing bishops' transcripts. One of the most successful indexing projects is 'A Place in the Sun', a project to index part of the series of Sun Fire Office policy registers held at Guildhall Library. This project was started in 2003 by a group of users who, as the then London Archive Users Forum, successfully applied for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and subsequently to Awards for All to support their voluntary work.

*'I am working on the Workhouse records and it has given me such an interest in the subject. It was something I knew very little about but now has taught me so much' Female 65-74*

*'I would have liked to do more transcribing, but [the record office] ran out of areas before I ran out of enthusiasm.'*

Volunteers with specific specialist or technical expertise are often vital to archive services in supporting effective cataloguing of particular collections. For example, The Ballast Trust provides volunteers with specific knowledge of technical business records (See Case Study 7.7). The British Steel Archive Project based at Teeside University has recruited volunteers to support photograph recognition, whilst members of the Road Locomotive Society used their expertise on steam and agricultural machinery to support cataloguing of collections as part of the Museum of English Rural Life's 'Heavy Metal' project. The expertise held amongst individuals and groups outside the archive, that can inform and improve cataloguing, has been recently recognised in the piloting of the 'Revisiting Archives Collections' methodology through a MLA Partnership Action for Archives project.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Conservation work

Volunteers can provide vital support to professional conservators in undertaking basic preservation activities and preparation work. For example, Devon Record Office has a group of conservation volunteers working every Tuesday (See Case Study 7.10). Another celebrated team of conservation volunteers are the Lancashire Record Office Will Flatteners who spent 19 years flattening almost 600,000 documents that were part of the Record Office's collection of probate (see Appendix B), whilst Carlisle Record Office has recruited over 70 volunteers to undertake preservation packing to make the collection ready for its 2010 relocation to new premises. A new area of volunteer

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<sup>19</sup> Information about Revisiting Collections is available from Collections Link website [http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase\\_access/revisiting\\_collections](http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/Increase_access/revisiting_collections), and the MLA London website <http://www.mlalondon.org.uk/priorities/index.cfm?NavigationID=429> Accessed Mar 2009.



activity, with both access and conservation benefits is digitisation. For example, undergraduate students from Manchester Metropolitan University have been helping Manchester Local Studies and Archives to digitise the photographic collections.

*'Amazing sense of being part of history. Handling this huge Victorian Apportionment book, transcribing the details onto a spreadsheet, the twenty first century update to match the map on the CD after having helped to do some of the conservation work on the original map. How wonderful is that?!'* Female 55-64

#### 4.2.3 Research

Volunteers have been used both to identify resources within existing archive collections and in the wider community, for example the Bristol Black Archives Partnership used volunteers to support various different aspects of its project to identify existing materials within the record office and elsewhere to celebrate the heritage of the city's African-Caribbean community. Volunteers from the Bury Past and Present Society are researching captions for the Jarman collection of glass plate negatives held by Suffolk Record Office. Research by volunteers has included preparing records for publication, for example volunteers at Berkshire Record Office have produced editions published by the Berkshire Record Society including in 2008 the *Thames Navigation Commission Minutes 1771-1790*.

Individuals own research interests are often the primary means by which they choose where to volunteer. Whilst in most cases volunteers within local record offices identified family or local history research as their route into volunteering, if anything volunteers in more specialist archives even more closely relate their own research interests to volunteering.

*'My interest is specifically in this archive as it contains many documents which I would want to consult for the history of the village'* Female, 65-74

*'I am researching my family history and the Tithe map Project related to areas in which some of my ancestors lived, as well as the village in which I live, so giving a more personal edge to the project'* Female 55-64

*"The research related to aviation which is a field in which I have worked for 35+ years and in which I have had a lifelong interest.'* Male, 55-64

*'I have always been an activist so it seemed a good way to do something politically oriented in a time of political stagnation (my archive concentrates on the history of the women's liberation movement)'* Female 45-54

*'I wanted to be involved in the art world, as my academic interest is art history... I have always wanted to learn as much as possible, in any area of art history / visual culture.'* Female 18-24

#### 4.2.4 Public Events

Volunteers are increasingly supporting the development of learning and outreach activities. These might take the form of workshops, talks, creating exhibitions or new

resources with volunteers supporting staff or delivering work independently. For example in Sutton, youth volunteers acted as guides for the ‘Gentleman Slavers’ exhibition. The Black Cultural Archives is one of many organisations using volunteers to record oral histories, in this particular case focused on the Black Women’s movement. These types of activities help to combine volunteers’ research interests with opportunities to learn new skills.

*‘I was asked by my volunteer coordinator if I would like to take a workshop on researching family history, this wasn’t something I had ever thought of doing before however I agreed and put a programme together using my own family history research. I then discovered it had to be in PowerPoint, with the help of my coordinator I worked out how to use PowerPoint and changed the programme to that format. The talk was a success and since then I have given other talks away from the comfort zone of the archives. Nothing in my past indicated I could do this, I left school at fifteen (we didn’t take exams back then) and have worked in factories, shops and as a taxi driver. My volunteer coordinator was the person who convinced me I was capable of standing in front of a room full of strangers and giving these talks.’ Female, 65-74*

The use of volunteers in delivering regular customer-facing services has increased in recent years. A number of local authority services have begun to use experienced users to give advice to new users, for example the Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre uses a volunteer to support family historians (see Case Study 7.2) and Dudley Archives and Local History Service run computer buddy sessions where volunteers support users who are new to researching on the internet. London Metropolitan Archives is using volunteers to support its public service team to provide Saturday openings.

*‘I am passionate about genealogy, and the [archive] was not open at that stage on Saturdays. Being full-time at work, supporting Saturday opening was the only way I was going to get useful access to the archive material that I needed to research (on the Saturdays when I wasn’t working as a volunteer)’ Female, 55-64*

#### **4.3 Benefits for volunteers**

As previously mentioned, 81% of survey respondents felt that they had improved their historical knowledge through volunteering. 64% had learnt or improved archival skills, and 24% had learnt or improved conservation skills.

In addition, when asked about the following benefits:

- 48% felt it had enabled them to meet new people/socialise
- 31% felt it had helped with their sense of being part of a community
- 32% felt it had helped with their sense of being part of a workplace
- 28% felt it had helped them learn or improve their IT or other work-related skills
- 16% felt it had improved their confidence to look for work

What the results of the survey show very clearly are that, whatever the initial reasons individuals had for opting to volunteer in an archive environment, they identify a much wider range of benefits having become involved in volunteering. The following chart maps the question about what was the motivation to become a volunteer, against responses to the question about what the benefits have been.

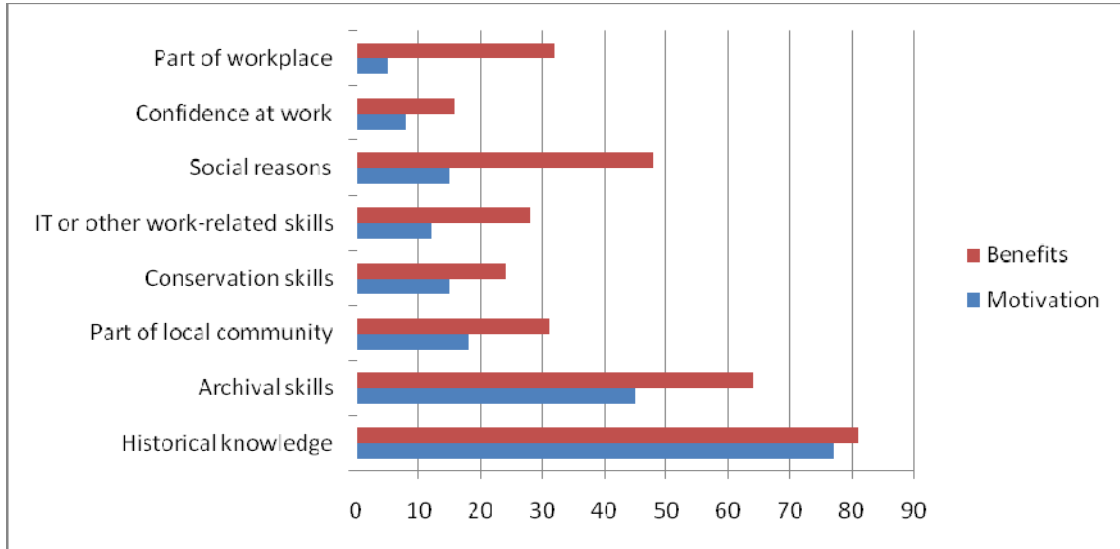


Chart 3: Comparison of responses to the question ‘Why did you want to become a volunteer?’ and ‘What have been the benefits to you from volunteering?’ % responses<sup>20</sup>

These figures represent significant additional benefits to volunteering, and many unrelated to the original motivation for volunteering. For example, whilst 45% (+/- 4.81) stated that they were motivated to volunteer to learn or improve archive skills, 64% (+/- 4.64) agreed that they had learnt or improved archival skills, representing around 30% greater impact. There was also significant impact relating to learning or improving IT or work-related skills. The benefits of volunteering were perceived by more than twice as many respondents, with 12% (+/- 3.14) stating that they began volunteering to learn or improve IT or other work-related skills, but 28% (+/- 4.34) stated this as a benefit of their volunteering. There were even more dramatic additional benefits in terms of softer outcomes. 18% (+/- 3.71) became volunteers to feel part of their local community rising to 31% (+/-4.47) responding that the sense of being part of community was a benefit to them. Whilst only 15% (+/- 3.45) cited social reasons for becoming a volunteer, 48% (+/- 4.83) cited meeting new people and socialising as a benefit of volunteering.

When asked to identify other benefits, a number (9%) provided comments focused on volunteering giving them a sense of general confidence or a feeling of being valued.

*‘I have bi-polar disorder and at present do not work, so volunteering gave me the opportunity to contribute to the community and also build my confidence’ Female 35-44*

*‘It is better than paid work. People say thank you and value suggestions and interest. It is great to share experiences with other volunteers and staff’ Male, 65-74*

<sup>20</sup> Source: NCA Survey 2009 See p.56-7 for breakdown by figures, percentage and error range (at confidence interval of 95%)

*'A sense that what we offer is valuable to and valued by the Record Office'  
Female 75 and over*

*'It gives me much pleasure to see my work completed, and I am more heartened to be in a place of work, with such wonderful people, to achieve an end result, be part of the community and well-being' Male 45-54*

*'I like the respect my supervisors and the other staff have for me. They appreciate my time and effort, and the way I take the project seriously. It is a work situation in which I feel dignified and valued; I have really started to imagine myself in a position such as this in a more permanent role in the future.'* Female, 18-24

If archive services seek to target new types of volunteers it would be beneficial to consider how to promote a) the employment related benefits and b) the softer outcomes that volunteers have identified around social engagement and sense of purpose. Further tangible benefits were identified by a number of respondents, and some examples are given below to give a flavour of these.

*'The Archivist encouraged me to write a book about the database I had created and the information I discovered in other local repositories, and my book was published in 2003, after 7 years work. I would never have had any inclination to write anything, but for the help and encouragement I received at [the archive].'  
Female, 55-64*

*'I still correspond with persons living in various parts of the world to assist them in their historical research' Male, 75 and over*

*'Working as a volunteer in [the archives] has encouraged me to write and submit articles that have been published in a local history magazine.'* Female, 55-64

*'I have gained a much broader perspective of what material is contained in the archive, seen new ways of organising and referencing materials, gained some insight into the drivers for running an archive. [These] help me professionally as I am a business consultant' Female, 55-64*

*'Convenient access to library resources at the volunteer workplace.'* Male, 65-74

*'I'm now pursuing a PhD in sociology based on a case study of a feminist organisation whose records are held in my archive. Had I not worked there, I would probably never have heard of them.'* Female, 45-54

## 5 Policies and Procedures

### 5.1 – Committing to Good Practice

The key principles of the *Compact Volunteering Code of Good Practice* are

- Volunteering must be the result of a free choice by the volunteer
- Volunteering must be open to everyone
- Volunteers must receive some benefits to make their contribution worthwhile
- Volunteers must be publicly recognised

*Investing in Volunteers* is the national quality standard recognising good practice in organisations' volunteer management. The standard is based on 10 indicators:

- There is an expressed commitment to supporting volunteering and recognition throughout the employing organisation that volunteering benefits individuals and the organisations involved
- The employer commits appropriate resources to working with volunteers
- The employer communicates that volunteering is accessible to all employees
- The employer promotes appropriate opportunities for volunteering in line with its values, and which are of benefit to the volunteers and the community
- The employer is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering
- The employer is committed to offering fair, efficient and consistent routes to volunteering opportunities for all employees
- The employer exercises its duty of care in matching volunteers with volunteering opportunities, in line with Equal Opportunities, diversity management and Data Protection requirements
- The employer ensures that there are clear procedures in place for introducing volunteers to the community partner: its aims, policies, practices and relevant personnel
- The employer is aware of the need to give volunteers appropriate recognition
- The employer takes account of the varying support needs of volunteers and assures itself that the community partner does likewise

All organisations within the archive sector providing volunteering opportunities should be ascribing to the principles of the Compact, and it is hoped that archives and record offices will increasingly develop policies that enable them to reach the Investing in Volunteers standard. At present there are no archives specifically listed in the Investing in Volunteers Achievers Club, although a few museums and libraries services have achieved the standard, for example, Beamish, North of England Open Air Museum, Northamptonshire Libraries & Information Service and Tyne & Wear Museums.

### 5.2 Volunteering Policies

There has been an increase in the formalisation of volunteering policies, in particular in the public sector, however it is unclear how many of these conform to the Compact or the provide the basis for the Investing in Volunteers ten indicators of good practice. The IVR 2005 report stated that only 55% of archives had a volunteer policy in place, although this had increased from 33% in 2001. In 2007, under The National Archives self-assessment performance measurement programme for local authority archive services, 90 of the 124 organisations surveyed agreed with the statement 'During the last year we have taken actions to promote volunteering', however only 68% of these stated that they had a volunteering policy. In the 2008 survey the number of services with a policy had increased to 75% with a further 8% in preparation. This increase may

be partly due in England to the introduction of National Indicators for Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships (England) include the priority 'Participation in Regular Volunteering' which has been incorporated into 43 of 150 local area agreements (See Appendix A).

These policies have been developed at a different levels within the local authorities, with some working to corporate wide policies, others working within a cultural services, library service or directorate-wide policy, whilst others have been able to tailor service-specific policies. For example Suffolk Record Office's volunteering policy sits underneath the County Council's 'Give it a Go' scheme. Hampshire Archives Volunteer Scheme (see Case Study 7.1) conforms to the County Council's Code of Practice, whilst Bury Metropolitan Borough Council's Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning Services are developing a collaborative volunteer policy (see Case Study 7.3). It is likely that other archive services within larger organisations providing volunteering or work experience opportunities have similar opportunities to tap into corporate policies. For example, University of Reading's Museums and Special Collections Service volunteering programme fits into the university's broader teaching and learning aims (see Case Study 7.6).

There is still a certain level of concern within the sector that increased use of volunteers will undermine their professional status within parent organisations and lead to a questioning of the need for invest in professional staffing. Another benefit for the archive in formulating an effective volunteering policy is that it can help to differentiate the role of the professional archivist and the volunteer.

### **5.3 Volunteer Co-ordinator**

With the drive to increase and extend volunteering, the role of the volunteer co-ordinator becomes increasingly important. For example, the Sutherland Papers project at Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service employed a project worker whose role incorporated volunteer co-ordination and the post of volunteer coordinator was subsequently incorporated into the organisation's staffing structure (See Case Study 7.9). Evaluation of projects involving volunteers frequently highlight that a key lesson from the project was to factor enough time for volunteer management into the role of existing staff, or project-specific posts. The benefits of having a volunteer co-ordinator are felt both by the organisation and the volunteer. Archive services should investigate how this role can be met whether that is within existing staffing levels, through a co-ordinator who is themselves a volunteer (see Case Study 7.1), or by incorporating volunteer co-ordinator posts into externally funded projects.

*'Another major benefit is that, if you have a good volunteer co-ordinator you feel valued at a time of life when it's all too easy to feel discounted and of little consequence' Female, 65-74*

### **5.4 Providing flexibility opportunities**

Whilst policies and procedures provide a framework for supporting volunteers, it is important that the individual is not forgotten and that volunteers are given tasks that match their skills and interests and that suit their lifestyle. This can also help to meet the Compact principle to ensure 'Volunteering must be open to everyone', in other words by providing a diversity of opportunities, the archive or record office can encourage a diversity of volunteers. For example some volunteers welcome the structure of a set

attendance pattern, whilst others are looking for tasks that can be fitted around other commitments.

*'Other benefits have included having a structure as part of my week (e.g. I have something to do and to look forward to).'* Male, 45-54

*'I enjoy the flexibility of being a volunteer as opposed to a regular staff member. This suits me at my stage of life (as the mother of a young child). I also like the variety that you get as a volunteer: there are fewer fixed routines and expectations.'* Female, 35-44

*'Being a volunteer takes away the stress of keeping to set hours.'* Female, 75 and over

*'Doing a useful job and not being tied to time. If I feel like a cup of coffee or a break I can just get up from my desk and go.'* Male, 75 and over

A number of archives have begun to develop volunteering opportunities that individuals can undertake at home or at venues other than the record office, for example, the 'What's Beneath Your Feet?' project at Gloucestershire Archives (See Case Study 7.8), The National Archives' 'Living the Poor Life' project, or Warwickshire Record Office's 'Outside the Box' initiative.

*'My voluntary work has been done at home using the computer - I have therefore avoided unnecessary travel to the County Record Office requiring extra time and expense.'* Female, 65-74

## **5.5 Volunteer rights**

It is important that volunteers feel valued and properly supported. This helps to meet the Compact principles that volunteers must receive some benefits to make their contribution worthwhile, and volunteers must be publicly recognised. Volunteer support should be acknowledged in print, on websites and through opportunities to celebrate the volunteers, for example through exhibitions and press releases. For example a volunteer with the 'Buried Battles and Veteran Voices' project at Surrey History Centre won a Surrey County Council Award for Volunteering. Volunteers' contributions can also be acknowledged in more informal ways.

*'The Record Office put on a display at the end, showing different aspects which had appealed to the various volunteers.'* Female, 75 and over

*'The Staff at the archive where I volunteer have been very friendly and helpful to me and have included [me] in social outings to the cinema and for meals etc., which has helped me enormously.'* Female, 45-54

Volunteers' activities need to be incorporated into the running of the service so that they don't feel like outsiders, or that they are inconveniencing staff. They should be provided with appropriate training and support to undertake the tasks they have been given and to ensure compliance around Health & Safety, Data Protection, copyright etc.

*'I am treated with care and courtesy by the Library staff and feel very much part of the team. First impressions are incredibly important.'* Female, 45-54

*'The staff made me feel VERY welcome and although the language of the archives is Welsh and I don't speak it, this has not been problem. Their advice has been invaluable.'* Female, 65-74

## 5.6 Work Experience

Archives that provide work experience opportunities for those wishing to become archivists or records managers should ensure that they use the FARMER 'Guidance to applicants seeking, and organisations providing, pre-course work experience in archives and records management'<sup>21</sup>. The Society of Archivists makes a list of work placement opportunities available via its website and in addition the Institute of Conservation provides a training exchange for potential entrants to the conservation profession.

*'I have acquired a deeper knowledge of Archives and Records Management. Volunteering has confirmed to me my interest in Archives and wanting to pursue a career in this field.'* Female, 18-24

Other volunteers use their volunteering in a more informal way to develop their workplace skills and 29% of 2009 survey respondents reported learning or improving work-related skills, with 16% stating that volunteering had improved their confidence to look for work. Appropriate procedures will enable the archive service to record the individual's contribution and provide accurate references if required.

*'I have been unemployed for some time. It helps to keep me sane, giving me some kind of routine, an opportunity to improve my skills and experience and was key to me gaining a place on a Masters Degree course.'* Female 45-54

*'Perhaps the main benefit for myself has been the inherent interest of the specific projects in which I have been involved, and the analytic and management skills which I have been able to exercise.'* Male 55-64

A number of archive services have worked with other agencies to provide specific targeted work placements. For example, Berwick upon Tweed Record Office has worked with Capability Scotland, Flintshire Record Office has worked with both SCOPE and A4E (see Case Study 7.4), and Bury Archive Services work with TNG (see Case Study 7.3). The advantage of working with organisations, whose mission is to support people seeking to return to work after long-term illness, unemployment, or providing placements for people with disabilities, is that they can provide support to both the individual taking up the placement, and to the archive service taking on the placement as the agencies will have appropriate procedures in place. Most of these placements appear to come about through approaches from the partner organisations, and it is hoped that in future archive services will be more pro-active in seeking out these partnerships.

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<sup>21</sup> Guidance available as a word document from the Society of Archivists website <http://www.archives.org.uk/content.asp?id=311>, Accessed Mar 2009



Work experience placements for young people are also offered by some services. These might be short-term work placements for school children, such as provided by Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre, or projects specifically designed to involve young people in volunteering, such as Worcestershire Records Office's Croome Summer School (see Case Study 7.5). As with any activity within the archive or record office involving children, organisations must comply with relevant legislation such as the Protection of Children Act, however it is important that guidance and support is provided to the archive sector to allay concerns about working with this age group. By encouraging this type of volunteering, not only does it enable young people to engage in an active way with archival materials, it would also help to encourage a broader range of young people to consider archives as a possible future career, thus supporting diversification of the profession.

Undergraduate student placements are often treated in the same way as other volunteering opportunities and policies are written to incorporate this type of volunteer. In other circumstances, particularly where the archive is associated with the university, this might be covered by a more structured framework including accreditation, examples being at the University of Reading Museums and Special Collections Service (see Case Study 7.6) and the University of Glasgow Archive Services work in collaboration with the Club 21 Business Partnership Programme.

## 6 Recommendations

It is hoped that NCA<sup>22</sup> and other stakeholders in the archive sector will endorse the following eight recommendations and consider taking forward the specific actions suggested under each recommendation as part of an Action Plan for Volunteering in Archives.

**Recommendation 1:** NCA to work with key organisations within the sector to support volunteering in archives

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
NCA to work with organisations such as Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, The National Archives, Society of Archivists, Scottish Council on Archives, Archives and Records Council Wales, and CyMAL to develop an action plan based on Recommendations 2-8	NCA (MLA, TNA, SoA, SCA, ARCW, CyMAL)	Summer 2009

**Recommendation 2:** Engage with the All Party Group on Archives and Opinion Formers

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Create a short briefing paper on volunteering in archives targeted at the All Party Group on Archives	NCA (MLA)	2009
Highlight report to relevant government departments and national volunteering bodies	NCA (MLA)	2009
Hold a session on volunteering in archives for parliamentarians	All Party Group on Archives (NCA)	Autumn 2009

**Recommendation 3:** Encourage national recognition of volunteer contribution to archives

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Introduction of a Volunteering Award scheme	NCA (MLA, SoA))	2009/10

**Recommendation 4:** Share good practice within the archive sector

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
NCA's Public Service Quality Group 2009 Forum to celebrate the role of volunteers within the archive sector and present examples of good practice to the sector.	NCA	4 Nov 2009
Ensure availability of good practice case studies through MLA research database	MLA	Ongoing
Develop Best Practice guidelines for volunteering in the archive sector	SoA	2010

<sup>22</sup> If the proposed creation of a new sectoral organisation replacing the NCA and the Society of Archivists (SoA) goes ahead, it is hoped that the new body would take over the actions assigned to NCA and SoA.

**Recommendation 5:** Encourage work experience opportunities through volunteering in archives

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Provision of information about work placement opportunities	SoA	Ongoing
Ensure inclusion of relevant guidance on creating modular volunteering opportunities to develop workplace skills in Good Practice Guidelines (see Rec 4)	SoA	2010

**Recommendation 6:** Promote diversification of archive volunteers

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Ensure inclusion of relevant guidance to create opportunities for a range of volunteers including under 18s and people with disabilities in Good Practice Guidelines (see Rec 4)	SoA	2010

**Recommendation 7:** Provide training opportunities within the sector to promote good practice

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Identify training needs around volunteering through survey	SoA	2009
Bring together relevant partners to discuss delivery of training opportunities	SoA (NCA, MLA London)	2009

**Recommendation 8:** Improve evidence gathering and evaluation in relation to the use of volunteers in the archive sector

<i>Action</i>	<i>Lead (Partners)</i>	<i>Timetable</i>
Identify gaps in evidence gathering	NCA (MLA, TNA)	2009
Identify barriers to involving volunteers	NCA (SoA)	2009
Encourage volunteering projects under the <i>Archive Pace Setter</i> programme	NCA	2009

## 7 Case Studies<sup>23</sup>

### 7.1 Formalising Volunteering policies and practices

**Project Title and Organisation:** Hampshire Archives Volunteers Scheme, Hampshire Record Office

**Brief Summary:**

The Hampshire Archives Volunteer Scheme was launched in June 2007 and is a partnership between Hampshire Record Office and the Hampshire Archives Trust. Building on the Record Office's successful engagement with volunteers over the years, the scheme was set up to provide a stronger framework for effective management of volunteers and to enable the Record Office to provide a broader range of volunteering opportunities in the future. The scheme is also designed to ensure that the benefits of the Heritage Lottery funded project 'Living Links'; an innovative community archives project in which both Hampshire Record Office and Hampshire Archives Trust are partners, are supported through sustainable service development.

**Target Audience:**

This service development is not targeted at a particular audience, but provides a framework through which targeted volunteering opportunities can be provided in the future.

**Aim:**

- To broaden, and extend, volunteering opportunities at Hampshire Record Office through the creation of a formalised framework for volunteering.
- To develop appropriate policies and procedures to ensure that volunteering is open to all, that volunteers are provided with benefits and their rights recognised, and that their contribution to the service is fully acknowledged.
- To ensure that volunteering within the Record Office conforms to the County Council Code of Practice and supports delivery of the Hampshire Local Area Agreement targeted priority 'Participation in regular volunteering'.

**Process:**

Development of the Scheme

The Scheme was developed in partnership with the Hampshire Archives Trust. The Trust is a membership body which supports the work of Hampshire's archives services by rescuing archives at risk, by surveying and advising on the care of archives held by organisations, groups and individuals, and by increasing awareness of the importance and interest of archives. A paper was presented to the HAT Executive Committee in March 2006. Informal consultation was undertaken on the proposed scheme via the Trust, with managers at the Record Office, colleagues from the Museum and Library services and with existing volunteers. Care was taken to ensure the Scheme would conform to the County Council code of practice on the use of volunteers.

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<sup>23</sup> There is already a useful case study on 'Volunteering: Tyne and Wear Archive Service' on the MLA research database see <http://research.mla.gov.uk/case-studies/>

## Implementation

The scheme is designed to ensure its flexible use in terms of the range of volunteering activities offered, however some of the specific areas it is likely to be used are:

- Cataloguing and indexing archive collections (either at HRO or off site using copies of records)
- Inputting data into the online archive catalogue
- Scanning and digitising archives e.g. photographic collections
- Helping with preservation work such as repackaging archives
- Helping at HRO events such as open days or family learning activities or assisting with HRO stalls at local and family history days around the county
- Providing assistance for new users at HRO and demonstrating the use of the online archive catalogue
- Giving prepared talks and presentations about the work of the Record Office and Hampshire Archives Trust

Volunteers signing up for the scheme do not need any previous experience or specific skills. They are asked to complete a registration form giving some basic information about themselves, their existing skills and availability and provide a reference from someone who has known them for at least two years.

In return the Record office provides:

- Training - every volunteer is given basic induction training about Hampshire Record Office and its archives, health and safety etc. Beyond that, for some activities a short briefing session in advance of an event is all that is necessary; for others, longer training sessions will be provided that are tailored to the work they have volunteered to do.
- Benefits - One year's free membership of Hampshire Archives Trust
- Expenses – Out of pocket expenses are paid (although volunteers working at HRO in Winchester are normally be expected to fund their own travel to and from Winchester).
- Cover - Volunteers have insurance cover under the County Council's Personal Accident Scheme and are be covered for public liability risk. They are given the same level of protection for health and safety as is given to Hampshire Record Office staff.

## Number of participants:

Hampshire Record Office currently has 21 volunteers who commit time on a regular basis. Numbers have been increasing, partly as a result of the Living Links project. Until recently the Record Office has not been in a position to cope with a sudden increase in numbers of volunteers but the Scheme is designed to extend the number of volunteering opportunities in the future through a managed increase. The launch was therefore deliberately low key to avoid the risk of disappointing prospective volunteers through raising unrealistic expectations.

## Impact and outcome

Under the scheme staff time taken in supporting volunteers has been recognised and formalised, with a single archivist from the Access and Learning team taking on the role as the primary link with volunteers, with additional named contacts amongst the team for particular projects.

The scheme has been devised so that the procedures are appropriate in covering a wider range of volunteering opportunities. This will give the Record Office flexibility to extend volunteering from the usual type of activities such as indexing and simple preservation tasks to include a whole range of new roles, in particular in supporting access and outreach work.

It is also hoped that, once volunteers have received their year's free membership of the Hampshire Archives Trust, they will continue their membership of the organisation, so that volunteering also supports the longer-term work of HAT.

### **Evaluation**

The evaluation that will be undertaken at the end of the Living Links project in autumn 2010 will include an evaluation on volunteering and inform the ongoing re-evaluation of the scheme. As part of the scheme volunteers who leave are asked to complete an exit evaluation form.

### **Tips**

There were initially some concerns about how existing volunteers would feel about signing up to a more formalised scheme. This proved not to be the case. Volunteers have particularly welcomed the additional privileges they have received by being part of the scheme. These privileges, such as workplace security badges and access codes, have demonstrated the trust the Record Office places in the volunteers and makes them feel part of the organisation.

### **Future Development**

Any future use of volunteers will be covered by the Scheme. The Scheme will enable Hampshire Record Office to develop targeted projects for groups of volunteers focused on local communities, or specific indexing or preservation activities. It will also provide a mechanism by which community groups, particularly those that have been involved in 'Living Links', can initiate future volunteering projects to work with HRO. As the range of volunteering opportunities is extended, it is hoped that a volunteer might be willing to take on a co-ordination role.

### **Project Website**

<http://www3.hants.gov.uk/archives.htm>

### **Contact Details:**

Jan Smith, County Archivist, Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, Sussex Street, Winchester SO23 8TH, 01962 846155, [jan.t.smith@hants.gov.uk](mailto:jan.t.smith@hants.gov.uk)

## 7.2 Supporting Family History Research

**Organisation:** Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre, (Bexley Library Service)

**Brief Summary:**

Like other local authority archive services the majority of the customers who use the Centre come to research their family history. Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre has found that family historians frequently have enquiries that can take up much staff time, particularly when they are new to the subject. Therefore, it was decided to engage a keen and experienced family historian to help other family historians with their enquiries for one morning per week. This service runs with little staff intervention and it is increasingly popular. Lately, it is not rare for all six People's Network computers in the Centre to be full of people conducting family history with the aid of the volunteer. There is potential to expand this service to an extra morning or afternoon per week.

**Target Audience:**

Family historians from Bexley and beyond

**Aim:**

- To offer a better service to family historians in Bexley and beyond
- To free up limited staff resources so that they can undertake other duties and tasks
- To satisfy a demand by family historians
- To increase use in non online sources, archives and book collections
- To expand volunteering opportunities within Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre

**Process:**

Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre adheres to the Bexley Library Service volunteer policy. The policy aims:

- To show how Bexley Library Service is committed to supporting volunteers and adopting best practise in volunteer management
- To ensure uniformity of service delivery across the Library Service
- To clarify the role of volunteers, their tasks and expectations
- To adopt a policy of fair and equal treatment of volunteers
- To add value, support and diversity to the work of Bexley library Service

Bexley Local Studies & Archive Centre developed a Volunteer Work Plan to organise volunteering at the Centre. The purpose of this plan is to provide a coherent framework within which current volunteers at the Centre can work over the next three years. It is also intended that this plan will provide a basis to recruit additional volunteers to work at Local Studies. The plan includes a number of volunteering opportunities at the Centre including: cataloguing; collection care and answering family history enquiries.

One of the regular users expressed an interest in helping other family historians with their research. She is a keen family historian and has had articles published in several national family history magazines. It was suggested that she may like to come into Local Studies for one morning a week to see how popular this volunteer led service would be amongst current and new users. Local Studies' front line staff promoted the service to users, especially those who were new to family history. It took some weeks for the

service to take off, but once the service was promoted to users it proved to be very popular. The service has run since 2007 and expanding the service would require finding another volunteer as equally knowledgeable and as experienced.

**Number of participants:**

At the moment one volunteer for one morning per week, helping between 6 to 10 people with family history enquiries during the session.

**Impact and outcome:**

- Family history research, particularly when undertaken by people new to the subject, can be quite lengthy. Before engaging a volunteer to run a family history enquiry service, for one morning per week, a disproportionate amount of paid staff time was spent helping customers with their family history research. Introducing this volunteer led service has freed up paid staff time to undertake other duties.
- It is not uncommon for all six People's Network computers in local studies with access to the family history website *Ancestry.com* to be in use.
- It has also promoted the Centre as a venue to research family history
- There has been increased use of the Centre's archives and local studies collections.
- It has helped to dispel the myth, common amongst many beginners in family history, that everything is available online.

**Evaluation:**

There has been no specific evaluation of the volunteer led service but, according to the PSQG National Visitors Survey, 72% of users are family historians with 69% rating the service 'very good' and 31% rating it 'good'.

**Tips:**

- Volunteer must be competent, confident and a good communicator
- Volunteer must have a very sound knowledge and experience of using a range of sources online and hardcopy, including archives for family history.
- Staff buy in is essential so that they view a volunteer led service as an opportunity not a threat.

**Future Development:**

It is hoped to extend the service to another morning per week.

**Project Website:** <http://www.bexley.gov.uk/localstudies/index.html>

**Contact Details:**

Simon McKeon, Local Studies Manager, Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre, Townley Road, Bexleyheath, Kent DA6 7HJ, 020 8836 7370, [simon.mckeon@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:simon.mckeon@bexley.gov.uk)



### 7.3 Encouraging return to work

**Project Title and Organisation:** The New Deal Training Programme, Bury Archives Service

**Brief Summary:**

TNG are a training company working with individuals who are out of work to give them new opportunities in their search for employment. Their clients are given guidance in CV writing and interview skills, have time to search for and apply for jobs and are given a work experience placement lasting 13 weeks in an organisation that interests them or they would like to gain skills in. Bury Archives Service were initially approached in 2007 to be a placement organisation on this scheme.

**Target Audience:**

All volunteers on the scheme are on job seekers allowance and are actively seeking employment. Bury Archive Service is advertised to clients of TNG as an organisation offering work placements, but it is the client's choice whether they would like to work with the service and informal interviews for positions are held.

**Aim:**

Bury Archive Service did not actively try to develop this form of volunteering but when approached by TNG it seemed too good an opportunity to miss. It would diversify the ways in which the service worked with volunteers and would allow the service to set up different volunteer projects than usual.

**Process:**

TNG clients are treated as a member of staff – with set hours of work and protocol to follow. They are all informally interviewed before being accepted by Bury Archive Service on placement. TNG phone every day to check the client has turned up for work. All clients are given an individual project to work on as assigned by the Archivist. In the most these projects consist of listing, repackaging, scanning collections and carrying out research. They are asked to represent the service by assisting on specific activities, such as open day events (if these opportunities arise).

The work with TNG is reviewed on an annual basis with a member of their staff meeting with the Archivist.

**Number of participants:** Four people came to Bury Archive Service on 13 week placements in the last two year period. Two of these were graduate level in terms of education and two were young adults (18 years) with no qualification beyond GCSE. All have had an interest in history.

**Impact and outcome**

Every placement is unique in terms of its impact on the service, due to the skills and abilities of the volunteer and the nature of the project we devise.

*Lily (2009): 'Working at the archives gives me experience of a work environment that I can draw on in interview situations. It has helped me to gain confidence in the workplace and I now have a work based experience of using a computer. I love history and the placement has been really interesting – giving me an idea of what actually goes on in an archive, to catalogue and help researchers.'*

Jim (2007): *'I really like the placement - it is my dream job'*.

Three of the four placement clients have continued to work as volunteers at the service after their placement ended. One placement finished just before the 13 week period ended as the client found employment. It is known that at least one other client is now in employment.

Working with volunteers of this nature has really made the service redress its induction procedures. It is easy to become complacent when regular volunteers are primarily looking for a pastime. The service is very aware that it is working with people who need to build up their confidence and feel part of a work community. They need careful guidance and Bury Archive Service ensures it gives the placement clients a range of challenges in a project to help diversify their skill set.

### **Evaluation**

TNG review the client progress with them and Bury Archive Service receives the data collected. This deals with client confidence and motivation, progress they have made in terms of role/ responsibilities/ areas of development/ skills. They are asked what they like/ dislike about the placement. They are asked if they believe they are being treated fairly in terms of supervision, hours of work and terms and conditions of placement. They are asked if they would like any further training/ development.

### **Tips**

- Be aware of the time commitment (full time, 13 weeks)
- Ensure you interview potential clients before a placement starts so both parties know what to expect from one another.
- Be aware of the confidence levels of the people you will be working with – and their vulnerability in this respect.
- There is no financial cost to the organisation – all clients have their travel expenses paid by TNG

### **Future Development**

The way volunteers are being utilised by the service has been recognised by the wider organisation. Bury Metropolitan Borough Council's Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning Services are currently developing a collaborative volunteer policy. This policy will be accompanied by publicity material to encourage volunteers with varied skills/ abilities/ interests etc. to work with the services. Pooling networks and experiences across the organisation in this way will ensure that each service is able to signpost potential volunteers appropriately and ensure that potentially useful volunteers are not turned away - providing a rewarding experience for both parties.

### **Website =**

Bury Archive Service [www.bury.gov.uk/archives](http://www.bury.gov.uk/archives)

TNG [www.tng.uk.com](http://www.tng.uk.com)

### **Contact Details:**

Joanne Fitton, Archivist, Bury Museum + Archives, Moss Street, Bury, BL9 0DR, 0161 253 6314, [j.c.fitton@bury.gov.uk](mailto:j.c.fitton@bury.gov.uk)

## **7.4 Working with partner organisations to deliver volunteering opportunities**

**Project Title and Organisation:** Work Experience through SCOPE & A4E, Flintshire Record Office

### **Brief Summary:**

Flintshire Record Office has worked with two organisations to provide work placement opportunities that can help volunteers learn new skills and increase their confidence in a workplace setting. This can support individuals in returning to work. The two organisations Flintshire Record Office has worked with are Scope, a charity which works with the disabled, and A4E which is an agency working to get unemployed people back into work.

### **Target Audience**

Both organisations contacted the Record Office to find out if it would be interested in taking on someone for a short period of work experience in administrative work.

### **Aim**

Ideally this should be a win/win situation for both Record Office and Volunteer.

- The Record Office gains administrative support
- The volunteer gains varied work experience in an interesting and friendly environment. This stands them in good stead in their efforts to secure paid employment – it looks good on their CVs and gives them an extra potential reference to support job applications

### **Process**

The agency concerned chooses a candidate it feels would be suitable and supplies a CV to the Record Office. Someone from the agency and the candidate come for an interview at the Record Office with the Principal Archivist (the service manager) and the Administrative Officer who would be the volunteer's immediate supervisor in his/her work.

If all parties are happy with the interview, the volunteer starts as soon as convenient. The work involved is generally four days a week with the fifth day spent at the agency job-hunting. The placement is for a period of three months although, obviously, if the volunteer is successful in finding paid work before the period is up, the placement is terminated.

### **Number of Participants**

To date Scope has provided one work placement volunteer and, although they have not since offered anyone else, there is nothing to suggest that the outcome was unsatisfactory from Scope's point of view. Flintshire Record Office has had several people take up placements through A4E, the latest of whom is with the service until April 2009. The partnership is an ongoing relationship. The Record Office cannot take more than one person at a time, and sometimes if the agency does not have anyone suitable on their books, there is no take up of the placement. There have been five placements over the past two years.

### **Impact & Outcome**

The impact for both sides is generally considerable. On the whole, the volunteers enjoy their work at the Record Office and three-months of work, even if unpaid, looks better on

a CV than three months of doing nothing. The impact on the Record Office is equal and generally positive. The Record Office is a small team and an extra member of staff makes a considerable difference. It is not only the Administrative Officer who benefits from having someone to share her work load, the front-line staff who deliver the service to the public are relieved of some of the administrative tasks which fall on them, such as carrying out reprographic orders.

Success has varied but on balance, Flintshire Record Office is very pleased with what it gets out of this process. In general the volunteers have been hardworking, enthusiastic, eager to fit in and happy to undertake any task asked of them.

### **Evaluation**

No formal evaluation process happens on the Record Office side. The Principal Archivist generally discusses the placement with those who have been involved in supervising the volunteer. Any problems usually raise their heads during the placement but so far there has been nothing serious. The agencies concerned have their own evaluation process.

### **Tips**

The only note of caution is the need to be careful not to give the volunteer access to any of sensitive and/or confidential records held in the Record Office. Permanent members of staff are CRB-checked as a matter of course but this is not possible for volunteers, given the time-scales within which they work.

### **Future Development**

One of the reasons the Record Office was keen to participate in the first place was that, with an administrative officer off on long term sick leave, this left the service short of staff with no spare budget to pay an extra member of staff. If the situation is resolved, the Record Office will have to look at whether it can continue to offer the same opportunity and itself gain the same benefit. However, in a busy office extra administrative support is always likely to be welcome.

### **Website:**

[www.flintshire.gov.uk/archives](http://www.flintshire.gov.uk/archives)

### **Contact Details:**

Claire Harrington, Principal Archivist, The Flintshire Record Office, The Old Rectory, Hawarden, Flintshire, CH5 3NR, 01244 532414 [Claire\\_Harrington@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:Claire_Harrington@flintshire.gov.uk)

## 7.5 Youth Volunteering

**Project Title and Organisation:** Summer School Project, Worcestershire Record Office

**Brief Summary:**

This project, funded by MLA West Midlands, was based on the records of the Croome Estate and the Earls of Coventry. The project was designed to pilot working with young people aged between 13 and 19, in particular encouraging this age group to undertake work within the Record Office on a voluntary basis over the summer of 2007.

**Target Audience:**

The project was aimed at the age group, 13 – 19.

**Aim:**

The aims of the project were to:

- Engage new audiences and challenge their perceptions of archives as ‘dusty and boring’
- Give young people new skills, confidence and increase their maturity
- Develop the knowledge of Record Office staff regarding working with young people
- Show the regional archive sector the benefits of using young people as volunteers

**Process:**

Recruitment

The Summer School was only one part of a project that included the cataloguing of the Croome papers. A Project Archivist was recruited, although delays in the recruitment process meant that the Project Archivist was not in post at the beginning of the Summer School and therefore other members of staff managed the recruitment of volunteers and the start of the Summer School. A number of different methods were used to recruit the volunteers, firstly via general publicity about the project and subsequently through publicity materials aimed at young people and circulated to schools, youth centres and young archaeologist and young museums clubs. The initial response was disappointing but following further promotion within the Council and further press coverage the target number of 12 participants for the initial workshop was reached.

Activities

The introductory workshop was held at the Record Office and allowed staff to ask about the young people’s existing knowledge of archives, as well as providing the participants with a tour and practical sessions on handling and reading old handwriting. The young volunteers were given Volunteer Task Descriptions and Work agreements setting out their activities for the summer. These were signed by the volunteers, and if required, counter-signed by their parents. The amount of volunteer hours the volunteers agreed to contribute was kept flexible to allow for their other commitments, and to enable Record Office staff to manage the number of volunteers requiring supervision at any given time. In addition to the workshop a talk was given about the collection, the young people watched a documentary on Croome Park and this was followed up by a trip to Croome Park.

The volunteers worked on basic preservation and sorting tasks, contributing on average 27 hours a week each during the summer vacation. The parts of the collection the volunteers worked on were carefully chosen to be appropriate to their level of understanding of archival documents whilst being challenging enough to stretch their

skills. Each volunteer was given a notebook to record items of interest, and these were discussed with each other and the staff. The volunteers were also introduced to other parts of the collection through selected displays.

#### **Number of participants:**

12 young people signed up for the project and as it progressed there was a core group of eight, with a 50/50 split between male and female and with ages ranging from 14 to 18. One participant had a disability.

#### **Impact and outcome**

- The project reached a new audience. Prior to the project most of the volunteers had never been to the Record Office and some did not know it existed
- The young people learnt new skills. As well as being able to handle documents appropriately, read old handwriting and help process collections, several of the young people felt their maturity and confidence had been helped by the project, and for one it was the first time she had taken a bus by herself
- The Record Office staff felt more confident about the benefits of using young people as volunteers and the project model informed future projects with teams of volunteers
- Information about the project was shared with the West Midlands regional archives group

#### **Evaluation**

At the initial workshop the participants were asked to complete feedback forms identifying why they had chosen to attend. An evaluation day was held at the end of the project which both celebrated the achievements of the volunteers and allowed volunteers to complete an evaluation form to assess the project's success against the MLA's Inspiring Learning for All Generic Learning Outcomes.

#### **Tips**

- Allow enough time in the recruitment process of project staff for Criminal Records Bureau checks
- Ensure that there is a good working knowledge of the collection within the staff to ensure that the volunteer contribution is maximised in supporting the cataloguing of the collection
- Include a contingency in the budget to allow for unexpected expenditure (in this instance the need to hire a mini-bus for the trip to Croome Park)

#### **Future Development**

The model used was not age specific and similar projects could be run with adults and community groups as well as young people. Worcestershire Record Office is developing a number of project proposals dependent on attracting external funding, but if they go ahead volunteers from the Croome Summer School may be interested in returning to help. When the new Worcester Library and History Centre opens in 2011, one of the first displays will be about the Croome Papers and will include images of the young volunteers.

#### **Website**

<http://worcestershire.whub.org.uk/home/wcc-records-croomesummerschool>

**Contact Details:**

Paul Hudson, Head of Worcestershire History Centre, Worcestershire History Centre,  
Trinity Street, Worcester, WR1 2PW, 01905 765926, [phudson2@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:phudson2@worcestershire.gov.uk)

Charlene Taylor, Croome Project Archivist, Worcestershire Record Office, County Hall,  
Spetchley Road, Worcester WR5 2NP 01905 728704 [ctaylor1@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:ctaylor1@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## 7.6 Student volunteer work with archives

**Organisation:** University of Reading Museums and Special Collections Service

### **Brief Summary**

Over the past four years the University of Reading's Museums and Special Collections Service has developed its existing volunteer programme to offer new opportunities and training to community and student volunteers. This involved: generating new types of volunteer projects; centralising the administration of volunteers; and also the development of sector specific training. This has been enhanced in 2008-9 with a project funded by two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning CCMS and CETL-AURS. The project involves the creation of new training resources and the accreditation of volunteer work for University of Reading students.

### **Aims**

- To support collections management and audience development across the university collections.
- To create a sustainable centralised system of volunteer management in order to avoid excessive demands on staff time.
- To provide 'value added' work experience opportunities and careers advice to students.
- To raise awareness of, and provide training in, specialist areas of heritage management.

### **Process**

Restructuring:

The University Museums at Reading have always relied on community and student volunteers on an ad hoc and informal basis. In 2005 funding was secured for a Volunteer Development Project. This project funded the employment of a University Museums and Special Collections Service Volunteer Development Officer.

The project was supported by the existence of the HEFCE funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS). This funding had allowed an Undergraduate Learning Officer to be placed within the Museum of English Rural Life. This meant that the volunteer project could be integrated with the T&L aims of the University and build on specialist knowledge of adult learning with collections. The line management of the Volunteer Project by the Undergraduate Learning Officer has led to the development of a unique offer for student volunteers.

In practical terms the early stages of the project focused on the centralisation of volunteer activity. Staff would work up projects with the Volunteer Officer which would be advertised via the Volunteer Office. Recruitment was also centralised and utilised the University's Careers Service's and the local Voluntary Action Group's existing marketing structures.

A decision was also made to keep formal records on volunteers as previously information on activities was known only to supervisory staff. This meant that detailed information was lost with staff turnover or was simply forgotten over time. As a larger number of student volunteers were taken on this became a problem with staff unable to provide good references. Each volunteer is now asked to provide a CV and two references before they start and all subsequent evidence is kept in a centrally stored file.



This process has been assisted by a new visitor database Artifax which is used to log volunteer details and hours. This has helped the University to understand the full scope of volunteer input. One student volunteer recently found that she had undertaken approximately 118 hours of volunteer work over the last year!

#### Training:

The processing of volunteers has also been improved by this centralised system. All volunteers are interviewed by the Volunteer Officer and introduced to the central volunteer facilities (two rooms with computer stations and tables for sorting work based at the Museum of English Rural Life). They then choose from a list of current volunteer projects. Some of these projects branched into new areas of volunteer work e.g. tour guiding or book conservation, which meant that training had to be developed.

The Volunteer Officer and the Undergraduate Learning Officer work together with various internal and external specialists to organise such training. The Undergraduate Learning Officer's other work with Enquiry Based Learning ensures that the training is not simply a lecture on a subject but a hands-on interactive experience which will aid students' long-term career plans.

For the academic year 2008-9 this focus on careers and training has been taken to a new level. With funding acquired from the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Career Management Skills (CCMS), CETL-AURS and the MLA South East's Workforce Development Fund, a new scheme is being piloted. The University Museums and Special Collections Service has teamed up with the Student Union's MASIV (Modular Accreditation of Students in Volunteering) scheme, which recognises self-reflective volunteer work on students' degree transcripts.

In order to support this initiative new workshops and resources have been created with consultant and former Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Museum Development Officer Janet Bell. These workshops give sector specific careers advice and practical training in various aspects of heritage management. The potential of e-portfolios as a method of supporting student reflection is also being explored.

This work has resulted in a cultural shift in the way that volunteers are viewed within the organisation. Volunteer work is now being written into funding proposals and staff are actively seeking out opportunities to train and utilise volunteers. In light of this, the organisation is developing a staff training workshop to help people get the most out of their volunteers. Requests for student volunteers are also coming in from other institutions in the local area and from other smaller collections on campus, which had not previously used volunteers on a regular basis. In this way the structure can help understaffed institutions, or those who want specific assistance, in attracting well trained student volunteers.

#### **Number of participants**

150 volunteers at any one time.  
95 students and 55 community volunteers.  
25 students on pilot accreditation scheme

## Impact and Outcome

### Impact on students

*'I didn't really know much about archives before joining MERL's Heavy Metal volunteer project. I don't think I was alone in this as most of my friends have very little idea of what an archive is. The project allowed me to go behind the scenes and get a taste of archival work. It also exposed me to some very interesting materials from the engineering archives which I didn't know the University had. My father and brother are both steam enthusiasts so I have been able to use the collection to find information for them.*

*I met different kinds of people working with members of the Road Locomotive Society on the project. I was the only student and they were mainly retired but I learnt a lot from them and they were extremely welcoming.*

*The skills I have acquired as a volunteer have helped me in my degree and in making decisions about my future career. I am planning on working in this sector so I am hoping that the mixture of training, experience and accreditation from this project will impress potential employers.'*

Frances Potts – 3<sup>rd</sup> year BA Archaeology and Ancient History student

### Impact on staff

*'Working as the sole archivist on a cataloguing project it has been a really positive experience having a volunteer to assist on some areas of the listing work. Supervising the volunteer has given me valuable knowledge of managing others which I would not have the chance to have otherwise. The volunteer is gaining hands-on experience of working with an archive collection as well as producing a clear, accurate and consistent list which will be used to ensure material worthy of permanent preservation is retained'*

Hayley Whiting Project Archivist Hugh Sinclair Project

### Impact on service

*'Being able to harness the enthusiasm and energy of our student community, while at the same time giving individuals a taste of working in our sector, has been a thoroughly positive experience for us. The diversity of our collections often means that project archivists are required to work in "silos", and so creating small teams of volunteers and professionals enables us to add value to projects and to develop management skills among our team. Achieving the balance between preservation and outreach is a constant struggle for archives services, and volunteering is one of the ways in which we can achieve both. It is too early to draw firm conclusions but the involvement of students in volunteering projects seems to be paralleled by an increase in their use of the collections in their studies. A community that is involved in both preserving and using the archives – isn't that what every archivist would like to see?'*

Guy Baxter University Archivist

Archival Projects involving student volunteers include Heavy Metal, Longman Collection, the Samuel Beckett Archive, Hugh Sinclair Collection, Glass Plate Negative project, Countryside Images Project, Leo Cooper Archive, Cole Archival Materials, Ure Museum

Archival Materials, REME Corps Archive, International Harvester Collections, Charles Burrell & John Fowler Engineering Drawings, Jill Smithies botanical drawings, Eric Guy photographic archive and the Evacuee archive.

### **Evaluation**

As has already been mentioned the visitor database Artifax has allowed the recording of the impact of volunteer activity much more effectively. By providing each collection with a sign up sheet it has been possible to record weekly activity and feed it back into the database. This information can be handed on to students if requested.

Official training is assessed using basic evaluation forms and focus groups are planned as part of the current project in order to understand the motivation for volunteering amongst students.

In the longer-term the University would like to research the impact that work experience has on student career management. This is notoriously difficult to capture. However, in the first instance social networking technology has been utilised to keep track of volunteers once they have left full time education. There is a Facebook site that is used to advertise 'starter posts' and internships and to provide ongoing support. In turn the University uses this site to retrieve information about student activity.

### **Tips**

Tip 1 – Do some research

There is lots of help out there. Many good ideas have been developed through consultation with both internal and external staff. The careers service is invaluable in the recruitment of student volunteers. They say that they are always looking for external contacts – the same is probably true of other local universities and colleges and staff are happy to discuss options with interested parties.

Tip 2 – Design a management structure

Employing a part-time member of staff to support volunteers may seem like an unwarranted expenditure but in our case 0.6 FTE of a volunteer officer produces approximately 3.0 FTE of volunteer hours across all of the collections. If you can't afford a member of staff to manage volunteers there are easy ways to centralise and streamline volunteering. Of course volunteers won't be able to manage all aspects of archival work but they can undertake routine or bulk tasks thus freeing up trained staff for more specialised activities. Build these decisions into forward plans, funding bids and job descriptions.

Tip 3 - Train your volunteers and staff

Volunteering is not just about free labour; it should be an extension of your learning mission. Voluntary work can be one of the significant ways in which young people gain experience of archives and collections. The design of good training materials may mean a greater initial input but in the long-term it saves staff time, enables more ambitious work to be undertaken and improves the skills and career prospects of your volunteer team. Staff training can also address some common problems relating to volunteer management and engage reluctant parties with the process.

### **Future development**

In the long-term there are plans to extend the training programme so that community volunteers can also get their work accredited. In the short-term it is hoped to make resources that were generated through the current project available to other institutions online. The University is also hoping to develop further links with other heritage based volunteer managers in the local area in order to share experiences, skills and resources.

It is re-examining the way that work experience is offered to secondary school students. One possible strand of this project will explore the possibility of offering placements to students from SEN schools or units. There have been talks with local institutions about possible structures and the University is currently working on a pilot for the next school year.

### **Websites**

Volunteer page <http://www.reading.ac.uk/merl/about/merl-support.asp>

CETL-AURS <http://www.reading.ac.uk/cetl-aurs/>

CCMS <http://www.reading.ac.uk/ccms/>

University Museums and Special Collections Service

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/about/about-museums.asp>

MASIV [http://www.rusu.co.uk/home/Get\\_Involved/MASIV\\_home.aspx](http://www.rusu.co.uk/home/Get_Involved/MASIV_home.aspx)

### **Contact Details**

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## 7.7 Bringing in specialist expertise

**Organisation:** The Ballast Trust

### **Brief Summary**

The Ballast Trust is a charitable foundation established to provide a rescue, sorting and cataloguing service for business archives with an emphasis on technical records such as shipbuilding, railway and engineering plans, drawings and photographs. Since its establishment it has catalogued collections of technical records on behalf of national and local archive repositories and museums.

While the Trust relies on the specialist skills of its volunteers to help catalogue the collections, the volunteers are supported by a full-time staff of three (a professional archivist and two archive technicians). By using volunteers the Trust has benefited from gaining the support of enthusiastic and knowledgeable individuals who donate their time to help understand archive collections and bring to them a depth of technical knowledge that archive repositories do not have.

### **Target Audience**

The Trust seeks to engage volunteers who have specialist knowledge of technical and commercial records either through personal interest or employment experience.

### **Aim**

The Trust aims to continue its work by ensuring that it recruits volunteers with the appropriate knowledge to help it process archive collections and meet its cataloguing targets. It tries to match volunteers with particular skill-sets to the right type of archive collection. This ensures that volunteers are enthusiastic about the collection and importantly it means that they bring to the collection significant background knowledge that allows them to understand the subtleties of complicated technical drawings and records.

### **Process**

The Trust has been in operation for 20 years and until his death in 2007 it operated under the personal guidelines of its founder and benefactor Dr William Lind. Volunteers came to the Trust usually through personal connections or by word of mouth. As a result the Trust has not yet developed a formal volunteering policy or programme.

Since January 2009, the Trust has employed a professional archivist and as part of the general plan to formalise operational procedures and processes for the Trust, it is intended to engage new volunteers by building on the system of volunteering that has been in place to date. In the past people have come to the Trust in the following ways:

- Through personal connections of Trust employees or existing volunteers.
- By word of mouth.
- Research interests have led them to the Trust.
- Existing membership of a railway association or model-making club who were aware of the Trust and its work.
- Previous employment with a company whose archive collection was deposited with the Trust for processing.

In the future, it is proposed to build on these methods and also to recruit volunteers in these additional ways:

- Through the internet, the Trust is developing a website at the moment which will feature information about volunteering.
- By developing partnerships with other heritage projects or organisations who may know of people that would be interested in volunteering.
- Registering with national and local volunteering programmes like Volunteer Development Scotland (<http://www.volunteerscotland.org.uk>).

### **Number of participants**

The Trust currently has 3 volunteers at present, two attend 4 days a week and one comes in for one day a week. Over the years it has received assistance from around 15 other volunteers.

### **Impact and outcome**

For the Trust using volunteers who have a wealth of accumulated knowledge about railways, shipbuilding or engineering means that they are able to approach a collection at a level of preparedness the average archive cataloguer does not have. There are some things “they just know” and it means the Trust can concentrate on teaching them the practical aspects of cataloguing rather than how to recognise a general arrangement drawing.

The level of knowledge our volunteers possess about certain subjects means that our confidence in their ability to catalogue the collections is high, provided they have clear guidance about how to catalogue. For example, what information fields to focus on and the appropriate level of detail to include.

For the volunteers the benefits are slightly different, they are all of retirement age and have a strong interest in a specific subject. Volunteering at the Trust gives them an opportunity to fulfil that interest and provide a useful and valuable service to the Trust. Some of the other benefits that our volunteers have mentioned include:

- Socialising with like-minded individuals.
- Providing a structure to the day.
- Opportunity to have access to documents of interest to them.
- Keeping their brain active.
- Able to make a valued contribution using their knowledge of a subject.

### **Evaluation**

No evaluation tools have been used to date.

### **Tips**

**Be flexible** - While the Trust intends to develop formal volunteer policies, the current flexibility of the Trust is an attraction for the volunteers recognising that the ‘over-bureaucratisation’ of volunteering can make people less likely to do so. Volunteers are also able to make use of the computing facilities and collections for private projects and research.

**Consider existing users** - Think about who is using your records already, could their enthusiasm and knowledge about the collection subject make them a good volunteer?

**Have clear requirements** - Discuss with volunteers what information needs to be captured for particular collections and to what detail. This means that volunteers won’t record overly detailed descriptions of drawings that cannot be used in the catalogue, it

helps the archivist to understand what information the collection contains and ensures the right balance is struck for the collection catalogue.

### **Future Developments**

#### Expansion

The Ballast Trust is in the process of formalising its procedures for cataloguing and introducing a new electronic catalogue system. Once this has been achieved it is expected that more volunteers will be recruited to process the collections held by the Ballast Trust. In time it may extend the service to other types of records and shift the focus from heavy industry.

#### Capture their knowledge

The archivist will work with the volunteers to capture the knowledge they have about particular record types. This will allow the production of guides to certain groups of records. For example, for shipbuilding plans recording what plans should form the core set of plans that are kept and how to recognise a capacity plan from a rigging plan.

### **Project Website**

[www.ballasttrust.org.uk](http://www.ballasttrust.org.uk) (from April 2009)

### **Contact Details**

Kiara King, Assistant Archivist, The Ballast Trust, 01505 328488,  
[k.king@archives.gla.ac.uk](mailto:k.king@archives.gla.ac.uk)

## 7.8 Remote Volunteering

**Project Title and Organisation:** 'What's beneath your feet? A SW region Archives 4 All project' Gloucestershire Archives in partnership with the Friends of Gloucestershire Archives and The National Archives (A2A)

### **Brief Summary:**

Gloucestershire Archives has its own volunteering policy launched in March 2007. Since that time a programme of volunteering tasks has been developed to provide opportunities for both remote and on-site volunteers. This project (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund) involved the digitisation of a series of over 160 official inclosure awards and their associated maps relating to individual parishes in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire (historically part of the county of Gloucester). Once the digital images had been prepared copies of the awards were supplied to volunteers to transcribe. The project also supported a programme of outreach activities including several workshops and displays at centres throughout the county. Formal learning resources for children were produced through pilot work with a local primary school and a series of downloadable resources and loans box were developed.

### **Target audience:**

Volunteers were required with the skills to read the writing on the original awards, possessing basic IT skills and remote capability to produce an electronic transcription. Retired members of local history societies were particularly targeted and any researcher at Gloucestershire Archives interested in accessing information from the awards & maps. The downloadable resources can be used by any educational establishment, or by private individuals interested in finding out more about the inclosure documentation & process.

### **Aim:**

- To open up access to a unique archival heritage resource for Gloucestershire using digital technology
- To actively recruit & involve volunteers and community groups

Prior to the project, access was limited to personal visitors to Gloucestershire Archives and users found the records awkward to handle and often very difficult to read because of handwriting styles and length of text. The records were at risk of damage through wear and tear during production and handling.

### **Process:**

The project funded the digitisation of both the maps and the awards, which was carried out by an external contractor (ICAM) on-site at Gloucestershire Archives. A programme of outreach activities was used to publicise the documentary resource and to attract volunteers to the project. An appeal for volunteers was also made through internal publicity, the Gloucestershire Archives newsletter and the quarterly Committee meetings of the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council's Local History Committee. Training was provided through workshops, two of which took place on site and a number more in the community. Other organisations were attracted to the project – for instance, both the Forest of Dean Local History Society and the Yate & District Heritage Centre staff and volunteers donated transcribing hours, while the staff and pupils of a county primary school worked with a consultant (whose hours were paid by the project) to produce a range of learning resources based on and inspired by the inclosure records. Activities for the children included using a surveyor's chain loaned from a local museum to



measure plots in their school playing field; dressing up in replica costumes and re-enacting a cottager's ejection from his home (based on an actual court case); creating a village guide using evidence from the inclosure and OS maps and field walking.

**Number of participants:**

Over 100 volunteers took part in the project, donating over 3000 hours of their time in order to produce word-for-word transcriptions of the awards. A consultant was employed to work with the staff and pupils of the primary school.

**Impact and outcome:**

The uptake by volunteers far surpassed expectations and proved quite a challenge, though very rewarding, to manage such a large 'army' of keen helpers. The appeal of the project for many was its flexibility - copies of the awards were supplied on CD (with guidance notes for those volunteers unable to attend training sessions) so that the transcribing could be done at home, at times to suit the individual. Wherever possible, volunteers were encouraged to work in pairs or groups so that they could check each other's transcriptions.

Volunteers' feedback has been very positive – for the majority it was their first experience of looking at inclosure records and apart from the enjoyment of finding out more about the history of their local area, they gained a lot of satisfaction by tackling unfamiliar handwriting and learning more about software and computers generally. Many involved their own family and friends – and only a handful dropped out. By contrast many have become 'hooked' and are keen to do more. Feedback has suggested that volunteers have greatly appreciated the opportunity to get involved in a stimulating and informative activity at home. Although the project technically ended with the final draw down of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund in May 2008, Gloucestershire Archives has continued to offer and support this activity as part of our general volunteering programme. 76 completed awards (almost 50% of the total) had been received by the draw down, with another 50 arriving in the 10 months since then. 40 more are at the transcription stage with only around 20 yet to be allocated.

The teachers and children thoroughly enjoyed their involvement and the resource package is now advertised to all schools in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. There is obviously much scope for using the inclosure maps for landscape and archaeology research. Gloucestershire County Council's archaeologists have experimented loading sample inclosure images onto their GIS system and this is something that it is hoped will be developed in the future, with public access to the GIS data being a longer-term aim. In addition, Gloucestershire Archives is using the volunteers' transcriptions to help test out procedures for preserving born-digital records in the archives.

**Evaluation:**

There has been no formal evaluation process among the volunteers although, during and towards the end of the project, they were invited to comment on what they had enjoyed about the project, what they had learnt, and whether they had involved other people, particularly if they had not used the Archives before.

**Tips:**

- The project coordinator, a senior member of the Archives management team, found that she spent more time on the coordination and promotion of the project than she

had first envisaged and in retrospect she would have wanted to include this in the project budget.

- There is also an ongoing cost involved in storing the volunteers' output (the transcriptions are electronic documents that need to be preserved). It was difficult at the outset to properly appreciate this.
- An end of project 'party' was held, and those volunteers who could make it enjoyed the chance to celebrate their achievements as a group.

**Future development:**

The project has helped Gloucestershire Archives to understand more about the issues and problems involved in managing and sustaining the output of a volunteering activity – in this case, when it creates electronic records using proprietary software that will not be sustainable in the long term. The work on digital and audio-visual preservation is ongoing.

Some of the volunteers recruited to the project have now moved on to other archive projects. One, for instance, has become a Searchroom "buddy" assisting customers with their family history research, while another is working remotely making a précis of the content of oral history recordings. The project has made the Archives think in a much more coherent manner about the processes involved in recruiting and sustaining volunteers. As a result, a list of tasks is being developed supporting all aspects of the Office's work from customer assistance to administration, while the existing volunteers' policy and strategies are being reviewed.

**Website:** <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives>.

**Name & contact details:**

Julie Courtenay, Collections Team Leader, Gloucestershire Archives, Clarence Row, Alvin St, Gloucester, Glos, GL1 3DW, 01452 425295,  
[julie.courtenay@gloucestershire.gov.uk](mailto:julie.courtenay@gloucestershire.gov.uk)

## 7.9 Project Specific Volunteering

**Project Title and Organisation:** Sutherland Papers Project: Increasing Volunteer Participation (Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service)

### **Brief Summary**

How the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service used the Sutherland Papers Project to explore new ways of involving volunteers in delivering Service aims; including recruitment, interpretation of collections and remote working,

### **Target Audience:**

All residents of Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent; internet users, genealogists,

### **Aim:**

To achieve 4000 hours of volunteer input over two years of the Project and to create a name index to significant parts of the archive of the Dukes of Sutherland.

### **Process:**

The Sutherland Papers Project was an HLF funded project to acquire and widen access to the vast archive of the Dukes of Sutherland, the most complete estate archives in England and the most used collection in the Staffordshire Record Office. £265,000 of the £2.1M cost was to deliver the access initiatives – new cataloguing; study days and exhibition; an online learning resource; and the creation of a name index by volunteers. The appeal to raise money for the purchase had created widespread interest in the archive and generated many contacts for the Service.

One of the four Project posts was partially tasked with volunteer recruitment and supervision.

Recruitment was pursued in four ways

- By invitation of existing groups, including the Friends of the Archive Service
- By appeal in the Service newsletter and by flyers placed in the searchroom of the Service
- At talks and outreach events by face to face contact
- On the internet on the Service website (all other routes offered the possibility of home working on the internet.

Greater success than expected meant that volunteer co-ordination became a greater part of the role of the Project member who had recruited them and the wide range of skills and interest of those volunteering meant that other tasks, such as transcription, interpretation of documents and the formation of study groups could now be delegated to volunteers. The results of the interpretation work can be seen on the Project website under the rubric 'Articles by contributors'.

Home working was facilitated by mailing out transcription or handwritten (indexers were not able to work directly onto a computer) for typing. Anecdotal reports from the home-workers stressed their appreciation at being able to contribute even though living some way away – one in Germany, others all over the UK.

One of the groups working on the Papers, the North Staffordshire Mining History Group, was invited to take part in one of the Projects Study Days – making presentations of how they were working and conveying powerfully the enjoyment the use of archives could

bring to those previously unused to working with primary sources. Their presentation was repeated at the Project Final Conference and lost nothing in comparison to the professional historians speaking.

### **Number of participants**

Over 70 volunteers

### **Impact and outcome**

A new name index with over half a million data elements was created. The website was enhanced with a wider and more expert knowledge than the resources of the Project could have managed alone. Legacy projects have been developed and the role of part-time volunteer co-ordinator has been mainstreamed

### **Evaluation**

A survey of the volunteers revealed that personal satisfaction and development were reported by many participants.

### **Tips**

The Sutherland Project was capacious enough to accommodate many levels of contribution and had generated significant publicity before it started. In the absence of a single large Project any co-ordinator needs to have a thorough grasp of all the possibilities within an office and the time and effort required to co-ordinate should not be underestimated. However the benefit to the Office of increasing the level of involvement of volunteers is a significant increase in what can be achieved and, though unlikely to be quantifiable, a greater loyalty and understanding amongst its users of the aims and purposes of the Service

### **Future Development**

A part-time post of volunteer co-ordinator has been mainstreamed and three legacy Projects are building on the work of the Project;

- Interpretation groups are collaborating on a project to open up Staffordshire's Quarter Session Rolls
- The Mining Groups are working to enhance the catalogues of the Office's mining records
- The name indexers are working on the county's tithe maps

### **Project website**

[www.sutherlandcollection.org.uk](http://www.sutherlandcollection.org.uk)  
[www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/archives)

### **Contact Details:**

Thea Randall, County Archivist, Staffordshire Record Office, Eastgate Street, Stafford ST16 2LZ, 01785 278370, [thea.randall@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:thea.randall@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Chris Latimer, City Archivist/Sutherland Papers Project Manager, Stoke on Trent City Archives, City Central Library, Hanley, Stoke on Trent, ST1 3RS, 01782 238401, [chris.latimer@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:chris.latimer@stoke.gov.uk)

## 7.10 Creating social opportunities through 'Volunteer Day'

**Organisation:** Devon Record Office

**Brief Summary:** Devon Record Office (DRO) moved to new premises at DCC Great Moor House, Exeter four years ago. It has had the pleasure and privilege of inviting volunteers to assist with some of the work required on the collections, and in that time has had around thirty individuals. Collections come into the office in various conditions and invariably need cleaning; therefore there is a 'suite' of rooms where sorting, de-infestation and cleaning take place. The permanent professional staff are perpetually cleaning new accessions, so any help in this area is always greatly appreciated. The next stages of treatment are accessioning, listing, surveying and packaging. It is in these rooms where archive and conservation volunteers might mingle and where the turnover of material is quite fast by archive standards! The projects are usually collection based which provides a convenient quantity of material that has an end in sight.

### **Target Audience:**

Devon Record Office volunteers come in roughly three categories:

- School age children who have an interest in history and are recommended to DRO for work experience in the summer months.
- Those belonging to history interest groups such as NADFAS (National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies) whose members have free time during working hours or who are retired. Their members usually have with a particular interest in an individual designer or company, namely The Herbert Read collection being worked on at the moment.
- Thirdly, a group of school leavers, graduates and 'second-careerers' who wish to gain experience in a working record office before commencing a college place or who wish to find permanent work in a local government record office, where full training might be offered. There has been a long tradition of training posts at DRO, but in recent years this has been supplemented by assisting volunteers to gain relevant experience that they can use as evidence for applications and interviews. It is impressive how in several instances volunteers have rescheduled and sacrificed other areas of their working lives to spend time at DRO. This dedication reminds staff how privileged they are to be caring for our written history as full time paid employees.

### **Aim:**

To progress the work on the collections with added workforce, while providing access to facilities and expertise to interested external groups and individuals.

### **Process:**

#### Recruitment

Often the route to becoming a volunteer is by having visited the office on a tour or organised course and resulting from this, the feeling may be 'this is just up my street, I want to join in'. Other times a letter of enquiry or request for work experience is received. There is no interview, but an informal first visit to see the office and discuss what work the volunteer might like from the tasks on offer at that moment. Recruits are required to fill out a short form and to read the volunteer and health & safety policies.

Tuesdays have been set aside in the studio as 'Volunteer Day' each week, when everyone is gathered together to work as teams and make it as sociable as possible. The advantage of this is that more experienced volunteers can assist and monitor new volunteers, which helps DRO staff carry on with their regular work on those days and helps with a feeling of ownership for each task. The tasks offered to volunteers must, in the main, be basic but DRO tries to introduce as much variety as possible and as an individual gains confidence and experience the possibilities broaden. In conservation, volunteers may be asked to clean documents in several ways with various materials and equipment; prepare packaging materials e.g. Calico coverings or heat sealing polyester sleeves for photographs; making made to measure dust jackets for books among other things. There is generally an ongoing collection to survey and package, which gives the opportunity to gain knowledge of a group of documents and how they can be improved by these processes for presentation to the public. Some of the work is dirty and DRO provide everything needed from dust coats to masks and gloves if necessary and any training in the use of equipment and health & safety procedures.

**Number of participants:** In conservation there may be up to six volunteers at any time, which is partly why Tuesdays are reserved as the main day for conservation volunteering.

#### **Impact and Outcome**

Devon Record Office is well served with volunteers, but welcomes additional offers of support.

*'I have been taught a great deal about the care and conservation of an archive and individual books and papers. I have found the whole of the experience fascinating and enjoyable.'*

#### **Tips:**

- You must evaluate the skills of volunteers through the process of the first visit, simple tasks leading to more complex, to judge the dexterity and patience of individuals.
- By having regular end dates for tasks you can gently dissuade some individuals from returning, usually because the quality of their work is worrying or they spend the whole day disturbing other staff or volunteers. Without a formal interview process there is a risk of collecting certain individuals who do not constructively contribute to the task, in the end the welfare of the documents and the aims of the office must come first.

#### **Future Development:**

Devon Record Office has decided that in the future it will concentrate on graduates and adults who have a serious desire to make archive conservation their career. It will still welcome some work experience school age children and selected retired volunteers, but not on the scale of recent years.

**Project Website:** [http://www.devon.gov.uk/record\\_office.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/record_office.htm)

**Contact:** Deborah Phillips, Sr. Archive Conservator, Devon Record Office, Great Moor House, Bittern Road, Sowton, Exeter EX2 7NL, Tel: 01392 384317, Email: [deborah.phillips@devon.gov.uk](mailto:deborah.phillips@devon.gov.uk)

## 8 Results of Survey of Volunteers

### 8.1 Methodology

A survey of volunteers was undertaken from 28 January to 1 March 2009 to supplement the existing literature on volunteering in archive. The survey was publicised to the UK archive sector via professional email list services (Archives-NRA.jiscmail.ac.uk, Archives-Wales.jiscmail.ac.uk and scotarch.gla.ac.uk). The form was made available online via the National Council on Archives website (www.nca.org.uk). Volunteers also had the opportunity, where required, to complete hard-copy versions of the form. The decision was made to create a short anonymous survey. The rationale for this was based on previous experience of surveying within the sector with the aim of maximising participation. It was felt that participation would be encouraged by limiting the number of questions on the form to a minimum. By allowing participants to remain anonymous it was hoped to encourage openness, as respondents could log positive and negative comments, without identifying individuals or services. 411 survey responses were received by the deadline for submissions. A further five were received after the closing date and were therefore not included in the analysed results.

If further time and resources had been available, a more detailed survey might have been developed and analysed enabling an interrogation of responses by region, type of archive, or type of volunteering activity being undertaken. In addition with a longer research period comparative analysis could have been undertaken in relation to responses by gender or age. Caution should be taken in seeing the survey responses as fully representative of volunteers working within the archive sector. Without accurate data on the total number of volunteers in the archive sector, it is not possible to demonstrate that the survey sample is sufficient to make statements about volunteers in the sector as a whole. Nevertheless, from the number of responses received in a relatively short timescale, it is possible to infer a high level of engagement amongst volunteers with their work and their host organisations. The survey give a valuable insight into how people enter a volunteering role in archives, what are their motives and what they perceive to be the benefits of volunteering through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data.

### 8.2 Survey Results

#### 1) Gender profile of survey respondents:

	No.	%	Error Range (Confidence Interval 95%)
Female	<b>263</b>	64	+/- 4.64
Male	<b>148</b>	36	+/- 4.64

#### 2) Age profile of the survey respondents:

	No.	%	Error Range (Confidence Interval 95%)
Under 18	<b>4</b>	1	+/- 0.96
18-24	<b>21</b>	5	+/- 2.11
25-34	<b>22</b>	5	+/- 2.11
35-44	<b>19</b>	5	+/- 2.11

45-54	<b>45</b>	11	+/- 3.03
55-64	<b>114</b>	27	+/- 4.29
65-74	<b>130</b>	32	+/- 4.51
75 and over	<b>37</b>	9	+/- 2.77
Did not respond to this question	<b>19</b>	5	+/- 2.11

3) How did you become a volunteer?

	No.	%	Error Range (Confidence Interval 95%)
I approached the record office/archive myself	<b>180</b>	44	+/- 4.8
The record office/archive was recruiting new volunteers	<b>45</b>	11	+/- 3.03
The record office/archive was recruiting new volunteers for a specific project	<b>91</b>	22	+/- 4
I am a member of a Friends group and/or NADFAS	<b>63</b>	15	+/- 3.45
I am a member of a local history group and/or community archive group	<b>79</b>	19	+/- 3.79
I was put in touch with the record office/archive by my school/college/university	<b>10</b>	2	+/- 1.35
I was put in touch with the record office/archive by a group/organisation helping people seeking to return to work	<b>15</b>	4	+/- 1.89

Other (please state): *This question allowed the option to give other information about how individuals began volunteering. Some of the comments received appear in the text of the report. The responses can also be broadly grouped as follows:*

- Word of mouth/via recommendation - **16**
- Through their history research - **8**
- Through a flyer or newspaper article – **7**
- Retired from, or previously worked at, the record office/archive - **5**
- After a talk – **5**
- Approached to volunteer - **4**
- Through a volunteer organisation/shop - **4**
- Through working in the same organisation - **3**
- Via the Society of Archivists - **2**

4) Why did you want to become a volunteer?

	No.	%	Error Range (Confidence Interval 95%)
Interest in history	<b>318</b>	77	+/- 4.07
To learn/improve archival skills	<b>183</b>	45	+/- 4.81
To feel part of my local community	<b>74</b>	18	+/- 3.71
To learn/improve conservation skills	<b>61</b>	15	+/- 3.45
To learn/improve IT or other work-related skills	<b>49</b>	12	+/- 3.14
For social reasons	<b>60</b>	15	+/- 3.45
To gain confidence with working with new people	<b>31</b>	8	+/- 2.62
To continue feeling part of the place I worked	<b>22</b>	5	+/- 2.11



In addition respondents were asked:

***If you had other reasons for becoming a volunteer, or would like to explain more about why you became a volunteer, please include your comments here.*** Some of the comments received appear in the text of the report. The responses can also be broadly grouped as follows:

- To provide better resources for other users – **37**
- To test suitability of working in archives as a future career or as specific work experience requirement for undertaking a further course in archives management or conservation – **29**
- For well being/enjoyment – **27**
- To further my own historical research (family/local or specialist) – **25**
- To repay the service received from the Record Office/Archive – **14**
- To share my existing knowledge/skills – **13**
- As part of higher education course - **1**
- To support my business – **1**

**What have been the benefits to you from volunteering?**

	No.	%	Error Range (Confidence Interval 95%)
Improved history knowledge	<b>332</b>	81	+/- 3.79
Learnt/improved archival skills	<b>263</b>	64	+/- 4.64
Meeting new people/socialising	<b>197</b>	48	+/- 4.83
Sense of being part of community	<b>128</b>	31	+/- 4.47
Sense of being part of workplace	<b>131</b>	32	+/- 4.51
Learnt/improved IT or other work-related skills	<b>117</b>	28	+/- 4.34
Learnt/improved conservation skills	<b>100</b>	24	+/- 4.13
Improved confidence to look for work	<b>65</b>	16	+/- 3.54

In addition respondents were asked:

***If there have been other benefits to you of being a volunteer, or you would like to explain more about what you enjoy about being a volunteer, please include your comments here.*** Some of the comments received appear in the text of the report. The responses can also be broadly grouped as follows:

- Sense of purpose/confidence and/or feeling valued – **38**
- Links with own research interest – **17**
- Opportunity to exchange ideas/knowledge/skills – **14**
- Learnt specific new skills - **11**
- Improved knowledge of local area – **11**
- Enjoy atmosphere of workplace and/or people – **10**
- Understanding of how an archive/record office works – **6**
- Have been encouraged to publish research – **4**
- Led to acceptance on postgraduate course – **2**

## 9 Further Reading and Information Sources

### 9.1 Further Reading

Carter, Paul. 'Begging for Mercy: Working with Volunteer Editors', *RecordKeeping*, Autumn 2004, pp.24-26

*Archive Services Statistics 2006-7 Actuals* CIPFA, 2008 <http://www.cipfastats.net/>

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[http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/category\\_id\\_63\\_path\\_0p6p.aspx](http://www.communityarchives.org.uk/category_id_63_path_0p6p.aspx). Accessed March 2009

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Russell, Ian M. *A National Framework for Youth Action and Engagement: Executive Summary to The Russell Commission*, March 2005.

*Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport, Archives Workbook*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007

<http://www.dcms.gov.uk/images/research/TP-archive0607.xls> Accessed May 2009

A range of articles from the Volunteering England Good Practice Bank

[www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank) Accessed Jan 2009

## 9.2 Relevant Information Sources

The Commission on the Future of Volunteering - <http://www.volcomm.org.uk/>

Compact- <http://www.thecompact.org.uk>

Directory of Social Change - [www.dsc.org.uk](http://www.dsc.org.uk)

Institute of Volunteering Research - <http://www.ivr.org.uk/>

Investing in Volunteers - [www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk](http://www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk)

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action - [www.navca.org.uk](http://www.navca.org.uk)

Queens Award for Voluntary Service - <http://www.queensawardvoluntary.gov.uk/>

Volunteer Development Agency (Northern Ireland) - <http://www.volunteering-ni.org/>

Volunteer Development Scotland - <http://www.vds.org.uk/>

Volunteering England - <http://www.volunteering.org.uk/> (Free information line: 0800 028 3304)

Wales Council for Voluntary Action - <http://www.wcva.org.uk/>

## **Appendix A – Local Area Agreements in England including priority N1006 Participation in Regular Volunteering**

### North East 7 out of 12

Darlington  
Durham  
Gateshead  
Hartlepool  
Northumberland  
Redcar & Cleveland  
South Tyneside

### North West 6 out of 22

Bolton  
Lancashire  
Rochdale  
Salford  
St Helens  
Trafford

### Yorkshire & the Humber 2 out of 15

Kirklees  
York

### East Midlands 2 out of 9

Leicestershire  
Lincolnshire

### West Midlands 4 out of 14

Herefordshire  
Solihull  
Staffordshire  
Warwickshire

### East of England 2 out of 10

Essex  
Peterborough

### London 11 out of 33

Bexley  
Bromley  
Camden  
Enfield  
Haringey  
Harrow  
Hillingdon  
Islington  
Kensington & Chelsea  
Newham  
Redbridge

### South East 7 out of 19

Bracknell Forest  
Brighton & Hove  
Hampshire  
Kent  
Oxfordshire  
Portsmouth  
West Berkshire

### South West 2 out of 16

Somerset  
South Gloucestershire

## **Appendix B – Media coverage of the Lancashire Record Office Will-Flatteners project includes:**

- 1 Ancestors magazine February 2007
- 2 BBC TV North West Tonight 18 Jan 2007
- 3 British Association of Friends of Museums Autumn 2007
- 4 Friends of Lancashire Archives quarterly newsletter – frequent references
- 5 Lancashire Local History Federation newsletter May 1988
- 6 Lancashire Evening Post 1995, 18 Jan 2007
- 7 Lancashire Life December 2002, Feb 2007
- 8 Lancashire County Council Vision newspaper (free) Apr 2003, Jan 2007
- 9 Liverpool Daily Post Saturday Supplement 21 Apr 2007
- 10 Magazine of the Lancashire Family History and Heraldry Society May 1988
- 11 News from the Archives (in-house newsletter) - frequent references with special edition Jan 2007
- 12 Preston Citizen – several references
- 13 Records Management Society Bulletin May 2007
- 14 Southport Visitor 12 Jan 2007

**Appendix C – Example of questionnaire (hard copy)**



## Survey of archive volunteers

The National Council on Archives is writing a short report on volunteering in archives. Please take a few moments to complete this form and help us with our research.

### Your Gender

- Female       Male

### Your Age Range

- Under 18       18 – 24       25 – 34  
 35 – 44       45 - 54       55 – 64  
 65 – 74       75 and over

### How did you become a volunteer?

Please tick those boxes that best describe how you first became a volunteer, intern or work experience placement

- I approached the record office/archive myself
- The record office/archive was recruiting new volunteers
- The record office/archive was recruiting new volunteers for a specific project
- I am a member of a Friends group and/or NADFAS
- I am a member of a local history group and/or community archive group
- I was put in touch with the record office/archive by my school/college/university
- I was put in touch with the record office/archive by a group/organisation helping people seeking to return to work
- Other (please state below)

### Why did you want to become a volunteer?

Please tick those boxes that best describe why you were first motivated to become a volunteer, intern or work experience placement

- Interest in history
- To learn/improve archival skills
- To learn/improve conservation skills
- To learn/improve IT or other work-related skills
- For social reasons
- To feel part of my local community
- To continue feeling part of the place I worked
- To gain confidence with working with new people

*If you had other reasons for becoming a volunteer, or would like to explain more about why you became a volunteer, please include your comments here. (Please note that these comments may be used in our published report)*

### What have been the benefits to you from volunteering?

Please tick those boxes that best describe what you feel about your experience of being a volunteer, intern or work experience placement

- Improved historical knowledge
- Learnt/improved archival skills
- Learnt/improved conservation skills
- Learnt/improved IT or other work-related skills
- Meeting new people / socialising
- Sense of being part of community
- Sense of being part of workplace
- Improved confidence to look for work

*If there have been other benefits to you of being a volunteer, or you would like to explain more about what you enjoy about being a volunteer, please*

*include your comments here. (Please note that these comments may be used in our published report)*



*the*  
**NATIONAL  
COUNCIL ON  
ARCHIVES**

*'Find out more what's behind the doors. I love it all. The people, the documents, even the checking of things and when its finally finished it's a great feeling that its all been done and it there for all to see. I also love it for the history of my town as well. I got into it through some research I need for a book I was writing and just wanted to know more about the place and how it works for I love it. I've built up my skills in a few ways and loving it all.'*

*Female Volunteer, 35-44*

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