

2019: Collections Week Report

For two weeks in January 2019, Warwickshire County Record Office closed to the public. For this short time we were able to focus on tasks that ordinarily we would be unable to do. Specifically this year we wanted to tackle a number of large, uncatalogued collections which required appraising in the hopes this would free up some much need space.

This report gives us an opportunity to tell you what we were able to achieve during the two weeks, aware, as we are, that to close in such a way does have an impact on our researchers. We hope this precious time proves as worthwhile for our users as much as it does for us.

The Records of Dr Dunn: Carolyn Ewing, Archivist

During collections fortnight Carolyn was assigned the ongoing work of appraising Dr Dunn's collection. Following on from the initial survey carried out last year, decisions were made as to what type of material to retain from the collection. Frustratingly, as it leads to slower progress, the majority of the boxes contained material needing to be both kept and discarded. Therefore the task has been to physically separate documents for archiving and weed out duplicate and unwanted material.



Undertaking this work in a solid block of time helps enormously with this process because the material is all fresh in the mind. And it's a lot easier to do this when you can spread out in the search-room!

As part of the process the material to be retained has been grouped roughly according to where it might fit in a catalogue hierarchy at series level and Carolyn has been able to sketch out a rough skeleton of a catalogue. Ideally some further refinement will be necessary but this is dependent on available time.

Following on from all this appraisal work, we'll need to formally accession the records, begin the listing process, and probably re-box the collection to make better use of the available space. It is thought that by the end of this exercise the collection will have been reduced by about 30% and freed up some precious space.

There are still three boxes to sift through but the end is in sight. And with regard to the material we do not wish to keep, this will be offered back to the depositor, some will be returned to the local NHS trust and some will be securely destroyed.

Fortunately, Carolyn also managed to find some time to do a little preparatory work for her 'Show and Tell' presentation in February.

Ordnance Survey Maps: Karen Moulder, Principal Archive Assistant



The two weeks closure has yet again provided us with an opportunity to sort the backlog of OS maps still waiting to go into map tanks. Since last year's closure weeks the many hundreds of maps, which were identified as needed to fill the gaps in our collection, have been through conservation, where repair-work was

undertaken and headers applied. Many thanks go to the conservation volunteers in assisting with this.

However, before the new maps could be put into the tanks, it was necessary to do a shuffle of the existing map tanks as many were overfull and becoming a problem for staff to manoeuvre. Once completed, and with the location list updated, we were able to add the new maps. The following number of OS maps have now been added:

116 6" pre-war maps

8 25" pre-war maps

5 10ft to the mile maps (pre-war)

290 25" post war maps

27 6" post war maps

Total: 446 maps added.

Map tanks have also been re-labelled, and all finding aids and databases updated.

Where did those two weeks go to?

Retro-conversion of Warwickshire Museum's Photographs: Jo Taylor, Archive Assistant

Jo was asked to focus her attention on the retro-conversion of Warwickshire Museum's photograph collection, (PH 1035). In the time allotted she added the details of roughly 800 images to our online catalogue, *Warwickshire's Past Unlocked* (which equates to 2 boxes). There's still another 6 boxes to go!



Jo was also able to catalogue the Royal Warwickshire Home Guard (CR 4763) and William Sadler of Over Whitacre, Gent (CR 4990) collections. And added some records into the WCC18 series, whilst also making a start on cataloguing records recently donated by the Polesworth Society (CR 5030)!

Listed buildings and Strongroom rationalisation: David Hodgkinson, Archivist

David assessed and appraised a collection relating to listed buildings in Warwickshire in the 1980s and 1990s, consisting of 28 boxes of material. This collection has now been accessioned in preparation for cataloguing and repackaging.

Collections taken in over the last year have been repackaged and rearranged in the strongrooms to make better use of space, and room has been made for further collections to be taken in over the next few months. This rationalisation will ensure the existing collections are easier to find and new accessions can be situated in numerical sequence.

Warwick Castle, Warwickshire County Council and Healey: Meada Wadman and Emma Bird, Archive Assistants

Meada and Emma had a number of interesting tasks to complete during the collections weeks.



Meada began repacking boxes in the Warwick Castle collection. These boxes had been unpacked and listed by one of our volunteers, but unfortunately the enlarged contents going back into the boxes no longer fitted on the shelf!

These boxes are a treasure trove of beautiful and fascinating documents, and now they are repacked neatly in conservation materials, they can be placed back safely on the shelves.

Meada's next task was to make the chassis numbers in the Healey Motors collection available through our online catalogue. This entailed retrieving each document where chassis numbers are contained in the collection and adding it to the description at item level.

By far the biggest task Meada and Emma undertook during collections week concerned CR 1520, which is a collection of Warwickshire County Council records, and is one of the larger ones in our strong-rooms.

Faced with 72 boxes, they unpacked, labelled and catalogued their contents, and by doing so have allowed greater, easier access to the collection by researchers. And, perhaps surprising for some, they found CR1520 included all sorts of fascinating documents, from sheep dipping regulations to negotiations over parish boundaries. As is always the case for cataloguers, listing and describing the records has given Meada and Emma the chance to learn more about the collection, in this case Local Government records and, therefore, how WCC functioned in the past. The benefit of this is that Meada and Emma are in a better position to help future customers. When we catalogue we learn an awful lot besides what documents are held in a collection.

As care regards access is required under Data Protection legislation, a number of items in the collection have had to be closed to the public because they include personal information relating to individuals/families from less than 100 years ago; but whilst this can be frustrating for researchers and historians, it will be of comfort to individuals and/or the families whose private information is held.

Meada and Emma have now had hands-on experience of legislation in an archive field, which is necessary for all of us these day and together, though not all of the boxes are finished, they managed to catalogue 353 items!

Meada reckons this was an interesting and fun collection to work with (who knew!); it's certainly a collection that has been made more accessible to members of the public.

Emma catalogued two very interesting collections during the weeks we were shut, and as a consequence the catalogues will become available online and the documents will be accessible.

The first collection (PH 1293) was one of photographs showing the demolition of GEC Alstom premises located on Mill Road, Rugby.

The second collection (CR 5023) documented The Warwick Phoenix Players who were a local drama group, this included accounts, minutes and scrapbooks documenting the group's productions and successes at various theatre festivals.

Nuneaton Building Plans: Amanda Jones, Archive Assistant

In view of the need to preserve space a decision had been taken a while ago to preserve only the significant plans within this buildings regulation collection (CR 4164), and discard the many garage/greenhouse/WC plans. However, archivists are keen not to skew the view of future researchers by leaving documents reflecting only the 'important/extreme/difficult' works of living today. And so Amanda was asked to sample the more 'mundane' aspects of building works to ensure the collection reflected what the Borough Council were being asked to consider now and in the recent past.

Amanda began by going through seven large boxes of building plans (approximately 800 plans overall), sampling the items (consisting of private garages, conservatories, pigsties, greenhouses, car-ports, store sheds, W.C.s/rooms converted to bathrooms etc) which were then logged onto the building plan database.

The next phase of the building plan project involved Amanda considering the physical storage of the collection with a view to condensing down the amount of boxes by moving the contents of smaller boxes into medium sized boxes, which allowed for maximising of space. This worked well and she was able to condense down by approximately 50 boxes leaving 116 overall. It was then necessary to re-label the 116 boxes with their contents (using white labels and the famous 'office' fountain pen).



Amanda was also asked to spend one day moving maps around the map tanks in the searchroom and strongrooms with Karen, and bringing up new maps to the searchroom to amalgamate into the existing map tanks there.

The Harry Sunley Collection: Amanda Williams, Archivist

This is the time of year when Record Offices across England are busily collating information for The National Archives 'Accessions to Repositories' survey, and so, as with last year, Amanda has juggled her collection week project with the need to continue to consolidate figures and info for the survey.

Amanda's specific project centred around the collection of Harry Sunley, a well-regarded member of Kenilworth History and Archaeology Society (KHAS), author and speaker on topics such as Kenilworth Castle, Abbey and Barn, and in particular, leader in the field of 'metrology' (specialising in measurements used during the Norman period).



WCRO took in this collection some years ago, and unfortunately, little had been done since. (Hence collection weeks are so important to us.) A large collection of material, time has been required to re-box, appraise and then begin the arranging of the collection into something future archaeologists and historians of Kenilworth and metrology can access.

Unfortunately, taking time out for the accessions to repositories has meant slow progress has been made, but the collection is re-boxed and a first appraisal has taken place, so progress has been made.

Charles Lines Collection: Rob Eyre, Senior Archivist

Charles Lines was a speaker and writer on local history, who made regular contributions to newspapers such as the Birmingham Mail and magazines including Warwickshire and Worcestershire *Life*. He wrote several books particularly themed around Solihull - his birth place, or other places on the west side of the county. He

was very active in the National Trust and campaigned for the preservation of buildings and locations of historic interest.

After his death in 2001 the Record Office was asked to take possession of his papers for appraisal. The collection is stored in approximately 75 boxes; the most interesting features of the collection being the drafts of articles and talks, the research notes for his books and letters to and from Charles Lines.

Unfortunately much of this paper work was in a chaotic state by the time of his death and piecing the fragments together into something that is meaningful is quite a lengthy process.



There are also boxes and boxes of colour transparencies used by Charles Lines to illustrate his talks. Again these are, on the whole, no longer in any kind of sequential order. A large number are of non-Warwickshire scenes and many country houses, too many of them to justify retaining, either because of the locality or because we already have many photographs of the location. There are however many photographs of historic pub signs, pubs which may have long since gone; pub signage was a subject of one of his talks and these images would make an interesting group.

There are some earlier images, many lantern slides, that Charles Lines had acquired, which have been listed by a volunteer. We have recruited further volunteer assistance in order to sift through the transparencies to pick out those deemed worthy of preservation.

Finally there is also a large collection of publications and guides to places in Warwickshire and other parts of the country. It will be necessary to check to see if any of these are unique to the record office, or are copies of ones already donated to

us in other collections. The probability is that the majority will be re-homed via Priory Books.

It is hoped the work covered has put in place a process whereby the collection can be reduced in scale with the benefit of making the collection more usable and freeing up much needed space.

And finally:

Closing the Record Office in order to complete these tasks isn't ideal, but it does enable us to produce results that we believe help both our customers and staff. And so we thank you for your forbearance.