


Glamorgan Archives

Annual Report

2020-2021



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Glamorgan Archives is the archive service for the historic counties of Mid and South Glamorgan , serving the local authorities of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Vale of Glamorgan.

Vision

The vision for the service is to collect, preserve and share the documentary heritage of the historic county of Glamorgan (incorporating Mid and South Glamorgan, as well as some records for West Glamorgan) for and with everyone.

Mission Statement

The mission of the service is to safeguard and develop the collections, whilst also making them as widely accessible as possible in order to engage, educate and empower all those who come into contact with them, now and in the future. The service will take a proactive and inclusive approach to enhancing the collection and its access by addressing cataloguing and conservation backlogs, developing a comprehensive solution for digital preservation and embracing new and innovative approaches for engagement and access to the collections in an increasingly digital world.



Welcome to Glamorgan Archives' 11th Annual Report describing activities during the period from 1st March 2020 to 31st December 2021

Introduction

This is my first annual report as Glamorgan Archivist following my appointment in April 2020. I could hardly have imagined, when I accepted the role, that the first two years of my new post would be so tumultuous and difficult. The Glamorgan Archives building closed on 24th March as a result of the pandemic and in line with government guidance. I took over on 1st April and inherited a world of uncertainty and confusion—for staff, for users and for everyone around us. It took a number of months for us to be able to get staff back into the building and we did not reopen to members of the public until June 2021. This all meant that there was not much to report at the end of the year, hence this report covering a longer period than normal.

In previous times, these annual reports would report the usage figures for the service over the course of the year—the number of visits by individuals and groups and how many documents were produced for them. Needless to say, those figures are hugely different to pre-pandemic as, at the time of writing, the service is still working at reduced capacity and with reduced opening hours. And yet, there is still many positive aspects to reflect on over the last 22 months (the period of this report) and we do at least have some usage statistics to report:

Number of Visitors	807 (including 16 groups pre lockdown)
Number of documents produced	9,563 (including items produced by staff for research and digitisation)
Remote enquiries	7,234
Attendance at events and engagement with staff	1,341
Website Hits	68,410
Social media (since Sep. 2020 when tracking started)	Increase in followers: Twitter—685 Facebook—159 Instagram—211 Biggest reach—42,791 on Twitter (Apr. 2021)

We have also continued to receive new deposits of material and the collection continues to grow. Some of the highlights from those new accessions will come later in the report.

One of the most significant achievements of the last few months has been the renewal of the service's Archives Accreditation status, which was confirmed in November 2021. Accreditation has been the national standard for archive services since 2013, and it is expected by The National Archives and Welsh Government that all places of deposit, such as the Archives, will be accredited. Glamorgan Archives was praised as "an exemplar of how an archive service should deliver on behalf of multiple local authorities".

Between April and July 2021, the Archives took part in the UK Archives Distance Enquiry Services Survey, which looks at archive remote enquiry services from the adult individuals' point of view. It is a survey designed to gauge levels of satisfaction with the archive service's remote user experience—those who contact the service by post or email with an enquiry. All distance enquirers who contact the service during the period of the survey are invited to take part.

The overall satisfaction of those who responded to the survey was 96% (based on those who said the service was either 'very good' or 'good'. In general, the scores received by the Archives have slightly declined since the last survey in 2019, but that is likely due to the impact of the pandemic with adaptations being required to services and facilities available. As Glamorgan Archives aims for a score of 90% or higher in this survey, the result shows that the service has succeeded in maintaining the delivery of a high quality remote enquiries service despite the impact of the pandemic on service delivery.

One of the key priorities for the service currently, and into the future, is the provision of a repository for born-digital records. Work has been underway in Wales for some time looking at possible solutions for this issue, and in October 2020 Glamorgan Archives was part of a Welsh consortium that was awarded funding from Welsh Government's Local Government Digital Transformation Fund to look at the long-term future of Council-created born-digital material. That project produced a report that included a series of recommendations to progress digital preservation in Wales. The steering group of the project is continuing to work on different tasks to progress with the work, and to hopefully establish a solution for digital records that will solve the threat of a digital black-hole.



Other grants over the course of this period have included several small grants from the Archives and Records Council Wales for attending courses and conferences, and equipment such as a digital microfilm reader and an edge welder for Conservation. In addition, the Archives were pleased to receive a substantial grant from Welsh Government's Cultural Recovery Fund during the pandemic that helped to fund a new high resolution camera system to enable better quality digitisation work to be undertaken in the future.

Outreach

The Archives have benefitted hugely over a number of years from the work of volunteers, and the recent period has been no different despite the limitations enforced by the closure to the building and the long period of social distancing. Many of the existing volunteers have continued to work from home on behalf of the Archives, undertaking transcription and indexing of digitised images of collections. The first on-site volunteers were welcomed back in November 2021 and were able to, once again, work on the collections themselves. Over the course of this period their projects have included crew agreements, poor law admission registers, Leversuch family correspondence, hospital patient records, and producing a finding aid for the 1877 diary of Tudor Crawshay, amongst other things.



The usual stream of visits and talks were completely stopped by the closure of the building and it took a little while for alternative methods to be established. In advance of the building being closed, the Board of the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) were welcomed for a meeting and a tour. Talks resumed in December 2020 with the first online talk on 'The History of Christmas in Modern Britain' by Professor Martin Johnes of Swansea University. This has been followed by a number of other talks since, including one on the Military Appeals Tribunal of the First World War, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum, What to expect from the 1921 Census (which attracted over 100 attendees), Islam in the Landscape of Cardiff and several talks on the Gwent Levels.

The usual round of visits from schools have yet to resume, but several sessions have been held remotely, and support for higher education has remained constant throughout, in particular with students from Cardiff University.

The Parliamentary Archives' exhibition 'The Journey to Democracy' was installed in the foyer on 6th March 2020, just prior to the closure of the building. It was due to remain in place for a few months but this was extended for over a year due to the pandemic.

Heritage and Cultural Exchange's exhibition 'Tiger Bay and the World' was launched in July 2021 and installed in the foyer shortly afterwards. Vaughan Gething, MS for Cardiff South and Penarth, visited to view the exhibition and meet representatives from HCE and Glamorgan Archives.



The service's social media following has grown steadily during the pandemic, with several very successful posts being made. In particular, in April, we shared a collection of photographs of people from Cardiff Docks, dated from 1900-1920, for which we have very little information. As well as being well-received on social media, it was picked up by the local and national media. The Senior Archivist appeared on BBC Breakfast and BBC Wales Today to discuss the photographs, and the Glamorgan Archivist appeared on the Antiques Roadshow with the images, broadcast in September.



Glamorgan Archives has continued to work with a wide range of partners throughout the last 22 months. Some of those relationships have built upon existing foundations, and some are new partnerships that have developed during the pandemic. The service has supported many local organisations with their own projects. This includes groups like Cardiff People First and Vale People First, the Jewish History Association of South Wales, Arts Shell, Grangetown Local History Society, Glamorgan Family History Society, South Wales Record Society, the Merthyr Archives Project, Scribla Collective, and the Welsh Norwegian Society, amongst others. The Archives has also been approached about partnering in two different academic research projects: one led by the Universities of Glasgow and Reading looking at visualisation of workstreams with digital archives and the other led by Central European University thinking about measuring participation in the cultural heritage sector in Europe. Both are awaiting the results of their funding applications.

Conservation

Work has continued on the National Manuscript Conservation Trust-funded project to conserve the Plymouth Estate surveys, which has involved taking apart the existing enclosures to clean, repair, and digitise each plan before the volumes are re-bound and boxed. This work has been much delayed by the pandemic, but is proceeding well.



There have also been a number of external commissions undertaken by Conservation over the period, including work on the Briton Ferry estate map for West Glamorgan Archive Service, rebinding almost 500 registers for Pontypridd Registration Service, repairs on behalf of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and cleaning and boxing for Glamorgan Cricket Club, amongst other things.

Collections

The service had been fortunate to secure funding from the Archives Revealed funding stream for the 'Time and Tide' project, to catalogue the records of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation and Associated British Ports, starting in December 2019. This project was very much effected by the closure of the building during the first lockdown, as it is difficult to catalogue records when you don't have access to the collection. The Project Archivist nevertheless managed to complete the majority of the work required during her year with us, and the remaining items have been worked on by the team since she left us in December 2020.

Staff used the opportunity of working from home whilst the building was closed from March 2020 to undertake some background work on the collections descriptions and to retrospectively score every collection with regards to its priority for cataloguing. This helps to identify collections suitable for future cataloguing projects.

Work also started on setting up a system for indexing the catalogue database by place name. This has been slowed down by the move towards new software for cataloguing, which will also provide a much improved public interface. Work has been underway on this move during the latter part of 2021 and it is hoped to launch the new catalogue in 2022.



The collections have continued to grow over the period, although deposits of new material did have to wait whilst the building was closed. Since then, the flow of new deposits has resumed and the service has been pleased to welcome a wide range of material. 94 deposits were received in 2020, and 2021 saw 128 deposits. Some of the highlights of new deposits include:

- A large collection of records from the Principality Building Society continued to come in, including ledgers, cash books, registers of members and records from related building societies who were associated with the Principality, dated from its' establishment in 1860 through to the present day.
- A collection incorporating administrative records of the Penarth Civic Society, along with newsletters and correspondence was deposited. Over the past thirty years the Society has campaigned for the protection and enhancement of the town of Penarth together with its heritage and cultural life.
- A broad range of ecclesiastical records including Church in Wales registers, records and associated material such as from the parishes of Llandaff North in Cardiff and Llangynwyd, Maesteg, as well as Chapel records from across the area, including Bryn Seion Chapel, Ystrad Mynach, Radyr Methodist Church amongst others.
- A number of business collections have been received including EJ Llewelin of Barry, Printers; Theatr Iolo Theatre Company; Giles and Harrap, brewers of Merthyr Tydfil; and others.



- A large number of family and personal collections include a small collection of family papers relating to Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil, have been received accumulated by a family who had lived in Dowlais for many years and including photographs and papers; records of Victor Warren Eveleigh relating to his life and work through the 20th century; papers of William George Chamberlin, musician; papers of Kenneth W.B. Harris, athlete including newspaper cuttings and photographs relating to his sporting career and lifetime involved in Welsh Athletics ; photographs and papers of Clara Novello Davies; a collection from Eluned Mair Mackender of the Llynfi Valley including records of amateur dramatics and operatic societies, youth groups and scientific societies through the mid twentieth century; papers from Susam Moore of Cardiff relating to her schooling and career in the mid twentieth century; and many other collections.
- A range of material from the constituent authorities that we serve including Council records and other related material have been received, incorporating records of predecessor bodies (pre-dating the current arrangements). In addition, there have been a number of deposits from local politicians regarding their time in office.
- One of the largest and most interesting accessions of the period has been the deposit of the William Burges series of drawing, plans and elevations from Cardiff Castle. Comprising material related to the design and build of Cardiff Castle and Castell Coch, as well as a range of other smaller buildings or spaces, the collection has come in over the course of 2021.

For more information about any of the new accessions that have been received over the period, please contact the Archives. Full lists of the accessions that have been received are provided in the Glamorgan Archivist's reports to the Glamorgan Archives Joint Committee, which are available through the Cardiff Council website.

For such an unsettled and disruptive time, the team have continued to make considerable progress with a number of projects and have achieved much despite the constraints that they have faced. My first year and a half in charge of the service has been challenging for a number of reasons, but it has been a pleasure to start to meet users, volunteers, depositors, partners and others. There is still much for me to learn and experience in the role and I hope to get the opportunity to get out into the community more over the forthcoming year. I especially need to thank the team for making me feel so welcome and for supporting me through the stormy waters that we've experienced since I came into the post.

Laura Cotton, Glamorgan Archivist