

It has been such a long time since I wrote you all a volunteer newsletter and as we edge ever closer to the end of another year it felt like the perfect time to reflect on the progress we've made. It has been a very strange year and one which still sees us not quite back to our normal routine in terms of volunteering and access to the Record Office. However, we have stayed connected to one another and as ever you have rallied and supported us in any way you can. So, let's reflect on all that's happened in 2021... be warned this newsletter will be an impressive length but I hope you find it interesting to sit back and review 2021 and the goings on at the Record Office.

The announcement of another lockdown on the 5th January 2021 meant that the Record Office never re-opened its doors to the public or volunteers after the Christmas break (having only re-opened on the 8th December 2020). However, staff were permitted to come in and work in the office, making the most of the closure time to focus on moving collections and starting new externally funded projects. We found the closure time incredibly useful and as you will see below a lot was achieved in a short space of time!

Newspapers on the move – (January-February 2021)

Over four days' of heroic work, and with assistance of the retail team, Anne, Richard, and Drew successfully moved everything from the Pixash Lane store to our new base at Culverhay. Heritage Services are using part of the former Culverhay School (later Bath Community Academy) at Rush Hill, which closed a few years ago, to store collections following the vacating of Pixash Lane. We have two ground floor rooms in a small block and upstairs are hundreds of mannequins which form part of the Fashion Museum collection. Roman Baths have also moved much of their archaeological material there (into the main block).

It is a vast improvement on what went before – there is adequate workspace, power, lighting, heating, toilet, good 4G signal – nearly the full works!

We then undertook another move of newspaper volumes from the Haydon industrial site, where the Council's Records Management store is, to Culverhay. These volumes hold bound local newspapers covering 1812 to 1986. They are very heavy and were housed on incredibly high shelves and in inadequate boxes. Together we managed to de-box and assess 380 volumes and had lots of fun stomping and flattening the boxes (not so much fun dodging the spiders though!) and we managed to shift all of the volumes to Culverhay on Wednesday 8th February. Now, for the first time, the newspaper collection has been successfully reunited at our Culverhay store. In total

approx. 2000 newspapers have been moved. Holly and Anne don't get to escape the newspapers quite yet though as they will now focus on cleaning and condition surveying the collection.



Left: The storage of the newspapers at Haydon

Above: Some of the newspapers on the new shelving at Culverhay

Accreditation Success! (5th February 2021)

Our accreditation review took place on the 5th February 2021. Our application was reviewed against the UK Archive Service Accreditation Standard, with the panel assessing our 'organisational health, collections management and the work we undertake with a range of stakeholders'.

We're so pleased to have received this recognition for the amount we've managed to achieve over the last few years and wanted to say a BIG, BIG thank you to you all for your continued support. So much of what we achieve is thanks to you giving considerable amounts of your own time to assisting with improving the accessibility and conditions of our collections and we can't thank you enough for all you do! I felt incredibly proud to represent you all at the interviews with the assessors and to have the chance to outline how much you do for us. As the assessors outlined:

'The volunteers' contribution is impressively dedicated and clearly supports the service in a range of activities.'

We will hold accredited status for six years before we have to go through another review.

Shiny new shelving and changes to strongrooms (March 2021)

Having cleared strongroom 8 (which is a small strongroom by the photocopier in the searchroom) and given it a lick of paint, we have been able to put up spare static shelving and move local studies reference series into there. It will act as an overspill to the open shelves in the searchroom and family history room and free up space in Strongroom 12 and the staff office.

On the 1st March 2021 we had confirmation that we could refit one side of our Old Kitchen Strongroom with new rolling rack shelving. We needed to clear the existing shelving of records and with a team effort we managed to fill 121 crates with building control files and move 350 shelves of records to various gaps available in other strong rooms. It was quite an intense week physically and logistically, involving multiple trolley loads, but we managed to do it and the new shelving went in over the following weeks, giving us at least 200 metres of shiny new space!



Left: The old shelving in the Old Kitchen Strongroom being dismantled



Right: The shiny new shelving in place

Re-opening to the public and volunteers (May-September 2021)

We re-opened to researchers again, appointment only, on Tuesday 4th May, restricting access to two people in the searchroom, two people in the family history room, and closing on Mondays and Fridays. Some of you kindly came in and acted as our guinea pigs to walk through the opening procedure with us, ensuring that we had thought of everything in terms of the new access restrictions and to also try out our new membership card system.

Since re-opening we have managed to help over **508 researchers** who have visited our searchroom (thank you so much to Steph for being such a big support with this, especially all the sanitising you've had to do!) and collectively we have dealt with over **1,000 enquiries** by phone and email this year.

We were able to welcome 10 volunteers back into the office from Monday 17th May, on the Mondays and Fridays we were closed to the public (socially distanced of course)! We finally

welcomed you all back into the office from Monday 27th September, which was lovely after so long being apart. Of course, this wasn't to last as we had to close for two weeks from the 25th October as cases in Bath spiked, and then the threat of Omicron closed volunteering again from Monday 13th December, leaving us all uncertain about what the New Year might bring.

It has been a frustrating year for volunteering as we have had to react to the changes with Covid-19 but regardless of the uncertainty you have all rallied and supported us in any way you could. In total, you have been able to give **489 hours** in house, which is incredible considering the disruption to the year! Below is a review of the work you've been doing in the Record Office when you have been able to.

In-house volunteering projects

Ian continues to do a wonderful job of cataloguing our quarter sessions papers and gives a whole day each week to the task which we are very grateful of. Catherine is persevering with listing and sorting the Irvine collection, wrestling with the unidentified drawings of locations in and around Bath and ensuring that the collection is much more usable.

Michele has listed the collection of menus for us which dates from 1805 to 2005 and is now on to the invite and ticket collection. It will be brilliant to have these collections listed as the items are really useful for exhibitions as well as exploring the entertainment and social events happening in Bath at the time.

Andy and Kerri have just started a project to list the collection of agreements we hold. They date from 1860 and include agreements for the provision of sewers and water pipes, construction of roads and even an agreement for a band to play in the pleasure grounds in Bath. This will be an incredibly useful collection to have listed as it will complement the contracts that Drew and I catalogued earlier this year and will be of great interest to researchers.

Sheena continues to do sterling work to update the catalogue entries for the local studies open access books, including their locations so that it's clear that the books now live at the Guildhall. Hannah is working hard to catalogue the bound music collection which is brilliant as we now have a searchable list of the sheet music we hold. Her hard work has meant that we have been able to answer enquiries relating to our music collection much more accurately, which is very helpful indeed!

Caroline and Mike have been working hard to input our printed enquires onto our CALM database. Prior to 2019 all our enquiries were kept in printed form which meant that it was extremely difficult for staff to easily search them for information to see, for example, if an enquiry has been answered before. By having Caroline and Mike kindly input our old enquiries into CALM we will have a searchable database with all the useful information easily accessible, saving staff so much time.

Mike and Julia continue to list Anne's collection of Bath maps in the volunteer workroom. They are greatly improving our knowledge of this collection, including exact scale information for the maps, along with very detailed descriptions of their contents.

Lois is cross-checking the Marshall's Subscription Library book: a rare surviving register for one of these libraries (1793-1799). She has kindly taken the time to look into the history of some of the individuals to provide context and make us aware of some of the influential people who were visiting Bath at the time.

Elizabeth continues to repair our collection of lease plans. These plans are highlighted to show the extent of the lease-holding for each property, and we are very grateful to Elizabeth for her continued support in helping us improve the condition of our collections.

Michele and Gill are listing a collection of photographs we hold of the city. We are unsure how this collection was compiled, and we have no list of what it contains. Their hard work will mean that we will now know what we hold and will enable us to finally make the collection accessible to researchers.

Last but not least, David is working on an article on the history of the Mayors Guides to allow us to post something on our social media pages. He is then kindly going to work on writing the history of the architectural changes of the Guildhall. This is something which has never really been explored before, so we are very grateful to him for taking on this challenge.

Conservation Student – Erin (30th May 2021)

Erin, (pictured right) a conservation student from Cardiff University, joined us for a six-week placement to gain some practical experience of working with various collections. During her time with us she helped Holly clean the rare book collection, worked with Drew and I



to repack the contract collection, re-packaged our Ellis collection and did some pest management work with Anne.

Creative writing exhibition – June 2021

This writing project was a workshop collaboration between Bath Record Office and writers at the St. John's Foundation. The project grew, originally, out of a desire to see the St. John's Foundation writers' stories and poems published in an anthology of writings about local history and landscape. Bath Record Office were suggested as a possible collaborator and with the help of Lucy, Helen Daniels (Learning Workshop Leader) researched the records at the Record Office over a number of days in late 2018 /early 2019, to identify suitable artefacts and materials.

A total of ten workshops were designed, to take place in February and March 2019 in Bath and Radstock. The workshops covered the following themes: Maps, Weather, the Bath Chronicle, Crime, Retail through the ages, and mining at the Combe Down quarries. Artefacts included 17th century maps of Bath and Somerset, an 18th century weather diary by the Rector of Bath, photographs of floods from the early 20th century, Victorian crime reports and police files, copies of the Bath Chronicle from over 200 years ago, and a number of other gems from the archive.

21 creative writing pieces were submitted, and they contain such things as: a poem about a mythical 'man of Mendip', a monologue by a policeman trapped in floodwater, stories of 18th and 19th century shopkeepers, personal memories of living on Camden Crescent, a poem about the Blitz and a story of refugees in southern Africa, among many other vivid forms of writing. You can read them here: <https://www.batharchives.co.uk/creative-writing-inspired-archives>

Heritage Open Day

(Friday 19th September)

As part of the Heritage Open Week (10-19th September) we held four tours of the Guildhall on the 19th September. The theme was 'Edible England' and along with creating a virtual escape room puzzle (which you can play through here:

<https://www.batharchives.co.uk/edible-england-activities>) and lots of content for our social media pages, Anne and



The display we put out for the Guildhall tours

David, one of our regular Friday volunteers, held tours of the Guildhall. The tours included a visit to one of our strongrooms which used to be a kitchen to see the old ovens and explore it's former use, and also a trip up to the banqueting hall on the first floor. The tours were really well received, and were fully booked within the first two days of advertising them! Special thanks to David for his help preparing and giving these tours, we couldn't have done them without your support!

Recent accession - October 2021

An exciting accession this year was a collection of 17-20th Century deeds from the Solicitors Stone, King and Wardle. They were vacating their offices at 12-13 Queens Square, having been there for over 170 years, and asked if we would like the collection. The collection includes deeds for Wiltshire, Bristol, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Somerset, Lincolnshire, and Dublin, so these will be rehomed with other record offices, but there are some lovely ones for Bath, particularly for the Royal Crescent. Drew can't wait to catalogue these one day!

Remote volunteering projects – Volunteers superb efforts of support!

This year has been very frustrating and although we have seen some improvements in the easing of restrictions and the roll out of the vaccine, we have still experienced lots of disruption to our volunteering. I know that can be frustrating for you all as you enjoy the opportunity to come in and socialise with one another, but I wanted to take this opportunity to say thank you to you all for looking out for each other remotely, whether that be catching up via email, zoom coffee breaks, or socially distanced lunches in the park. You have kept in touch and looked out for one another and that is so important. I feel very lucky to work with such caring people and I look forward to next year in the hopes that we can get back to our normal routine.

Now whilst you've been unable to come in and volunteer you have continue to be a tremendous support to the Record Office remotely, taking part in three major projects, alongside some smaller listing tasks, in the last year. Collectively you have given **1,988 hours** to remote volunteering over the past year, which is a staggering number, and we can't thank you enough. Below is a review of all your hard work over the past year:

Bath and Colonialism project

Ten of you assisted with the Bath & Colonialism Newspaper Project which involved you searching digitised copies of the Bath Chronicle on the British Newspaper Archive database, for keywords and place names relating to the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

This project was borne out of a partnership between us, Bath Abbey and Bath Preservation Trust. Work began in November 2020 and continued into 2021 when the project team successfully

received £9,950 from The National Archive's funding stream to create a website to host the research on a searchable database. 27 volunteers were involved across the three sites and the work has drawn interest and advice from connected organisations across the city including the Bath & Colonialism Action group which includes members of Bath's Black community.

We have found significant new content that can be used for research, interpretation, and learning. New evidence of the Black presence in Bath has been found. We see tobacco, mahogany and sugar arriving and being sold in Bath; how the colonial wars were reported; and the close connection between Bath and Bristol.

We now have a complete set of articles for the keywords you have researched for the years (1860-1890). This will be imported into the database at the Abbey and then published as a searchable database on a dedicated web site. We have appointed Lisa Kennedy as our Web Content Writer to produce written guidance that will help us describe historical material that contains racist language and scenes of violence. Marva Jackson Lord of Griots Arts has been employed as our web developer and the hope is that the website will launch in March next year.

Bath in Time project – Update from Anne

In April this year we started to edit the database for the Bath in Time website. This was with a view to updating the website when we changed the providers later in the year. Some wonderful volunteers came forward to help with the editing process – tagging the images, adding dates where possible and flagging up issues to be investigated. The launch of the website has been delayed, for a number of reasons, but it should be going live at the end of January 2022. Or at least the first version of it. There is still a lot of ongoing detailed editing work to do on the title and descriptions in the database, but a lot of it has been done. The database will be updated again later in the year with a final edited version, but a lot of your work will make it possible to launch with a much-improved search facility that makes use of the information you added, thus making it easier (we hope!) to find what you want.

A few numbers for you:



Item from our collection - A seal designed by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787 for the anti-slavery campaign. It depicts an African man kneeling in supplication under the slogan 'Am I not a man and a brother?'.

Total number of lines on the database: 44,237

Number of 'sheets' created for editing: 22 (though 2 of these were later sub-divided for tagging, so we had 36 individual sheets)

Number of volunteers: 14 (7 of which were new recruits!)

Number of staff: 3 tagging, 1 editing, 1 co-ordinating and keeping us going (thanks Hannah!)

Number of volunteer hours: 696

Number of artists identified (so far): 80 and counting

Number of lines completely edited to date: 29,000 approx.

Number of photographs by George Love Dafnis: 7644

Number of items in the Local Studies collection: 28,033

Only another 15,000 or so lines to edit...

Externally funded project work and public engagement

Wellcome Project 2 - Building a Healthier City 2: slum clearance, council housing and renovation in Bath, 1890-1995

This project began in January 2021 and will open up valuable new opportunities for research into the relationship between housing and health. The work we're doing will enable access to significant records relating to slum clearance, provision of council housing, and renovation of unfit properties in Bath between 1890 and 1995.

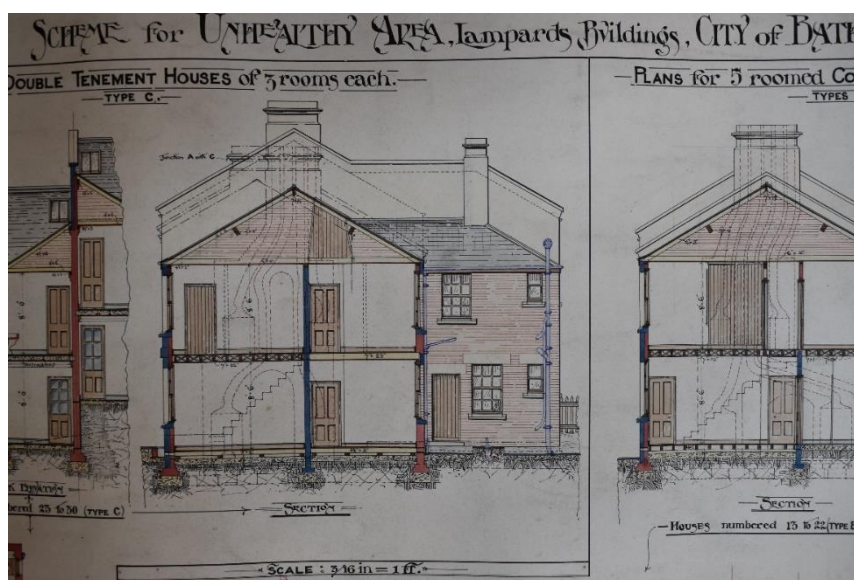
The records were uncatalogued and very poorly packaged, with some in need of remedial conservation. We started work in January 2021 with Drew, Pam and I carrying out a detailed survey of the project records, identifying them, organising them and recording their locations. Drew and I then worked out a detailed cataloguing structure for the different records and got to work cataloguing the collection of contracts. There were 2,947 in total and we completed the cataloguing in September.

The Contracts relate primarily to residential properties, including city centre Georgian properties and the development of council housing estates and old persons dwellings in the 20th Century. The contracts relating to housing include: the construction and development of estates, temporary housing post 1945, demolition and clearance of bomb-damaged sites and ongoing maintenance and modernisation works, particularly to pre-1939 council housing. These works include improvement to water supply at the properties, introduction of central heating, gas and electric and provision of facilities such as: laundry blocks, smoke detectors, pram storage and garages.

The contracts also include works to: museums, galleries, and libraries; police and fire stations; education and leisure facilities; parks and cemeteries; reservoirs and pumping stations; sewers and sewage disposal works; and road and footpath improvements. Of note, we have contracts for: the Assembly Rooms, The Baths, Empire Hotel, The Guildhall, Markets and the Art Gallery.

Our next task was to tackle the boxes of material relating to the slum clearance at Lampard's Buildings and Dolemeads, where work was undertaken to improve the housing conditions in relation to the Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890).

In 1890 residents of Lampard's Buildings petitioned Bath's Urban Sanitary Authority highlighting their concern about the living conditions, initially suggesting a potential throughfare to widen the road and let more light in. They then requested an inspection of the area by Bath's Medical Officer



A plan showing the housing scheme for Lampard's Buildings

of Health. His report suggested that the area was unhealthy within the meaning of the Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890) which resulted in the Urban Sanitary Authority discussing and implementing plans for an improvement scheme for Lampard's Buildings, gaining the permission of the Local Government Board to borrow funds to undertake the works.

The collection includes reports from the Medical Officer of Health and the City Surveyor outlining the conditions in much detail, proposals and estimated costings for the improvement works, plans, and proofs from professionals in support of the scheme.

In terms of the Dolemeads, preparations were undertaken by the Urban Sanitary Authority to design a scheme for workers housing at the Dolemeads to act as replacements for the housing which would be demolished as part of the Spring Gardens Road Improvements.

Flood mitigation works at Spring Gardens Lane in the 1890s caused the removal of a number of working-class dwellings in order to widen the river. As a condition for the sanction to borrow funds

to complete the flood works, the Local Government Board required the Corporation to prepare a scheme to replace the working-class dwellings that had been lost.

Initial plans were for a development at the Old Widcombe Mill to re-house just those families that had been displaced, but the scheme quickly developed into a larger development in the heart of the Dolemeads. While the existing worker's housing in the Dolemeads were not considered especially poor by the Medical Officer of Health, the situation was considered unsuitable due to the repeated flooding it was subjected to. Therefore, part of the scheme to build new workers housing in the area raised the land level by up to 13 feet to bring it above the likely flood levels.

The collection Drew and I have catalogued includes documents regarding early proposals to accommodate displaced persons in premises at the Old Widcombe Mill site; documents relating to offers to sell lands for the new scheme of workers housing; descriptions and specifications of the new housing to be constructed; plans of the proposed dwellings; and accounts of the execution of the works.

Wellcome Project – Conservation

In March 2021 Pam was offered a permanent job as Conservator at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. She accepted the role and sadly left on 6th April 2021. Pam oversaw Bath Record Office grow in leaps and bounds in terms of its conservation. From the small conservation room in 2.0 to a project studio that has space to process packaging and carry out benchwork, along with implementing a pest management system.



The new conservation studio on the second floor of the Guildhall

Holly Cook, previously Assistant Collections Manager at the British Museum, then joined us on the 5th July 2021, becoming our new Project Conservator. She has done a brilliant job of hitting the ground running and has got stuck into flattening and repairing the plans which were attached to the

contracts and re-packaging our collection of sealed orders. She has been a real asset to our little project team, and we have really enjoyed getting to know her over the last few months.

Wellcome Project - Public engagement application

As holders of a Wellcome Trust Research Resources grant, we are able to apply to the Wellcome Trust for additional funds for Public Engagement. Lucy and I have been working with the Radstock-based organisation, Creativity Works, to develop a programme to complement the main project. The project will: explore how public engagement can ensure our research resonates with the public; use insights from the public to develop our research; and develop our public engagement and leadership skills. We are planning to investigate how creativity and personal perspectives can enhance engagement with housing records, working with people affected by housing issues, working with individuals from Genesis Trust and residents of Foxhill Housing Estate.

We have heard that we have been successful with our funding bid and will start work on the project in the New Year.

Medlock grant for conservation engagement project

From April 2021 Holly Cook has been spending one day a week on an outreach project funded by Medlock. She is organising training sessions for a select group of local museums and organisations to help them address some of their conservation concerns or needs in terms of training. The training session will be taking place early next year.

Council minutes and digital preservation - Veronica

Veronica has successfully re-boxed and catalogued our collection of Council minutes (c.1995-2008) in Strongroom 12. She has worked incredibly hard to achieve this and it's wonderful to see all the minutes housed in archival quality boxes. In total she has catalogued nearly 80 metres worth of minutes and they are now available on our online catalogue, finally making them accessible to all!

Veronica has also been working really hard to create a digital preservation workplan and manual which has really moved things on in that area. She has also been auditing our collections of digital records, to enable us to have a much better understanding of what we hold and what work might need to be done to ensure they continue to be accessible.

Local Studies - Update from Holly T

What a year! On the Newspapers front: We have a brand-new newspaper store out at Culverhay as of early last year. Anne and I have made some good headway out there on Tuesdays - updating the

records with condition reports – going through each bound folio, one by one – dusting, cleaning and assessing condition. I have been recommending what (if any) conservation interventions will be required. In June, I worked with our conservation intern Erin on re-hinging boards and doing paper repairs on the 18th century volumes (a very small portion of the vast collection!)

Books: On the transfers from the offsite store at Haydon: I have been spending most of my time this year down in SR12 cataloguing a few hundred books that have been transferred from the other offsite store Haydon (near Radstock). For the pre-1801 volumes (of which there are many!) I have been creating new DCRM(B) standard records with important information such as custodial history, marginalia, etc. For the pre-1801 material (mostly the pre-1701 material), imprints can be tricky and a lot of research must be carried out to ensure you are cataloguing a true copy of a particular imprint. It is quite fun detective work.

Other collections: This year I have worked cataloguing and/or reshelving (or both!) the Bath Guides Collections, Bath Fiction, the periodicals, the pamphlets, the Special Presses Collection, the Autograph Letters collection, the Rare's Collection (including the miniatures) among others! Local Studies at BRO is a vast collection of smaller collections – all incredibly fascinating and a great privilege to work with.

Here are a few pictures of a set of 10 miniature children's books in our Rare's Minis Collection. 'Library for Youth', printed for John Wallis in 1800, is very rare – as few complete sets exist and fewer still exist within their original 1800 wooden 'bookcase' box. Each tiny volume has engravings, some hand coloured. Just one of thousands of BRO Local Studies 'treasures'!



Volunteer updates

New in-house volunteer - Catherine

Catherine Carey joined us in November and is our newest Conservation Volunteer. She is working with Holly Cook on a Wednesday to help with Wellcome Project conservation, and

we really appreciate her giving her time and skills to help us conserve our collection. She used to work as an archive conservator at the National Archives Kew and Surrey History Centre and we are very pleased to have her on board as part of our little team.

Tribute to Sue Smith

I wanted to take this opportunity to say a few words about one of our dear volunteers who sadly passed away on the 29th July. There are so many wonderful things I could say about Sue and a short paragraph in a newsletter just won't do her justice. She was an incredibly kind-hearted, caring person who never had a bad word to say about anyone.

She was passionate about her family history and was devoted to her family, especially her grand-daughter Lilly. She had lived in Bath all her life and was a fountain of knowledge about the changing city. She had volunteered with us for over ten years, giving an afternoon a week of her time to help us with everything and anything, especially repackaging hundreds of Beresford-Smith records for us. She was one of our four Thursday ladies, and seeing them as a trio now just isn't right. There is a big hole left in our little team due to the loss of Sue and we miss her very much!



So, I just wanted to take this opportunity to remember Sue and thank her for all she did for the Record Office! From learning how to use Zoom over lockdown so she could keep in touch, entertaining us with her family history tales during tea breaks and telling me the perils of old age (I promise to look after my eyes and teeth Sue!) you were wonderful and very special Sue, and we will always remember you!