



City and County of Swansea

Minutes of the **West Glamorgan Archives Committee**

Remotely via Microsoft Teams

Friday, 11 September 2020 at 11.00 am

Present: L Fleet (Chair) Presided

Councillor(s) - Swansea

P M Black

L S Gibbard

L R Jones

R V Smith

Councillor(s) – Neath Port Talbot

R Mizen

P A Rees

H N James

W F Griffiths

Associated Organisations

A Dullea

Diocese of Swansea & Brecon

L Miskell

Swansea University

S Perons

Diocese of Llandaff

Officer(s)

K Collis

County Archivist

G Borsden

Democratic Services Officer

W John

County Librarian - NPT

Apologies for Absence

Councillors A R Aubrey & M Durke and J Watkins, C Griffiths and T McNulty

17 Welcome

The County Archivist and Members of the Committee welcomed Louise Fleet, the new Lord Lieutenant of West Glamorgan and Chair of the Joint Archives Committee to her first meeting.

18 Disclosures of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct adopted by both Authorities, no interests were declared.

19 Minutes.

Resolved that the Minutes of the West Glamorgan Archives Committee meeting held on 13 March 2020 be approved as a correct record.

20 Report of the County Archivist.

The County Archivist presented a report which outlined the work of the Joint Archive Service during the period March - August 2020.

Covid 19

He referred to the significant impact that the pandemic has had on the service since the countrywide lockdown was enforced in March.

He detailed the actions taken by staff in attending the Civic Centre throughout the period to ensure the collections were secure. He also detailed how officers continued to reply to postal/email queries and had expanded, developed and enhanced the online services and social media output.

He outlined that after many months of closure and the undertaking of the relevant risk assessments, consultations with the trades unions and necessary physical alterations to the searchroom, the service plans to reopen on 29th September in a revised manner with a much reduced 'appointment only' capacity for visitors and significantly altered availability of records due to the social distancing rules and regulations being in place.

A short film produced to relaunch Archives provision across Wales was shown to the Committee.

This film and associated online and social media publicity would be launched shortly to promote the reopening.

The reopening of the Archives at the Mechanics Institute in Neath remains more difficult due to the layout of the building. Full discussion will be undertaken with the Antiquarian Society and Neath Port Talbot Council going forward.

Service Outreach

He further detailed the work undertaken by Officers during the lockdown as outlined in the previous item and detailed in particular the films that the service had created and posted online. Some of these were linked to anniversaries that occurred during lockdown such as VE day and refugee week. These had proved extremely popular with the public.

The videos can be viewed via the following link:

<https://www.facebook.com/pg/WestGlamorganArchives/videos/>

He also outlined that one to one family history tutorials have also been restarted via the online 'Teams' platform.

The online information available for schoolchildren relating to the Swansea Blitz and 'Rich and Poor Victorians' was also outlined. Appropriate promotion and advertising of these resources needs to be provided to schools in both authorities.

The Creation of Teaching Resources Relating to Wales' Connection with the Slave Trade.

He outlined the ongoing discussions and preparation for the development of teaching resources for the study of Wales' historical links to the slave trade and its part in the development of the British Empire. He placed this in the context of global events

that have occurred over the previous months and outlined the ongoing review of street names/statutes etc that is happening in Swansea.

He outlined that Welsh Government have also established a working group to review the Wales history curriculum to incorporate a greater awareness our historic involvement in the British slave trade and Wales' part in the British Empire. The new teaching pack aims to tie in with the revision of history provision over the coming years.

He outlined verbally some interesting historical facts from the archives in the draft teaching resources which show how Black people were living in south Wales as early as 1687 in Cardiff and 1801 in Swansea.

Annual Report of the County Archivist

He outlined that the annual report had been produced and published online in May. Copies had been circulated electronically to Committee Members.

It can be viewed online at: <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/article/8510/Annual-Report-of-the-County-Archivist>

Use of the Service

He outlined that the closure of the facilities due to the pandemic had obviously dramatically reduced onsite visitor figures but online activity and sales had held up well given the circumstances.

Archives Accreditation and a Revised Policy Framework

He reported on the status of the Service with regard to the findings of the mid-term Archive accreditation review last November and further to discussions at the last meeting in March. The long term provision of an archives facility in Swansea remains a real concern, but the formulation and agreement of a temporary plan for the relocation of the archives may satisfy the Accreditation Panel in the interim.

It was reported that a Swansea Council report on the future of the Civic Centre had already been delayed by several months due to the Covid pandemic.

Swansea Council members outlined that the relevant report can be called before Scrutiny Committee, particularly to examine the future plans for the continued provision of a public Archive Service and suitable storage space for the archive collections.

The County Archivist outlined he had continued discussions during lockdown regarding the potential options for the temporary storage of the collections in two sites at Glamorgan Archives in Cardiff and the Richard Burton Archives in Swansea University. Neither of these facilities would be able to house the entirety of the West Glamorgan archive collections, but the County Archivist stressed the importance of the records being stored securely and in the correct environmental conditions. He indicated that the reduced public availability of the records for a period of time, though not ideal, was of lesser importance than their safekeeping for use by future generations.

He reported that neither archive could accommodate the records permanently without substantial capital building works, to the cost of which both authorities would need to contribute. In the case of Glamorgan Archives, this would require the building of an extension for their Cardiff repository. This option of a capital investment outside the two local authority areas was considered unacceptable by members of the committee and extremely unlikely to be approved by elected members of either authority.

He outlined that a further review was due in two months' time and the potential reputational loss to the service should the accreditation be revoked and the implications of this on the service's ability to bid for external funds. He indicated that, due to Covid and the delays outlined above, more time could be sought from the Accreditation Panel to discuss and develop a solution.

Members of the Committee discussed the issues and outlined and agreed their support for the development of a local new facility or in the worst-case scenario the temporary relocation as outlined above by the County Archivist whilst a new facility is developed.

The County Archivist outlined another requirement of the Accreditation Panel, which was that the Panel required the consolidation of a number of hitherto stand-alone Archive Service policies into a single coherent document. This was attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

Resolved that the revised policies as outlined in Appendix 2 to the report be approved and adopted.

Accessions of Archive Collections

The County Archivist outlined and reported on the list of archives received by the Service during the quarter.

He made specific reference to an important collection relating to the Ynyscedwyn Estate in the Swansea Valley that the service had managed to acquire during lockdown. The collection, some of which dates back to the 16th century, is of immense local historical importance and sheds new light on the history of the upper Swansea Valley.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm

Chair