

Report from the Archivist

Coronavirus and furlough

The Archivist worked her City Council hours from home from early March and was then put on furlough. She returns to work on Monday 28th September, as does the Assistant to the Archivist, Sarah Wride.

Environmental conditions in the Town Hall's Archives storage area

Whilst the Archivist has been on furlough, the Town Hall Management team have continued emptying the dehumidifier in the cell with the mould problem. The Town Hall Manager has reported that water is still collecting, so the dehumidifier is extremely worthwhile.

Heritage Open Day and "Wake Up Wells Community Day"

Both these events in which the City Archives was to have participated were cancelled because of coronavirus.

Closure of Wells City Archives to visitors

On Government advice to prevent the spread of Covid-19, Wells City Archives and Wells & Mendip Museum were closed on 17th March until further notice. The Museum re-opened on 22nd August but on Saturdays only. Hopefully the Archivist will have access to the Strong Room on Mondays by 28th September. The Curator is presently working on the necessary Covid-19 protocols which would make this possible and the Archivist has provided her input to these.

It is not yet known when it will be possible to re-open the Archives to visits by members of the public. The Archivist's first priority once she is again able to access the Strong Room will be to audit the physical condition of the collection. She will then draw up a Risk Assessment for both volunteers and members of the public, on the basis of which access to the Archives can again be made possible. She has been in regular touch throughout with The National Archives and with local archives (including Wells Cathedral Archives), in order to obtain up-to-date advice. Guidelines include the wearing of masks, advance ordering of all items, and the quarantining of documents and document handling aids for 72 hours after use. Meanwhile, the Archivist has arranged for both the City Council and Museum websites to feature updated messages, explaining that, "Wells City Archives is currently closed to the public but is planning a safe re-opening. Even though we cannot make research appointments at present, we are still responding to enquiries".

Museum Archives hours

Since 18th March, the Archivist has been working her Museum hours from home. She has focussed on two areas: email enquiries and the creation of the first proper Archival catalogue of the City Archives collection. She has kept up to date with enquiries, and in this way, a limited service has been maintained since the beginning of the closed period. Although she has had no access to the physical Archives, the large range of digital resources which she and volunteers have created over the last nine years has helped enormously in responding helpfully to research enquiries. The Archivist has also made great progress with the catalogue. Finally, she has received several donations of material at home, which she has quarantined, then accessioned and listed.

World War Two Commemoration Project

The Archivist has been collaborating on a voluntary basis on a Museum project to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of World War Two. She has helped research a brief biography of each of the 39 Wells men and women who died during World War Two and are named on Wells War Memorial. Where possible, photographs of them have been tracked down. The findings have been posted daily since VJ-Day (15th August) on the Museum's social media and (in longer form) on its website. A very positive response has been received.

City Archivist's post

There has been a change in the Archivist's employment status. Since 1st July, she no longer splits her City Archivist's post between two employers. Formerly she worked for Wells & Mendip Museum on a part-time self-employed basis in addition to working part-time as an employee of the City Council. Since 1st July, she is solely a part-time employee of the Council. She will still be working at both the Museum and the Town Hall.

Dr Julia Wood
07.09.2020