

## **Report from the Archivist**

### Coronavirus and furlough

Following a period of furlough, the Archivist returned to work on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020, as did the Assistant to the Archivist, Sarah Wride. They both went on furlough again from 5<sup>th</sup> November. The Archivist started work again from home on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 and began coming in to the Town Hall again from 7<sup>th</sup> June, though continuing to work some of her hours from home.

### Environmental conditions and security of the Archives storage areas

The Archivist is extremely grateful to the Town Hall Management team for keeping a regular check on environmental conditions in and the security of the Archives storage area in the Town Hall while she has been on furlough. During her month back at work in October 2020, she was able to check on the environment in this area; and now she is back in, she is able to do so again. She offers her gratitude to Nick Marshman for regularly emptying the dehumidifier in the cell with the mould problem. It is clear from the amount of water which is collected that the dehumidifier is a permanent necessity.

### Closure of Wells City Archives to visitors

On Government advice to prevent the spread of Covid-19, Wells City Archives has been closed to the public since 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020. It is not yet known when it will be possible to re-open the Archives to visits by members of the public. Auditing the physical condition of the key items in the historic collection is a key immediate priority for the Archivist; she also has a large backlog of enquiries to deal with; and the availability of a suitable room at the Museum is another consideration. When it does seem that it may be possible to accommodate visitors to the Archives again, protocols to ensure a safe re-opening will first have to be finalised and instigated. The Archivist will need to draw up a Risk Assessment for both volunteers and members of the public, on the basis of which access to the Archives could again be made possible. She will also have to obtain up-to-date advice from The National Archives and other archives. At present, guidelines include the wearing of masks, the advance ordering of all items, and special cleaning, seating and ventilation arrangements. Last week The National Archives dropped the quarantining of documents and document handling aids for 72 hours after use.

### New Archives base at the Town Hall

When she arrived back in the Town Hall on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020, the Archivist was thrilled with the new spacious and well-equipped shared room which has been made available as office space for the Archives. She wishes to thank Steve Luck, Kevin Westwood and Wells City Council for this. Working back in the Town Hall again for the first time since the outbreak of coronavirus, she was reassured by the arrangements that had been made for staff in relation to Covid restrictions.

### Actions between 28<sup>th</sup> September - 4<sup>th</sup> November

During this period working back in the Town Hall and Museum, the Archivist audited the physical condition of the most significant items in the historic collection. She also responded to email enquiries. At the Town Hall, she worked on sorting and clearing material from the Archives cells, arranging for the disposal of unwanted modern records (following the City Council's Retention & Disposal Policy). Sarah Wride focussed on sorting, arranging and packaging the unsorted Town Clerk's correspondence dating from 1974-1999.

The Archivist changed some of the Town Hall displays, creating an Archivist's Choice display to tie in with Black History Month (October). She also mounted a display about the men and women of Wells who died whilst serving in World War 2, to tie in with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War Two. The "Mills of Wells" exhibition ran at the Bishop's Palace from 24<sup>th</sup> September to 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020. (It was commissioned by the Archivist and created by the Wells Mills Interest Group for Heritage Open Day 2018 at the Town Hall. It features research carried out in the City Archives.)

### Actions from 3<sup>rd</sup> May to date

The Archivist has begun working through the many enquiries which have accumulated while she was on furlough. She has also been checking the condition of the most important items in the historic collection.

In response to an invitation to contribute a piece to Wells Heritage Partners' brochure about the city, she has written the section on "The Water of Wells". She has created a new "Archivist's Choice" display about the early history of the Portway Annexe, and has contributed historic photos of the High Street from the City Archives to the Museum's forthcoming Schools Project.

It has been agreed between the Town Clerk, Town Hall Manager and Archivist that this year, because of coronavirus and its ramifications, Wells City Council will not be taking part in Heritage Open Day (HODs)

and it will not be possible for the Town Hall to be open for the event. However, we intend to participate again in 2022. Wells Civic Society has taken on the job of coordinating the HODs events and creating and distributing the joint leaflet, and the City Council will print this.

#### Volunteer Archives projects

Throughout the period of the coronavirus pandemic, significant work by volunteers has continued to take place on several important volunteer Archives projects. Although the Archivist has been furloughed for most of the time since the pandemic began, she has participated in these on a voluntary basis, in some cases managing them, in others, contributing material or editorial skills. For details of these projects, please see the City Archives Annual Report for 2020-21. Additionally, this May, Archives volunteer David Mather carried out palaeographical transcription of 17<sup>th</sup>-century City Archives documents for Jon Jefferies for the "Monmouth in Wells" exhibition he has prepared. And an article promoting ScraseBase and explaining that it is a City Archives project appeared in the June 2021 issue of *Wells Voice*. Written by Clare Blackmore, it was entitled "When rent could be paid with red roses". The Archivist is immensely grateful to the dedicated Archives volunteers whose generous contribution of time and effort has made possible a vast amount of progress during an extremely difficult time.

Dr Julia Wood  
22.06.2021