

Report for MLA East of England & Maritime Heritage East

Archives and Libraries Collections and Resources Survey 2007

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1.1 Background

Maritime Heritage East is a programme based at the award winning Time and Tide Museum. The programme has been part funded by the Norfolk Museum and Heritage Objective 2 Package and Renaissance in the Regions (MLA).

As part of this ongoing programme a survey of collections and skills in the maritime sector across the East of England has been undertaken. To further this work, and to enable cross-domain consideration of maritime heritage, MLA East of England funded a companion survey of libraries and archives. This complementary research will combine to concentrate the resources of maritime interests at Great Yarmouth, continuing its establishment as a Gateway Museum for maritime heritage in the East of England.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to find out in more detail what significance and shared interests exist in our region's dispersed maritime collections and to promote the unique heritage merit of our maritime past. One of the principal aims of the survey was to extract information of a thematic nature held in archive collections.

The information gathered will help to form the basis for future cross-domain partnership working between museum, libraries and archives in relation to our shared maritime heritage and, most importantly, how best to improve public interest and access to archive collections.

1.3 Scope of Survey

A selection of archives and libraries with maritime holdings such as heritage centres and local study collections were contacted (see Appendix A).

As a survey of maritime collections and resources, the three counties with a coastline were an obvious focus. Surveys were also sent to neighbouring inland counties in the East of England, as archive collections can find themselves deposited at a certain location for many reasons, including fortuity.

1.4 Methodology

Names and addresses of potential archives were collected and collated. As part of this mapping project, it was decided that archives attached to museums would come under the scope of a separate collections and skills survey sent out by Fiona Ford, Maritime Curator. In total 28 libraries and archives were sent surveys, guidance notes and a covering letter explaining the aims and remit of the mapping exercise.

For the purpose of the survey “Maritime” was defined as ‘use of the sea’ and because of the significance to our region, inland waterways such as the Broads were also included.

It was stated in the covering letter and guidance notes that the survey was primarily requesting information regarding archive holdings that concern the maritime heritage of the East of England but that if an institution held a nationally significant archive that contained information on the maritime heritage beyond the Eastern Region then this should also be included.

The survey required archives to record their collection areas as well as maritime themes contained within their collections.

2 Aims and Objectives

2.1 Background

New statistics from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport’s *Taking Part*¹ survey have highlighted that in the past year 50% of non-visitors to archives cited “they had no reason to go” as the main factor for their non-attendance or usage. Institutions need to account for the role they play within their communities and it is vital that archives demonstrate their relevance and true value in society.

Archive collections often contain rich, personal narratives. With some interpretation and insight these can allow meaningful, inspirational public engagement. This survey asked archivists to consider their collections in terms of key themes and narratives. The aim was to uncover the social, cultural, economic and personal histories that often remain buried within the archives. The survey also aimed to identify shared interests between county collections.

I refer to the National Council on Archive’s (NCA) response to the Department of Communities Local Government’s Commission on Integration and Cohesion of Communities consultation. The NCA stress the importance that all members of society must have a sense of place, worth and ownership. They note that,

“A very powerful way of providing this sense of place and ownership is the valuing and validation of an individual’s and a group’s historical and contemporary record. Archives provide professional care, preservation and access to these records...There are many examples of the power and impact of caring for one’s documentary and oral heritage”²

Archives are well positioned to provide new and existing communities with a sense of place and identity and current information shows that visitors are already using archives for this very purpose.

The *Taking Part* survey highlighted that, out of those who attended an archive at least once in the last year, 37% cited “to find out about my family history” was the reason for their visit, followed by 15% who wanted to find out about the history of their local area.

2.2 Knowledge and Understanding

Better knowledge and understanding of the maritime collections within museums, libraries and archives through development of relationships between community and collections. Users will improve their knowledge of the important role that maritime heritage has in the development of the region.

It is hoped that the results of the survey will lead to a wider understanding of maritime collections and resources in the region amongst the general public and museums, libraries and archives. It will also make recommendations to make links between the maritime collections and contemporary issues.

2.3 Attitudes and Values

Archives can use their collections to explore contemporary and historical attitudes towards other people.

By using their maritime collections, archives can develop a sense of empathy in users by exploring the lives of those who have lived and worked in maritime communities, past, present and future.

2.4 Increased Access

The report will seek to make recommendations on improved access to archives. It will look at removing the barriers of professional terminology and how by approaching collections thematically, i.e., maritime heritage, a more inclusive and accessible introduction to archive collections can be developed. It will also produce statistics on the presence of archives on the web and online catalogues.

2.5 Experimentation and Innovation

The National Maritime Museum Greenwich (NMM) has acknowledged the initiative of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service in working towards the identification of a regional identity with partnership collaboration a key objective.

The archive survey will encourage an extension of a regional framework. The NMM are being kept up to date with the Maritime Heritage East programme, which may provide a template for the possible implementation of similar cross-domain initiatives in other regions.

3 Findings

3.1 Knowledge and Understanding

The results from the survey indicate that all archives included in the survey answer enquiries from members of the public. If we use the *Taking Part* survey as a guide, an increasing percentage of these enquiries will be regarding local and family history.

These findings were confirmed by the Lowestoft branch of Suffolk Record Office who included a list of their most common thematic enquiries, of which family history, especially ancestors who were on the fishing boats, was the most frequent.

Essex Record Office included leaflets of their comprehensive events programme. Under the theme Discovering Your History, they have organised events, some of which are fee charging, others free. They offer courses on Beginning Family History, Asylum Records for Family Historians and House History. The service identifies and caters for the growing public interest in local history and is an area that could be developed by other archives.

Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies have also developed an attractive and user-friendly brochure, which has information for people interested in Family History, House History and Garden History. It includes sections on themes such as Crime and Punishment, and Science and Invention and is proof that archives can coordinate their collections into subject areas or themes that will be useful to Curriculum users and for capturing more general interest. The layout of the brochure is easy to use, text is organised into bite size paragraphs; enough to be useful and inspire further enquiry. It is colourful and image heavy, with many pictures of documents from within their collection. This accessible and informative approach embodies the aims of this survey and demonstrates what can be achieved. It could be argued that all archives could work to develop a similar approach in the form of a leaflet or handout, which works within their own budgets. The introduction to the brochure reads,

*"This booklet aims to help you find out more about our estate collections and the part Hertfordshire residents played in shaping our local, national and international history. We hope it will inspire you to use the collections for yourself as you investigate the history of your own family, your house, or the local area. To get you started here are some documents and stores from the collections, as well as tips on how using them can help you in your own research. There are many more hidden stories and fascinating archives to discover. If you have enjoyed this glimpse, let us help you uncover more 'hidden talent.'"*³

For this to be possible archives must begin to think about their collections thematically and how they can use the records within their archives to inform and illustrate specific subject areas, as this is the way the general public will approach their collections.

Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service have produced a smaller booklet that lists their archive holdings, which again organises its information under document types such as Maps and Technical Drawings and subject focused headings, for instance Religion and Health and Welfare. The impetus for this booklet was to aid those non-users who commented that they believed the Archive and Record Service had a tremendous range of material but they did not have any idea of the different types of archives held.

In response to this survey Suffolk Record Office, Lowestoft branch and Norfolk Record Office have included a comprehensive list of maritime references contained within their archives, which can be used by staff for future maritime related enquiries. Essex Record Office also undertook the same task when the *From Tiller to Tide Maritime Survey of Essex*⁴ was compiled.

Given the strength of maritime history in the county, it follows that significant work has already been done to improve access to maritime heritage in Norfolk. Extensive work has already been undertaken at Norfolk Record Office to identify maritime references across its collections, which have been collated together to form an invaluable resource.

The survey identified that Norfolk and Suffolk Record Offices already have print out sheets for researchers which list maritime sources that could be the solid foundations for future development of subject and thematic focused publications.

Recommendation One

Archives that have not already done so could begin to work through their holdings, collating references to maritime heritage and compile a document to be used internally for future enquiries.

If there are sufficient references, this list could be organised by an archivist into a user-friendly version for the public, using headings and themes, from which a cost effective printed booklet produce and also put online.

There is great scope for interpretation and presentation, which will lead to an improved understanding of the importance and value of archives.

The NCA has said that it would like to see an emphasis on the sharing and celebration of community and group heritage. The Maritime Heritage East programme is a perfect opportunity to explore shared history and identity and to make links with contemporary society and issues.

3.2 Attitudes and Values

Little information was provided to indicate that archives are using their collections to explore attitudes to other people and changing cultures. In addition there is little narrative interpretation that explores the lives of people who live in maritime communities, past and present. The only two projects mentioned were the *Our Town*⁵ project and the *Sea Heroes*⁶ project.

The Maritime East Archive at Time and Tide Museum represents one of the East of England's most important maritime archives and serves a wide public interest in the region's maritime heritage. It provides a focus for the *Our Town* contemporary collecting project, which is using community curators to collect artefacts that have a story to tell about Great Yarmouth. The artefacts will be used in a future temporary exhibition that will hopefully stimulate further contributions. The objects from both the archive and museum collection will be used for reminiscence work and oral history that will be recorded and added to the archive. The findings can be viewed on the project's website at <http://www.ourgreatyarmouth.org.uk>

Another effective case study is the *Sea Heroes* Project at Suffolk Record Office at Lowestoft. This project focused on maritime history in Lowestoft and was linked to the national activities marking the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar, 1805-2005. The aim of the project was to encourage interest in local maritime history and in particular, to consider the work of local sea heroes. Stories were selected to inspire, inform a broad audience and to provide a new source for learning, history, literacy and art. The project helped to further a sense of community as well as a greater appreciation and respect for earlier generations. A discovery kit and online resources were developed, designed for KS2 and KS3 students, but were of interest to all.

The key objectives of the *Sea Heroes* project were to:

- Encourage school children, teenage reading groups, museum and record office visitors, and members of the general public to explore the stories of real sea heroes since the time of Admiral Nelson through archive and museum collections and working in partnership with other local organisations.
- Promote the archives held in the Lowestoft Record Office through developing and delivering three story creating workshops for schools and members of the public between October and December 2005. These included live story telling, art activities and interviews with real sea heroes, to encourage people to develop their own stories in words or pictures that were then entered into a competition.
- Produce learning resources on the theme of sea heroes for use by teachers, students and the public in different formats and styles including:

Discovery Kits (working with National Curriculum guidelines on art, literacy and history as well as general interest) and uploading archival material on the East of England Sense of Place Suffolk (EESOP) website www.senseofplacesuffolk.co.uk

- Produce a modular exhibition interpreting the sea heroes theme that was held initially at the Lowestoft Record Office and Central Library.

Other benefits included promoting the Friends of the Suffolk Record Office, attracting new volunteers and involving the community.

Recommendation Two

Both aforementioned projects illustrate the potential of using maritime heritage to develop projects that explore the lives and experiences of people represented within their archives. Most archives acquire documents passively rather than actively collect, but this should not hinder the use of the collections to make meaningful connections to contemporary issues.

The *Sea Heroes* project demonstrates the scope of activities that can be organised through effective partnership working between museums, libraries, archives and other heritage groups and local businesses.

Information from the surveys indicates that only five out of the twenty respondents had any structured schools programme. Four archives stated they had prepared schools worksheets and six produced teachers' packs. This is an area for potential development and it could be recommended that more archives begin to develop education material for curriculum users and in accordance with *Inspiring Learning for All*.⁷

The Discovery Kits produced by the *Sea Heroes* project are an invaluable resource and are an excellent example of how archives can use their collections to inspire creativity and work within the curriculum to produce a schools resource. Most of the information in the kit was included on an interactive CD-ROM rather than in printed format on the advice of local teachers. The kit contained reproductions of documents, maps/sea charts, photographs, paintings, drawings and prints, historical notes and information, a reading list and useful web pages, the competition winning entry, poems and drawings, the story of the *SS Hopelyn Rescue* told through the children's artwork created at the half-term workshop, a PowerPoint presentation of images including lighthouses and lifeboats, guidance notes on how to explore the archives at Suffolk Record Office and museum collections at the Maritime Museum and on understanding old photographs and ideas for lesson plans.

3.3 Increased Access

One of the key objectives of the survey was to ask archives to consider their collections thematically, under headings such as Fishing and Leisure. This request was made to approach the collections within archives from a lay person's point of view, such as the potential archive user identified by Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service, who knew the archive had a tremendous range of material but did not have any idea of the different types of archives held. The reality is that most people are not aware of the different types of documents held or how they are catalogued and this remains a significant barrier between archives and the general public.

Several archives did attempt to complete the Themes section and this information is gathered together and organised as a table (Appendix F). The archives that completed this section can view other archives that contain similar collections and themes, which could provide the basis for future partnership work, for instance, through the Maritime Heritage East programme.

It is important that archives consider access to their collections and make credible attempts to interpret their collections from different perspectives.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulty caused by such a request Susan Maddock of Norfolk Record Office noted,

"I can see that looking at our collections primarily from a subject perspective, however alien it seems to us, could connect us with people who might not otherwise think of using archives".

Of the twenty respondents, it is possible for the public to search online the collections of fourteen archives. When asked if the public could use other websites to search their collections, such as Access to Archives (A2A), thirteen archives answered "Yes".

In only one case did Access to Archives provide an opportunity to search a particular archives collection online, therefore this survey indicates that websites such as A2A provide an alternative site for archives that already have provision for searching their collections on the Internet.

Those archives that do enable the public to search their collections online make provision for keyword searches which require no knowledge of terminology or cataloguing systems. This is a step in the right direction but power of the Internet is yet to be fully exploited for searching archives.

County Record Office Cambridge highlighted their programme of online exhibitions in their survey return. They have produced several online displays focused around subjects that complement the curriculum or national events. One of particular interest to the Maritime Heritage East programme is the Trafalgar 200 exhibition. Organised under subject headings, the key historical events are told through informative text, which is brought to life by documents

from within Cambridge Record Office's archives. Pictures showing sections of the documents are also displayed. Some of the documents are available as annotated transcripts, which can be downloaded as PDF files.

To view the displays visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/online

Recommendation Three

The Cambridge County Record Office's online displays fully highlight the potential of archives on the Internet. I would recommend that the online presence of archives progress beyond providing search engines to developing similar online exhibitions. This is an area that would perhaps require funding and staff training but I feel would be met by enthusiasm as it provides archivists with the opportunity to have more contact with their archives and to present their research to new audiences.

It would also complement the programme of digitisation, which is an ongoing target across archives in the East of England.

3.4 Experimentation and Innovation

Responses to the survey varied from full to non-existent. As to some extent anticipated, several archivists with known maritime holdings failed to respond because they felt their archives did not relate specifically to the East of England.

This is true of many collections, even those held in museums. It was disappointing that this regional identification with and understanding of maritime collections was the reason most commonly cited for not participating in the survey. Archives that did not complete the survey, may have only contained a few references relating to the East of England but the fact that they are housed here makes it a rich maritime source of national significance that is held in the our region. Archives such as these would be strengths in a cross regional network and would demonstrate the East of England's maritime heritage strengths to a national audience.

From the survey returns, six archives responded that they had formed partnerships with other maritime individuals or organisations. This is a positive finding, which could improve as the Maritime Heritage East programme fosters cross-domain partnerships.

Recommendation Four

As the Maritime Heritage East programme develops it should continue to work with the MLA East of England to identify strategic cross-domain development opportunities within the sector.

4 Conclusion

Undertaking a survey in a subject specialist area, such as maritime heritage, has provided beneficial information regarding the current level of interpretation and presentation of archive collections. In particular it has identified what significance and shared interests exist in our region's dispersed maritime collections.

The process of circulating the survey and the information returned will facilitate one of the principle aims of the survey, which is to develop cross-domain partnerships. It is hoped that the survey has enabled archivists to better understand how their maritime collections are placed within a regional framework across the East of England.

It is clear that archivists have an invaluable knowledge of their archives and work needs to continue to find ways to provide access to this information for the general public. Professional terminology and cataloguing systems remains a barrier for many members of the public and this issue highlights the gap between professional and public understanding of archive collections. This report has made several recommendations some of which are smaller in scale such as archives producing subject focused sheets to be used internally and if appropriate being compiled into a publicly accessible resource, through to more ambitious initiatives such as curating online exhibitions.

It is hoped that the findings of this survey will facilitate practical results in improving access to archives and demonstrate the strengths of our shared maritime heritage. The report seeks to stimulate debate and to encourage cross regional dialogues regarding improvements that build upon the hard work already undertaken by archives to open up their collections and enable meaningful connections with the communities they serve.

5 Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the archives that took the time to complete the survey.

A special thank you goes to Susan Maddock who had the largest task, as the archivist responsible for completing both the Norfolk Record Office survey and the Kings Lynn Borough Archive survey. I would also like to thank the Lowestoft branch of Suffolk Record Office who aided my enquiries regarding cataloguing systems and the *Sea Heroes* project.

This final report is the result of the joint collaboration between MLA East of England and the Maritime Heritage East Programme. Therefore I would like to thank both Gordon Chancellor, MLA East of England and James Steward, Great Yarmouth Area Museums Officer for their support and guidance.

For report appendices click [here](#).

1 *Taking Part* is a continuous survey, started in 2005 and commissioned by the DCMS and is currently based on 28,117 interviews with adults aged 16 or over in England. Findings from the survey are used to help shape future policy to improve engagement across the cultural, leisure and sporting sectors. The *Taking Part* report and further information are available at: www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Research/taking_part_survey/surveyoutputs_may07.htm

2 Ruth Savage, The National Council of Archives response to the Department of Communities Local Government's Commission on Integration and Cohesion of Communities consultation, 2007. For the full response visit http://www.ncaonline.org.uk/materials/coic_nca_resp.pdf

For more information on the final report, Commission on Integration and Cohesion – Our Shared Future, visit http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/Our_final_report.aspx

3 Christine Shearman, Heritage Services Manager, in the introduction to, *Hidden Talent - A Guide to Hertfordshire's Estate Collections*, produced by Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies. For more information and a downloadable version of booklet visit <http://www.hertsdirect.org/libsleisure/heritage1/HALS/localhist/estates/>

4 *From Tiller to Tide - a Maritime Survey of Essex*, produced by Essex County Council and published by Essex Record Office, 2004. The compiled results of the survey provide an introduction to maritime collections in Essex from over 23 different organisations.

5 The *Our Town* Project aims to create a Community Archive by recording peoples' experiences of living and working in Great Yarmouth over the last 60 years by: recording oral history interviews, holding reminiscence workshops, through film and photography projects and collecting artefacts and ephemera. To view the website and contribute to the *Our Town* Project log on to www.ourgreatyarmouth.org.uk

6 The *Sea Heroes* Project focused on maritime history in Lowestoft and was linked to the national activities marking the bicentenary of the Battle of Trafalgar, 1805-2005. The aim of the project was to encourage interest in local maritime history and in particular to consider the work of local sea heroes. The learning resource produced in conjunction with the project can be viewed at http://www.senseofplacesuffolk.co.uk/learning_resources/index.html

7 *Inspiring Learning for All (ILFA)* was launched in 2004 and has been embraced by organisations across the museum, libraries and archives sector as a vision for transforming service provision. The vision articulated in ILFA, and the methodology to measure learning through Generic Learning Outcomes, has also been used by the broader cultural and heritage sector.