Friends of Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies Newsletter

June 2013

Many of you will have seen the recent report in the Express & Star about the transfer of material from Beatties' Heritage Room to the Archives.
The Heritage Room opened in the House of Fraser store three years ago to display items from the Beatties' archive, including many historic books and papers from the founding of the store. The items on display were a fraction of the total archives.
The Friends' committee raised concerns about the long term future of this collection about twelve months ago and it is pleasing to see that the Archives will now be home to this most important piece of retail history of Wolverhampton.
The Friends have paid for the installation of window blinds in the Oak Room. This means that you can now enjoy a drink in there without being dazzled by the sun (it does happen occasionally !)

Programme News

We have had a number of "second helpings" in our recent meetings, with the second instalments from both Ann Eales on her discoveries relating to Oaklands House and Anne Bailey on the victims and villains of late 18th Century Wolverhampton. Samantha Badger gave us a fuller version of the history of Fast Food in Wolverhampton that won her last year's local history Symposium bursary prize.
Sadly Duncan Nimmo had to cancel his talk on inter war suburbia in April, Frank Lockley stepped in to share some of his research on the Commonwealth War Graves at Heath Town Graveyard.
We hope to re-schedule Duncan's talk in our next programme

This year's Local History Symposium delivered the usual mix of interesting talks, the winner of the bursary was Erica Williams for her talk on the Wednesfield Trapmakers firm of John Williams.
The Friends catering was a great success, raising £112 towards our funds. Many thanks to all who volunteered their time to help out on the day.

Forthcoming meetings

22nd June
Frank Sharman will be entertaining us on the theme of "Seals, Signatures and Names"
20th July
Nigel Brown will be taking the next step in Genealogical research – exploring the role of DNA research.

Don't forget that guests of Friends are always welcome at our meetings at a charge of £2 per head.
If they like what they see they are of course most welcome to join.

Staff Profile

Our first profile from the Searchroom, Karen Davies

Wolverhampton born and bred, Karen considers herself to be a true 'Wulfrunian.' She has had a varied career since leaving school, working as an enamel artist at Bilston & Battersea Enamels, a car sunroof receptionist with Arrowin Sunroofs, a life assurance clerk at Friends Provident and a sales assistant at Beatties. However, it was since completing her first degree in History at Wolverhampton University at the grand old age of 39 that Karen's archive career took off. Two months after graduating she was asked to work as a self-employed historical researcher on the Stirring Memories project which documented the diverse communities of the Blakenhall area of Wolverhampton. When the project came to an end, she was then taken on full-time as a digital cataloguing assistant on the Workshop of the World project which involved scanning industrial photographs of the Black Country and putting them on to the electronic catalogue. By the time the project had ended, Karen had personally scanned and digitised over 5000 images, earning her the title of 'Scanning Queen.'

Karen's career continued in a similar vein as a part-time Digitisation Assistant at the Art Gallery interspersed with volunteering at Archives and tour guiding at Wightwick Manor. She was then lucky enough to be offered the permanent full time position of Archives Assistant in time for the Archives' move to their new home at the renovated Molineux Hotel. As well as carrying out her research counter duties, Karen studied for and successfully gained an MSc in Archive Administration from Aberystwyth University after qualifying as an archivist in December 2011.

Karen in action as "Scanning Queen" at last year's Local History Day

In between helping the Great British Public with their family and local history enquiries and studying, Karen also found time to help with the cataloguing backlog. Hence to say that the many and varied records of the Molineux Hotel restoration project have been accessioned and catalogued and are now safely tucked away in the repository. Karen is also a keen member of the Archives & Records Association and will soon be applying to become a Registered Member.

Karen still lives in Wolverhampton with husband Vic, son Alex and Mickey the cat. She has recently joined the City of Wolverhampton Choir and she and Vic sing regularly in concerts. She also takes a keen interest in local history and environmental issues and is a dedicated cat lover! Consequently she is a member of the National Trust, World Wildlife Fund, English Heritage, RSPCA and the Cats' Protection League.

If you would like to contribute to the Friends newsletter in any way please contact Frank Lockley on 01902 725520 or email franklockley1@gmail.com

Update from the Archives

The end of the financial year gives us an opportunity to review our visitor statistics over 2012-13. Our number of visitors this year was 7615, which is down on the previous year (8319) and I hope won't be the start of a worrying trend. Certainly things like the snow earlier this year haven't helped, but if you have any suggestions for attracting more visitors, please let us know! Conversely, however, we have had a slight increase in first-time visitors this year, 2000 as opposed to 1977 the previous year. We have also produced more archive and local studies material (3774 items compared to 3612), so the fewer visitors appear to be using more resources, so the service is still keeping busy!
We have had a number of different groups visiting us for tours this year, including the Beckminster Art Group and the Beatties Ex-employees Association. More recently, we have provided the Rococo Room for an interesting collaborative project involving the English Touring Opera working on a piece with local dementia patients. The finished opera was performed at the Grand Theatre in April.

Yet again we held a very successful Local History Symposium at Bantock Park on 23rd February. There was the usual variety of talks, ranging from Nonconformity in Wolverhampton to links between Vienna and 1940s Bilston. I am pleased to confirm that we awarded the bursary, sponsored jointly by the Express and Star and by the Wolverhampton Civic and Historical Society, to Erica Williams, for her very informative talk on the Wednesfield Trapmakers, John Williams & Son. As she is based in Germany, the official presentation has not yet taken place, but is scheduled for July. As we will be commemorating the anniversary of the start of the First World War in 2014, we would like to encourage submissions of papers on this theme for next year's Symposium, although obviously we welcome entries on all sorts of topics!

On that note, our volunteers are beavering away researching various aspects of the First World War in preparation for the anniversary. Some have been going through school log books and finding snippets of information for how the war affected local schools. Others have been researching the lives of local individuals who were involved in the war. Many of these stories have been gathered on the "Wolverhampton's War" blog online at http://wolverhamptonswar.wordpress.com .
The plan is for much of this material to contribute towards a joint exhibition with Bantock House Museum next year, focussing on the home front during this period, including letters from the trenches, diaries and other material. Finally, another group of volunteers have been looking through the local newspapers for First World War stories concerning Wolverhampton. Some of the highlights found so far have been uploaded to WAVE's Flickr site, so watch this space as more will be uploaded in the near future:
http://www.flickr.com/photos/wolverhampton_arts_and_heritage/sets/
Recent acquisitions to the archive service include minutes and membership records of the Wolverhampton Women's Luncheon Club (Accession number 2608) and minutes of the Wolverhampton Branch of the Western Front Association (D-SO-69). As well as school governors' minutes for many of the local schools, among the items that have been recently catalogued is a collection of project material relating to the restoration of the Molineux Hotel Building (D-MOL). While some of this material is confidential and is closed for public access at present, much of this collection is available to highlight this important building project in the City.

By the time you read this, I will be on maternity leave, as I'm sure many of you will be aware. In my absence, our Conservator, Jon Everall, will be acting up in a managerial role, and we will be appointing a part-time temporary Assistant Archivist to cover that aspect of my work.
I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your support, and to wish you well over the forthcoming year.

Heidi McIntosh – City Archivist

Further Events

We have arranged another walk to fill the "August Gap".
Billy Howe has again offered to lead us along some of Wolverhampton's canal system. This time we will be going from Broad Street Basin towards Horsley Fields. To set the scene for the walk Billy will be presenting a slide show on the preceding Saturday.

The slide show will be on Saturday 10th August at the Archives as normal at 11am.
The walk will be on Wednesday 14th August starting at 2pm and we will meet at the Light House cafe in the old Chubb Building.

Bantock House

The Bantock House lunchtime talk on Tuesday 4th June features the early days of the Chubb lock company and ties in with their All Locked Up exhibition.
In addition to the talk there will be a rare opportunity to view the "Aubin Trophy". This unique piece of engineering was designed and built by Wolverhampton lockmaker Charles Aubin for the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace.
It contains more than 3,000 parts in 44 different lock movements, designed to illustrate the art of the locksmith.
The trophy is rarely exhibited and will be on display for this day only.

Open Garden

Anne and Brian Bailey are opening their garden again this year in aid of the National Gardens Scheme.
The first date is Sunday 9th June (1.30 – 5.30), followed by Saturday 13th July (6.30 – 9.30). The garden is at 19 Waterdale, Compton WV3 9DY and admission is £3.

Help Wanted

We are starting a new service for members through the newsletter.
There is a huge amount of knowledge amongst members on all aspects of Wolverhampton's history and researching family history and we aim to use that knowledge to help solve any queries that you may have.

If you have a particular query, contact Frank Lockley (details at the end of the newsletter) and this will be put in the next newsletter. Anyone that can help can send their information to Frank who will pass it on. As all contact will be through Frank no members' contact details will be published.

Our first request for help is from Nigel Brown.
While doing some research Nigel became aware that Wolverhampton was once the base for Italian prisoners of war, possibly in the Pendeford area. He has not been able to find out any more on this so if anyone can help please contact Frank who can pass on the details.

The Map Room

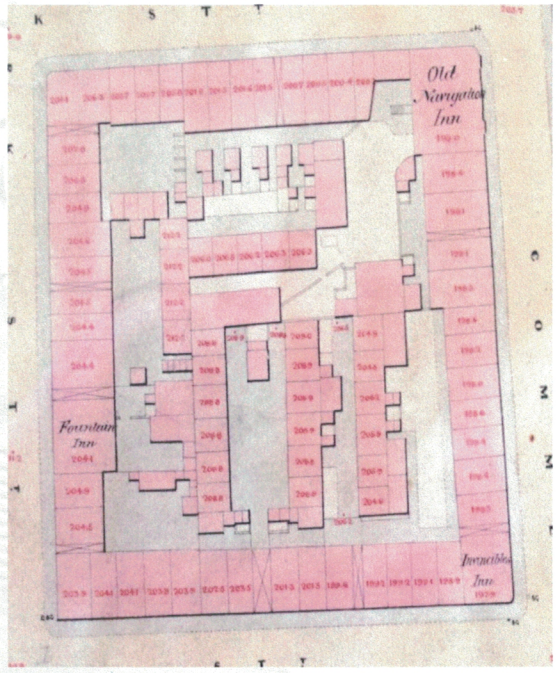
The Map Room is one of the great resources at the Archives yet few are probably aware of the wealth of information that is available there.
With thanks to Alf Russell for his guidance, this is the first of two guides to what you can find there.

The main volume of maps are of course various series of Ordnance Survey maps but there are also a number of fascinating town maps of Wolverhampton through the years.

The town plans of 1871 and 1886 are both at a scale of 1:500 and so are full of details. Individual buildings are shown, though sadly there are no street numbers of houses, and buildings such as pubs are named. Detail is such that even the location of sewer grates, water pumps and lamp posts are shown.

Of equal detail is the "sewer map" of 1852. This was surveyed for the "Health of Towns Act" and shows the proposed layout of the sewer system for the town. Other maps that deal with town improvements include one of 1895 showing proposed improvements to pavements in the town centre indicating the different materials that are to be used for different pavements, Australian hardwood, creosoted deal and granite setts.

There are also a number of maps from the 1920's and 1930's, mainly from the east side of town, showing areas of housing that were due for compulsory purchase orders.



Detail from the 1871 town plan

Bringing us up to date are the Goad maps of the main shopping area of town. Ranging from 1967 to 2000, these detailed plans show the occupants of retail and commercial premises, invaluable if you are looking into the recent development of the town centre.

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