

ABERDEEN CITY AND ABERDEENSHIRE ARCHIVES

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2010 - March 2011

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Introduction and Summary

I am pleased to present the work of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives for 2010-11 in this report. We work for Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to provide a joint archives service for the staff and councillors of both councils, as well as for the communities served by them and other interested parties from further afield.

This work involves collecting, preserving and providing access to records relating to the North East of Scotland. In recent years advances in technology and the growing popularity of local and family history have expanded the audiences that archive services can engage with, and so much of our focus has concentrated on improving access to the collections in our care.

In presenting the work of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives in 2010-11, I therefore see much change and progress being made.

The Service made significant steps in the past year towards improving remote access. It launched its Online Public Access Catalogue to provide potential visitors with the means to identify material relevant to their research prior to their visit without the need for staff assistance. At the same time, digital images of the City burial registers were made available through Deceased Online to allow remote users to access the information within these without having to come into the Archives Searchroom. Both of these initiatives will be developed in the coming year.

Advertising of the Service has also progressed considerably. Alongside the traditional talks that have been given to interested groups, a number of initiatives have been developed to expand its user-base. It has worked in collaboration with Aberdeenshire Council colleagues in the Local Studies Library, Registrars and Arts Education Team to create a highly successful CPD event and resource packs for teachers to provide signposts to local resources that help them in their work. It has developed a number of "Inreach" events in Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to advertise the Corporate aspect of the Service more widely. It has led a new initiative in Ancestral Tourism in the North East of Scotland to attract more business into the economy from the growing popularity of researching family history roots.

These are just a few of the developments that have been made in the past year by the Archives Service, and rather than being an end in themselves I see them as foundations that can be built upon in the coming year.

A major factor in all of the achievements detailed in this report and the future development of Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives is the expertise and enthusiasm of the staff themselves. My sincere thanks goes to them for all of their effort and support in the past year.

Philip Astley
City Archivist

Access and enquiries

A major part of the Archive service is devoted to providing access to the collections in its care. Enquiries and visits come from individuals in the North East of Scotland, from further afield in Scotland, England and abroad, and also from within the councils that pay for the service. Basic statistics for this are provided below.

The majority of enquiries and visits that are received are for family history purposes, but a significant number are also received about other local historical matters.

The most varied enquiries and visits have been received from council departments. In the past year there have been requests to assist in tracing council acts and transactions; tracing deeds of land ownership; providing evidence of property occupation and road adoption; tracing historical boundaries; access to plans of heritage sites for planning applications; and assistance in conservation planning projects.

In each case a preferential service to research information has been provided to the councils that have requested it, and visits have only been arranged once the information has been traced.

Town House Statistics

	2009/10	2010/11	% comparison
Enquiries	221	310	+ 40% (89)
Visits	389	220	- 43% (-169)
Productions	704	1452	+ 106% (748)

*Old Aberdeen House Statistics **

	2009/10	2010/11	% comparison
Enquiries	380	459	+ 20% (79)
Visits	343	380	+ 10% (37)
Productions	2701	2213	-18% (-488)

* of these, the following statistics regarding Aberdeenshire Council collections were gathered:

Aberdeenshire

	2009/10	2010/11	% comparison
Enquiries	223	289	+ 29% (66)
Productions	1050	954	- 9% (-96)

Total Statistics (TH + OAH)

	2009/10	2010/11	% comparison
Enquiries	601	769	+ 28% (168)
Visits	732	600	- 18% (-132)
Productions	3405	3665	+ 7% (260)

Remote Access

The Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for the service was launched in May 2010 and at 5 May 2011 is currently populated with 164 collections containing 28111 individual entries. The OPAC has given new impetus to the cataloguing of the service which has led to a more formal system of reporting progress in order to maintain future momentum with this function.

At the same time as the OPAC launch Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives launched its first major digital resource. Digital images of the City burial registers under the control of the organisation, were made available on the pay-per-view website Deceased Online with a view to reducing access to the original volumes and generating revenue that can be set aside for necessary conservation work to them.

In November 2010 the National Archives of Scotland (now the National Records of Scotland) launched its digital Kirk Session resource. This resource is also available at participating archives across the country that have Kirk session records under its Charge of Superintendence scheme. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives holds records of the Aberdeen City Churches under this scheme, and it was therefore fitting that the launch took place in Aberdeen before moving to other repositories.

The Kirk Session resource has been incredibly popular in both search rooms, providing access to digital versions of Kirk Session records around Scotland, not just City church records, and has generated a new proposal to digitise the Poor Relief records held by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives. A report has been circulated to stakeholder organisations (Aberdeenshire Council, Moray Council and the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society) to start negotiations.

The Service has also been promoting itself remotely through its online presence on the internet. So far this includes its website at www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/archives and its Facebook site at www.facebook.com/aberdeencityandshirearchives that at the time of writing has 244 followers.

These have been used primarily to promote the collections and activities of the Service, but have also generated considerable interest for the digital resources that have been made available. In particular, the work of one of our volunteers on a transcription of the Register of Militia Relief Certificates was picked up and promoted further by the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society.

Preservation and Conservation

The Service has a small budget for conservation projects involving items in need of repair. In 2010/11 6 items from Aberdeenshire Council's collections were sent for conservation, including Stonehaven's Fundamental Charter of 1624, Smeaton's 1779 plan of Banff Harbour, and a plan of the lands of Boddam dated to 1813.

The City conservation budget was used on packaging and transport for the Burial Register digitisation project. Providing digital access will reduce the long-term usage and damage to the volumes. It is expected that the revenue produced from remote access through Deceased Online will be put into future conservation work on these volumes.

Archive storage

The Scottish Council on Archives has recently provided funding for Local Authority Archive services to undertake National Preservation Office Assessments to ascertain the condition of collections at local level. The report for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives was produced in January 2010 and found that whilst the majority of the collections are in a low to medium priority preservation band (96.33%), the environmental conditions need to be improved to bring them into line with BS5454 standards.

The report states "There are only limited improvements that can be made to the environmental conditions of the collection in its current locations. The long term goal should be to move the collection to a purpose built repository with proper environmental control systems."

The City Archivist is therefore exploring options and partnerships for achieving this.

Management of archives

Cataloguing

The launch of the OPAC in May was one part of a larger strategy to widen access to the collections held by Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives. Cataloguing is another key part of that strategy which is fundamental for allowing access to the collections as well as being a key tool for managing them. It was therefore important for the Service to maintain momentum with cataloguing to ensure that the OPAC continues to be populated with collection lists.

Throughout 2010/11 the OPAC had 164 collections added to it with no formal strategy to guide what was to be added. At the end of the financial year, this was addressed by drawing up lists of collections for cataloguing and approving a strategy that involved the assignment of set numbers of collections for cataloguing to staff in each financial year and requiring progress reports from them on a quarterly basis.

New Deposits (Accessioning)

The Archive service collects records from a variety of sources. The majority of new deposits come from departments in Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council, but a number also come from external sources such as organisations and private individuals.

Coming to the end of the period 2010/11, closer working with Aberdeenshire Council's Records Manager resulted in a more formal procedure for the transfer of records being drawn up, and at the point of writing is awaiting final approval from the Council's Records Management Group.

Notable deposits for the year 2010/11 include:

- Aberdeen Greyhound Stadium Materials, 1964-66
- Administrative Records for the Freedom of the City of Aberdeen, 1949-2004
- A large collection of material from Robert Gordon's College relating to the Aberdeen Female Orphanage, Aberdeen Endowment's Trust etc.
- Building Plans of the Albert Hall and Victoria Hall in Ballater, 1874, 1894
- A large accession of photographs, school publications and administrative records of Mackie Academy, 1891-c. 2000
- South Aberdeenshire Registers of Planning Applications 1957-1955

Statistics for new deposits are as follows:

Authority *	2009/10	2010/11
Aberdeenshire	77	58
Aberdeen City	19	23
Moray	2	0
GVJB	2	2
Total	100	83

* This will not always be the depositor, so these figures represent a combination of deposits from external sources and council departments. It is common for external organisations and private individuals to gift collections to the Service, in which case the authority covering the area that the records relate to will be designated as the owner.

Outreach and Promotion

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives continued its highly active promotion of the service in 2010/11 with a number of activities.

Ancestral Tourism

The service played a major role in the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Ancestral Resources Partnership, an affiliation set up to publicise genealogical resources in the North East to tourists, helping to attract them to the area for the benefit of the local economy. The group is chaired by the Archive service, and has been involved in numerous events in the area, including a Family History Fair at Crathes Castle; a Family and Local history Fair at the Town House, Aberdeen; Doors Open Day at Old Aberdeen House; and a Family History Fair at Montrose. A booklet, "Routes to Your North East Roots" and a website aimed at tourists has now been developed. (<http://www.northeastscotlandroots.com/>)

Following an ERDF award, a facilitated workshop for Tourism providers (e.g. accommodation providers, tour guides and other interested parties from the sector) will be run to foster collaborative working.

Promotional Events

Staff attended 10 events 6 of which promoted the records of both Councils. The majority of these were at Family History Fair events that were connected with the Aberdeen and North East Ancestral Tourism Partnership.

Other notable events included the launch of the digital Kirk Session records resource at Union Square in Aberdeen (see **Access and Enquiries** for more details); the annual display of records relating to medicine for students undertaking the History of Medicine Course at Aberdeen University; and Old Aberdeen House's participation in Doors Open Day 2010 which was used remind the public of its various uses - as a storage facility, public search room and its previous function as Old Aberdeen School.

Talks

Staff also gave 9 talks publicising the service in the North East, 5 to City groups and 4 to Aberdeenshire groups. These were on topics as diverse as "Changing Landmarks in Aberdeen", and introducing the children of Ordiquhill Primary School to the archives of the school. The talks were delivered to a wide range of groups including the NHS Retirement Fellowship, the Banff Preservation and Heritage Society and Ordiquhill Primary School.

Inreach

As well as promoting the public service within the wider community of the North East, staff have also been active in promoting the corporate side of its service. The Archives Service is more than just a basic storage service for council records that have been selected for permanent preservation. In particular, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives also provides a research and retrieval service using the records in its care for council

departments to assist their business. It is therefore important to promote resource within Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council

In 2010 several successful 'pilot' events were run to promote the Archives Service. These involved drop-in days to the Charter Room for staff at the Town House in Aberdeen, and visits by the Archive Service to Woodhill House and Gordon House. These were very successful in generating interest and providing staff with a contact for future requests for assistance or transferring records.

It is intended that a more formal Inreach programme will be run in the next financial year combined with the production of a Corporate leaflet to promote the service to more remote areas of the Councils that might not be covered by the main events.

Education

One of the more diverse uses of Archives by Council departments relates to education. Archives are now being used for far more than just the teaching of history as teachers are being encouraged by the Curriculum for Excellence to be more creative in the way that they deliver lessons.

In response to this, the Archives Service has been heavily involved in a partnership with Aberdeenshire Council's Registrars, Local Studies Librarian, Arts Education Officer (Creative Links) and the Head of Social Studies Faculty at Ellon Academy to promote heritage resources in Aberdeenshire Council's schools.

So far this has resulted in a highly successful CPD event that was run at Crathes Castle, and development work being undertaken with HLF money on 3 "topic packs" for teachers combining archives, registrars and local studies resources.

Appendix

Comments about Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives

From the Comments Book

“Excellent Resources. Very grateful for staff’s help.”

“Many thanks to staff. Nothing too much trouble!”

“Extremely interesting & very informative. The Archives Staff so helpful & knowledgeable.”

“Fascinating – definitely 11/10”

By email

“Many thanks for all the running about to dig out the Russell archives. There was useful information and the photographs were good to see.”

“I am sure you must have spent more than 15 minutes on this and I appreciate all that you have done.”

“Thank you very much for this information. It's a great service you offer.”

By letter

“Thank you for that extremely interesting talk at our AGM. I was thoroughly impressed by what a range of ... materials you touched on, and how clearly you drew out a particular point of interest in each document...It is delightful to think that those in charge of our archives don't just hoard bits of paper, but actually know the archive intimately, and think about what the documents mean. Any of us with questions will come to you with real confidence as a friendly expert.”

"The time you dedicated to us and the experience and enthusiasm of your team...was exceptional...You should be very proud of what you have achieved ... and we trust that future generations will also appreciate the care and attention that has gone into preserving the historical record in its various formats."

“I had my first experience this afternoon of using the Aberdeen City Archives service, at the Dunbar Street department. My own background is as a Librarian who, in my last post before retirement, managed a rare book service which also handled manuscripts. I have also used many libraries and archives as part of my own research. Over the years I have found many helpful services but today's experience outshone them all. It is true that researchers have all gained enormously from the online resources which are becoming increasingly available, but nothing can replace the sort of professional help I received today”.