

# Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire

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# A R C H I V E S

## BIENNIAL REPORT

April 2018 - March 2020



*Spanish Flu exhibition delivered in partnership with Aberdeen City Libraries, Live Life Aberdeenshire and the Florence Nightingale Museum*

## Introduction

The last two years have been ones of positive transition and growth for Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire Archives. The restructuring that took place under Aberdeen City Council's Target Operating Model saw the service move from its former home in Legal & Democratic Services to a logical 'cluster' alongside Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, part of the wider 'City Growth' service, which is already proving to be a catalyst for improved collaboration.

Among the main achievements during this period are:

- The conclusion of the Leverhulme funded "Law in the Aberdeen Council Registers, 1398-1511" project with the University of Aberdeen.
- £500,000 awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the German Research Foundation for researchers at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Mainz to compare the records of Augsburg with the early records of Aberdeen which are held by the Archive at the Town House.
- Annual exhibitions for the Granite Noir festival which have generated significant media interest.
- A successful application for the "Archives Revealed" funding stream to catalogue the records of Aberdeen Harbour Board which were transferred to the Archive in December 2019.
- Celebration of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the "Stocket Charter" granted by Robert the Bruce in December 1319

The considerable achievements and activities of the last two years are even more impressive as they took place during a period of staff transition following the departure of two long-serving team members. With new staff come fresh ideas and new energy which will be vital for the continuing positive development of the Archive service in the years ahead.

Phil Astley  
City Archivist

## 2018 - 2020 in numbers



86,711

*entries in the cataloguing database by April 2020*



536

*visitors at Old Aberdeen House*



£39,145

*grant received from the Archives Revealed programme*



1,160

*enquiries responded to by the team*



6,531

*followers on Facebook by April 2020*



315

*new collections received*



19

*school and University group visits hosted*



5,237

*Register entries indexed by volunteer Sandy Weir*



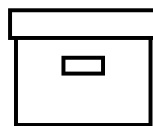
17,555

*visits to our website's homepage*



63,168

*items searchable in the online catalogue by April 2020*



5,319

*items produced at Old Aberdeen House*



2,342

*followers on Twitter by April 2020*



244,016

*image views of our records on Ancestry.co.uk in 2019*



10,334

*people attended an Archives talk, visit, exhibition or event*



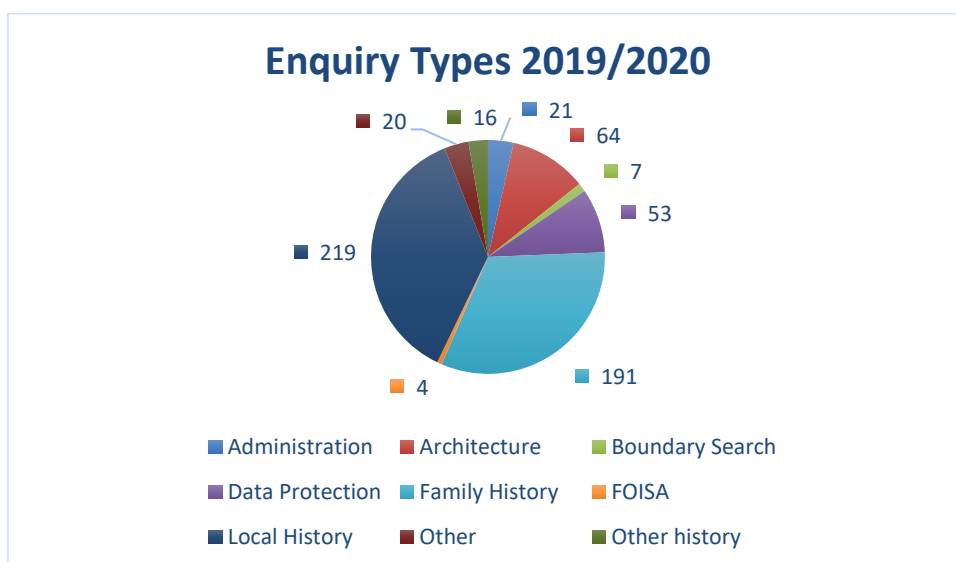
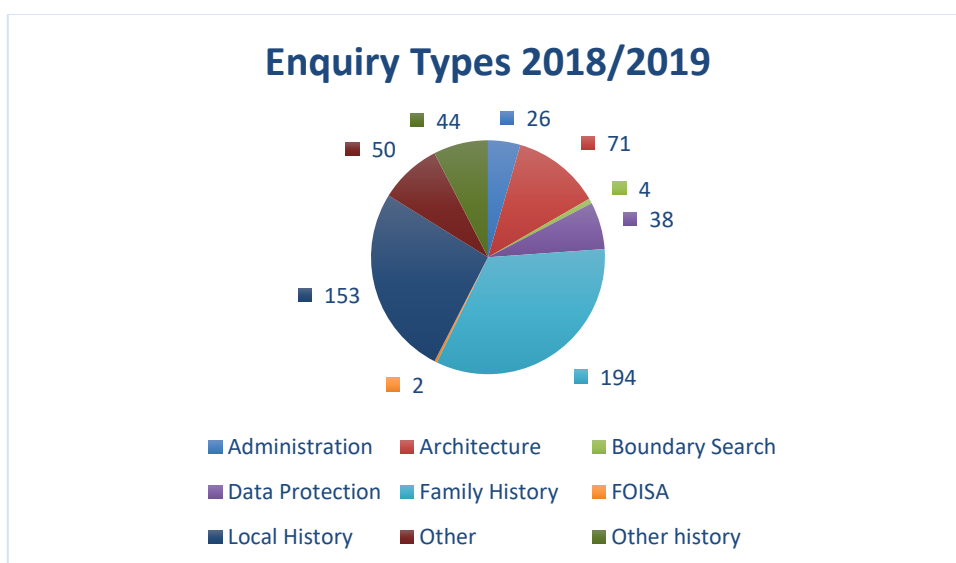
6000

*Aberdeen Harbour Board photos listed by volunteers*

## Access and Enquiries

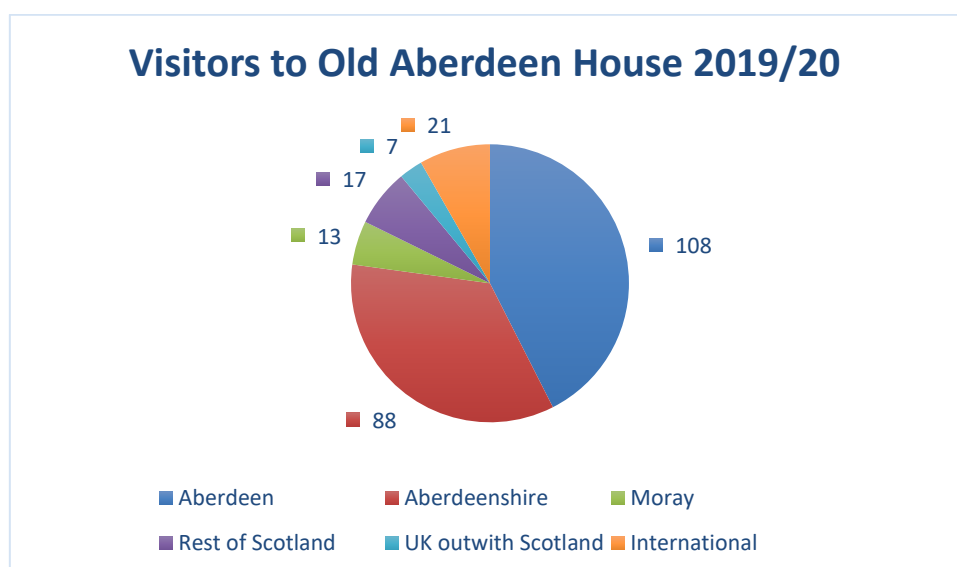
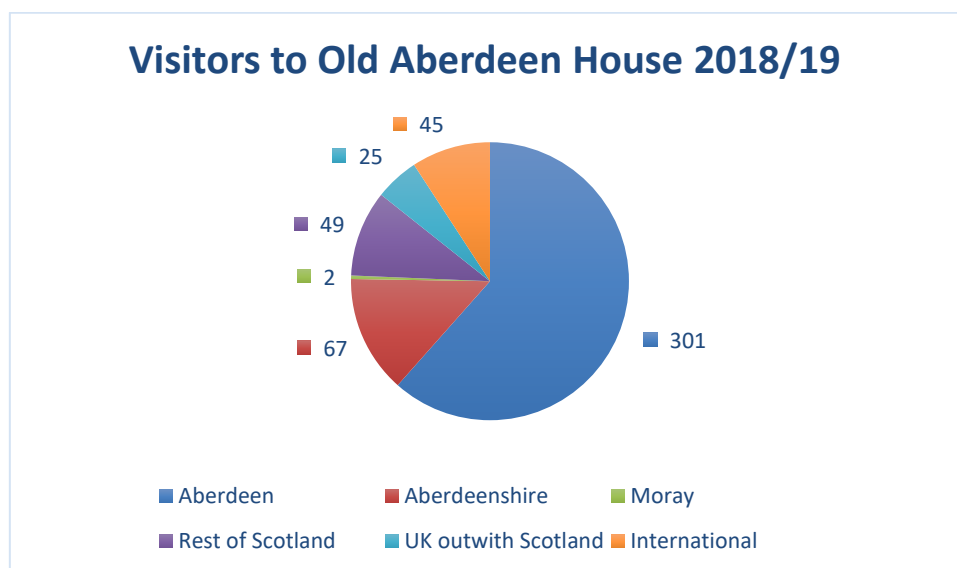
Enquiries and visits to access archive items come from individuals in the North East of Scotland, from further afield in Scotland, England and abroad, and also from within the two councils that fund the service.

The number of enquiries has remained consistent with previous years (see appendix for full details). The number of visitors continues to trend downwards: this may in part be explained by the increased availability of digitised material online through our partnership with Ancestry. Additionally, new Data Protection legislation, which came in in 2018, has reduced the amount of access we can provide to school records, one of our most popular collections. In 2019/20, the service had to operate reduced hours at both sites due to a shortage of staff, which will also have had an impact on visitor numbers.



Family history continues to be a significant source of to the service, but this has reduced proportionately since the last biennial report, and in 2019/20 was overtaken by local history enquiries. This may in some cases be related to new data protection legislation. The increase in local history and architectural enquiries (the latter mainly relate to people research the history of their house or architectural students researching a particular building) was significant across this period.

Enquiries from staff demonstrate an ongoing relevance of the archive records to both local authorities. There were 177 staff queries last year. The service has continued to contribute to both Councils' responses to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, providing advice to colleagues and conducting research in records relating to past practices and the care of specific individuals.



Aberdeen remains the highest source of visitors to the search rooms, although the downward trend noted in the last biennial report has continued. In contrast, the number travelling from Aberdeenshire to access the records has continued to increase. There has been an increase in International visitors, and a small decrease in visitors from the rest of the UK.

## Remote Access

The service maintains various sources of information on the internet to inform potential researchers about what is held in the collections, ranging from general information about collections on the website [www.aberdeency.gov.uk/archives](http://www.aberdeency.gov.uk/archives), to itemised lists available at the Online Public Access Catalogue at [www.aberdeency.gov.uk/archivecatalogue](http://www.aberdeency.gov.uk/archivecatalogue).

### *Website and Social Media*

The Archive Service's online presence consists of its [website](#), [Facebook site](#), and [Twitter site](#).

Hits / Followers	2018/19	2019/20	Increase / Decrease
Website	9154	8401	-753
Facebook	5798	6531	+733
Twitter	2211	2342	+131

### *Website highlights*

Areas of the website have been streamlined and shortened over the past two years, with new guides to the City Poor Relief records added and PDF versions of catalogues in the OPAC removed. The following transcriptions or indexes were added to the website in 2018/19 and 2019/20:

- Grampian Police Personnel Register indexes (Banffshire, Nairnshire, Elginshire, Elgin Burgh).
- Grampian Police Register of Returned Convicts.
- Grampian Police Records of prisoners released from Perth Prison.
- Banff Town Council Police Court Complaints.
- Banff Burgh Subscriptions for Highland Relief.
- Inverurie Assessment Roll.
- Inverbervie Cess Book.
- Peterhead Parish Home post mortems.
- Gardenstown Fishermen petition.

These are available via <https://www.aberdeency.gov.uk/services/libraries-and-archives/aberdeen-city-and-aberdeenshire-archives/catalogues-and-indexes>

We have also launched a couple of blogs which will highlight items and stories from our collections : <https://aberdeenarchives.blogspot.com/> and <https://criminalportraits.blogspot.com/> (the latter focuses on mugshots in the Grampian Police collections). The Documents of the Month and Home Front exhibition pages from our old website have been repurposed for this blog, and additional content will be added on a regular basis.

### *Remote access projects*

Two projects to promote remote access to collections and encourage engagement with local community groups have continued in the last two years.

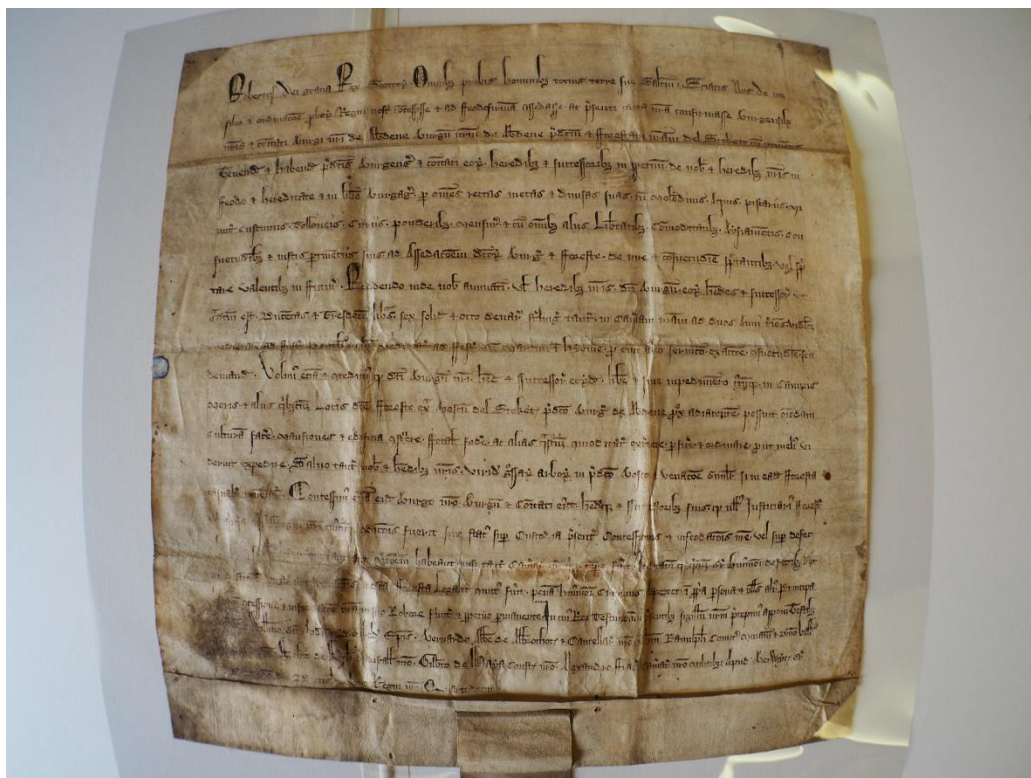
- *Ancestry.co.uk*: Under a contract with Ancestry.co.uk, our pre-1975 electoral registers were scanned and made available online at the end of 2018. This partnership is providing a valuable income stream for the service and widening access to this important series of records. During 2019, the Ancestry website recorded over 244,000 image views of these records. Plans are progressing to make burial registers, poor relief and school admission registers available in a similar way.



- *Assessed Tax Roll Transcription:* The pilot project with the Cromar History Group to transcribe and analyse entries in the Aberdeen County Assessed Records of 1799-1832 for the Tarland area has continued, with transcriptions for the three parishes for 1811/12 – 1814/15 now complete.

## Preservation and Conservation

Conservation was completed on 13 items between 2018-20 by professional conservator Emma Fraser and Highland Life’s Conservation Studio. This has included 10 medium priority items for the Aberdeen County Assessed Tax conservation project, and the Bruce Charter, which was 700 years old in 2019. The charter was removed from its unsuitable perspex enclosure, cleaned, relaxed by humidification, dried under tension and rehoused in a custom made enclosure which is suitable for displaying the charter. Small tears in the charter were also repaired with Japanese paper.



*The Stocket Charter, which celebrated its 700<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2019*

Reference	Title
AS/Acom/14	10 volumes of Assessed Tax volumes (various dates 1800-1832)
ED/GR6S/B53/3/1 ED/GR6S/B54/2/2	2 School Admission Registers for the Peterhead area
CA/3/A1/11	Bruce Charter

## Management of Archives

### *Cataloguing*

Catalogues are created on our cataloguing database CALM, and in most cases made available to the public to view in the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) (the exceptions are catalogue entries which contain personal information about living individuals, which cannot be made publicly accessible).

Over the past two years both branches have developed Cataloguing Plans to tackle our cataloguing backlog, which has included checking draft catalogues and adding paper lists into CALM. Significant progress has been made in widening the collections in the catalogue and

OPAC: by the end of April 2020 655 collections and 63168 individual descriptions were now in the OPAC (at the end of April 2018 this was 473 collections and 50083 descriptions). 2044 individual records were added to the cataloguing database in 2018/19, and 6460 in the course of 2019/20.

Notable collections added to the OPAC in 2018/19 and 2019/20 include:

Reference	Title
AS/Kber	Inverbervie Burgh collection (1708–1975)
AS/Bbnf	Additions to Banff Burgh collection, including receipts, charters, papers of Police Commissioners, Harbour Trust, Duff House Trust.
DD392	Royal Northern Agricultural Society (1843 – 1986)
DD527	Client Records of W.J.C. Reed & Co, solicitors, Laurencekirk: includes records of Laurencekirk Burgh, Laurencekirk District Nursing Association, Mearns-shire Farmer Society, Howe of the Mearns Horse Breeding Association, Laurencekirk Lighting Society Limited & Kincardineshire Auction Mart
DD601	Kincardineshire Farmers Club (1813–1960)
DD641	Berry Family Papers (1810 – 1960)
DD642	James Hendry Papers (1880 – 1935)
DD1059	Turriff Mutual Improvement Association - Minute Books (1857 - 1932)
DD1066	North Eastern Farmers/ North Eastern Agricultural Co-Operative Society (1856 – 2001)
DD1066A	Northern Agricultural and Lime Co. Ltd. and predecessors (1836 – 1971)
DD1096	Garioch Farmers Club Minutes (1808–1949)
DD1173	Banff County Bursary Fund
DD1402	Records of the Society of Solicitors and Procurators of Kincardineshire (1865 – 1901)
DD1460	Frasers of Castle Fraser Papers and Auchmedden Estate Papers (17th & 18th centuries)
DD2878	Banff Literary Society (1810 – 1835)
DD2879	Banffshire Society of Solicitors (1825–1996)
DD2880	Banff Incorporation of Shoemakers (1693 – 1877)
DM	Duncan and Munro, architects, Turriff (1865 – 1975)
ER	Electoral Rolls
GBM	George Bennett Mitchell and Son, architects (1900 – 1948)
PD14	Methodist Churches from the North of Scotland Mission Circuit (additional)
PD26	Medical Officer of Health reports (1914–1972)
PD36	Proctor's Orphanage, Skene (1888–1996)
PD41	Campfield Smiddy (1909 – 1975)
PD53	North East of Scotland Federation of Townswomen's Guilds (1936 – 1995)
PD64	Loyal Order of Ancient Shepherds Friendly Society: Aberdeen District (1890 - 1996)
VR	Valuation Rolls

A number of duplicate catalogue entries have also been deleted in the past two years, ensuring the catalogue is accurate and up-to-date.

#### *New Accessions*

180 new accessions were received of material of varying sizes between 2018 and 2019 and 135 between 2019 and 2020. The majority of our material is received from both Aberdeen City



Council and Aberdeenshire Council, alongside some donations from external depositors. Notable accessions for 2018/19 & 2019/20 include:

Title	Date
Papers of Daisy Jessiman-Gordon, teacher, artist and councillor	early – mid 20 <sup>th</sup> century
Papers of Robert F. Mackenzie, teacher and educationalist	1930s – 1980s
Papers of Sapper Robert Stephen	1916 - 1919
Sunnyside Ladies Bowling Club	1938 - 2010
Friends of Aberdeen International Youth Festival	1980 – 2018
Richard Irvin & Sons Limited, trawler owners and fish salesmen	late 19 <sup>th</sup> – early 21 <sup>st</sup> century
Kincorth Academy additional records	1971 - 2018
Fraserburgh Academy additional records	1890s – 1990s
North of Scotland Methodist Mission Circuit (additional records)	1823 – 2003
Aberdeen Harbour Board	1810 - 1960

### *Aberdeen Harbour Board Project*



In 2019 the Archive made a successful application to the UK National Archives' Archives Revealed programme, and received a grant of £39,145 to fund cataloguing work on the Aberdeen Harbour Board collection, alongside a contribution from the Harbour Board. The funding enabled us to hire a Project Archivist to complete the listing of the collection to archival standards in our catalogue, which will make the Harbour Board's records publicly accessible for the first time. The grant will also cover the archival-grade packaging required to rehouse the collection, and outreach work in relation to the collection.

The collection was moved to Old Aberdeen House in November 2019 and Project Archivist Mollie Horne started in post in December. The list will ultimately be available through the OPAC, and Mollie is writing a blog about her work on the project at <https://aberdeenhharbourboardarchive.blogspot.com/>.

### **Outreach and Promotion**

The Archive Service has continued its active outreach programme with a total of 62 over the period 2018-20 (37 events 2018/19 and 25 in 2019/20).

#### *Events & Exhibitions*

The archives service took part in the annual Granite Noir festival in 2019 and 2010: our contribution in 2019 comprised exhibitions of criminal mugshots at the Central Library and Lemon Tree, and a talk on Crime in the Archives. In 2020 we ran exhibitions focused on Women and Crime at the Music Hall and Lemon Tree, and with a talk at the Music Hall. In both years the exhibitions garnered significant media interest, notably with a feature with Mary Beard for BBC Front Row Late.



*Our appearance on Front Row Late with Mary Beard*

In collaboration with colleagues in City and Shire Local Studies, we participated in a project led by the Florence Nightingale Museum to mark the centenary of the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918/19. This involved an exhibition at Banff Academy, Woodhill House and Aberdeen Central Library focused on the pandemic and its impact in the local area.

We also participated in a Scottish Council on Archive's Community Archives event, the annual Doors Open Day, and a civic reception to mark Woodside Congregational Church's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

#### *Talks and Visits*

We have delivered a range of talks and tours promoting the collections to community groups, staff, Councillors, Civic visitors, and as part of events programmes for other organisations, notably the Maritime Museum's lunch time talks series. To mark the 700<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Bruce Charter, the charter was rehoused by conservator Emma Fraser and a well-attended talk was held at the Cowdray Hall.

The talks have covered a range of topics as diverse as the aftermath of the WW1 in the North East to the history of the Fife Arms hotel in Braemar. Visits hosted included community groups facilitated by Scotland's Urban Past and the "Ride with Norman Reedus" team for an AMC television programme.

#### ***Burgh Records Project***

Since 2012, the Archive service has been involved in several research projects with colleagues at the University of Aberdeen which have focussed on understanding the content of and expanding access to our UNESCO-recognised Council Registers which span the period 1398-1511. The most recent project, 'Law in the Aberdeen Council Registers', started in 2016 and concluded in 2019. The principle output was a digital transcription of all eight volumes, which is available here: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/projects/aberdeen-registers-online-213.php>. The end of the project was marked by a well attended event, "New Light on Medieval Aberdeen" held at the Town House in June 2019.

Law in the Aberdeen Council Registers was made possible by an award of £235,000 from the Leverhulme Trust. An additional sum of £30,000 was provided by Aberdeen City Council from the Bridges Trust Fund, while Chivas Brothers Ltd., made a donation of £15,000 following the

discovery in Council Register 8 of the earliest documented reference to a still for the production of *aqua vite* in 1505.

The success of the project has been the catalyst for further research and activities. These include 'Playing in the Archives' a six-month project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to explore how stories that appear in the medieval registers could be used as the basis for the narrative of a computer game, a prototype of which was one of the main outputs of the project.

'Songs of Medieval Aberdeen' also used stories found within the pages of the Council Registers as inspiration. Dr. Claire Hawes, one of the Research Assistants on the 'Law in the Aberdeen Council Registers' project received a Creative Funding award from Aberdeen City Council to enable her and her fellow musicians, Paddy Buchanan and Davy Cattanach, to compose traditional-style songs. These have been performed at several events, including one held in March 2020 at the Scottish Parliament.

In December 2019, £500,000 was awarded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the German Research Foundation for researchers at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Mainz to compare the records of Augsburg with the early records of Aberdeen. This three-year project will further enhance understanding of the records held by the Archive and examine the place of these records in a wider European context.

### *Education*

The service has been very active with its educational outreach over the past 2 years, with 19 sessions being delivered to school and university classes. These include:

- Participated in the HLF funded Scottish Council on Archives' Theatre of Remembrance project with pupils from Mackie Academy. The project used material from the archives to create dramatic performances, bringing to life the voices and stories of individuals and their communities during the First World War.



*Pupils at Mackie Academy taking part in the Theatre of Remembrance project*

- We also delivered a session to Dunnottar School in Stonehaven on their school in the Victorian era, and hosted visits to the archive by Walker Road, Woodside, Sunnybank and St Peter's schools.
- Over the past two years we have welcomed history classes from the University of Aberdeen and MLitt Students from the Elphinstone Institute to the archives. The classes are shown



displays of archival material relating to their studies and staff outline the wealth of records available to assist them in their research.

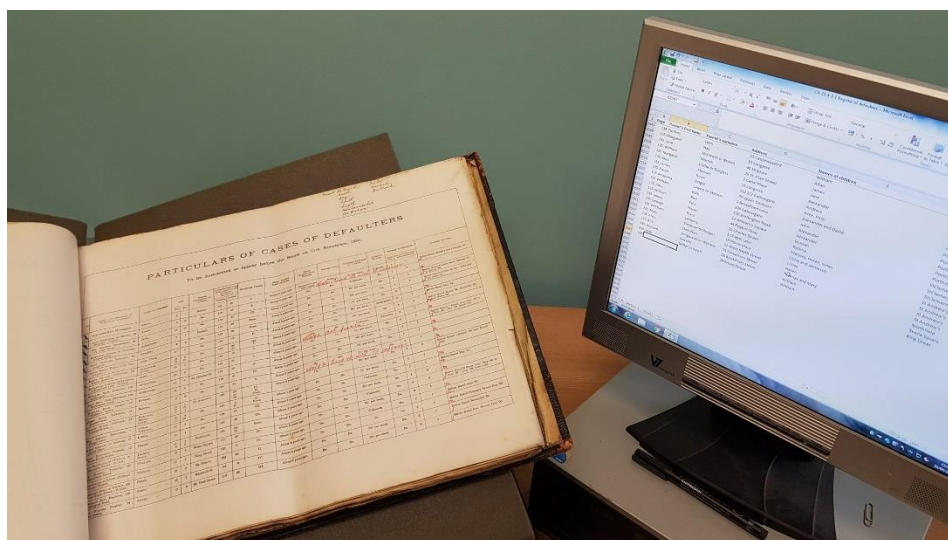
- Archive staff have also recorded pieces for Aberdeen University's online Scottish Heritage course for its Archive and Sources module.
- In February 2020 we hosted a joint event for PhD students with the Special Collections Centre at the University of Aberdeen.

### *Ancestral Tourism*

- The Archive service continues to play a coordinating role for the Aberdeen & North East Scotland Ancestral Tourism Partnership.
- A family and local history fair was held at the Town House in September 2018 to coincide with Doors Open Day.
- Marketing of the Partnership continues through the website [www.northeastscotlandroots.com](http://www.northeastscotlandroots.com) A seventh edition of the partnership's popular publication, "Routes to Your North East Roots" is planned.

### *Careers & Volunteering*

For many years the service has provided volunteers of many ages and backgrounds an opportunity to work in depth with the collections - perhaps to learn more about the history of an area, to experience something different, or to make a contribution to the community. For some the experience they gain leads to a career in archives or a related heritage or information profession: one of our volunteers has completed an archive administration course in 2018/2019 after her work with us and has now obtained a professional post in the sector. The contribution they have made to the service is invaluable.



*5,237 entries from the Aberdeen School Board Register of Defaulters have been indexed by volunteer Sandy Weir over the past two years*

In the past 2 years 14 people have volunteered with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Archives: 6 adults; 5 university students; and 3 school students. The amount of work over the past 2 years is estimated at 2512 hours, and included accessioning, listing collections, producing public displays, transcribing items, digitisation and preservation packaging.

### ***Volunteering highlights***

- In 2019/20 we hosted a second pupil from Ellon Academy on a work-related learning placement. She undertook a range of tasks, including research, cataloguing, indexing and assisting with the Granite Noir exhibition. She also transferred all the content from the old Document of the Month webpages onto a new archives blog.

- The work of our longest standing volunteers' commitment to the service is worthy of special mention. Sandy Weir, Sandy Riddell and Christina Leech have collectively contributed 36 years' work to the archive, having started volunteering with the archive in 2006, 2008 and 2010 respectively.

## Appendix: Statistics

### Town House (TH) Statistics

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	+/- from 2017/18	2019/20	+/- from 2018/19
<b>Enquiries</b>	266	200	121	-79	144	+23
<b>Visits</b>	321	256	207 (to Dec)	-49		
<b>Productions of items to readers</b>	3281	3538	674 (to Dec)	-2864		

### Old Aberdeen House \* (OAH) Statistics

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	+/- from 2017/18	2019/20	+/- from 2018/19
<b>Enquiries</b>	495	451	447	-4	444	-3
<b>Visits</b>	352	317	282	-35	254	-28
<b>Productions of items to readers</b>	3398	2777	3056	+279	2263	-793

\* Aberdeenshire Council statistics at Old Aberdeen House are as follows:

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	+/- from 2017/18	2019/20	+/- from 2018/19
<b>Enquiries</b>	304	337	249	- 88	203	-46
<b>Productions of items to readers</b>	1001	841	936	+95	1111	+175

### Total Statistics for TH and OAH

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	+/- from 2017/18	2019/20	+/- from 2018/19
<b>Enquiries</b>	761	645	568	-77	592	+24
<b>Visits</b>	673	573	489 (TH to Dec only)		254 (OAH only)	
<b>Productions of items to readers</b>	6679	6315	3735 (TH to Dec only)		2263 (OAH only)	

### Cataloguing

	2018/19	+/-	2019/20	+/-
Total CALM Entries	80251	+ 2044	86711	+ 6460
Entries viewable in the OPAC (at 07/05/2020)	57307	+ 7224	63168	+ 5861

### New accessions

Authority Area	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Aberdeen City	32	14	24	15
Aberdeenshire	67	83	155	120
Grampian Valuation Joint Board	1	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>135</b>

*Note: these figures include Aberdeenshire Council agendas and papers received, but not Aberdeen City. As of the end of 2019, these Aberdeenshire agendas have been processed on a monthly basis, rather than individually.*

#### Searchroom visitors

Year	Aberdeen		Aberdeenshire		Moray		Rest of Scotland		UK outwith Scotland		International	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
2016/17	491	72.9%	68	10.1%	3	0.4%	49	7.3%	35	5.2%	27	4%
2017/18	360	62.8%	107	18.7%	1	0.2%	39	6.8%	40	7.0%	26	4.5%
2018/19	301	61.6%	67	13.7%	2	0.6%	49	10.0%	25	5.1%	45	9.2%
2019/20	108	42.5%	88	34.6%	13	5.1%	17	6.7%	7	2.8%	21	8.3%

#### Enquiries

Type of Enquiry	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20	
Administrative	32	5.1%	26	4.5%	13	2.7%
Architecture	48	7.7%	71	12.2%	57	11.9%
Boundary Search	6	1.0%	4	0.7%	3	0.6%
Data Protection	37	5.9%	38	6.5%	50	10.5%
Family History	223	35.7%	194	33.3%	146	30.5%
FOISA	2	0.3%	2	0.3%	4	0.8%
Local History	160	25.6%	153	26.3%	171	35.8%
Other	68	10.9%	50	8.6%	18	3.8%
Other history	48	7.7%	44	7.6%	16	3.3%