

Archive helps tourism in Blackpool

The National Fairground Archive, based at the University of Sheffield library, has been instrumental in an ongoing scheme to promote tourism in Blackpool, helping to arrange a series of imaginative events celebrating the town's entertainment history.

Admission All Classes – run by The National Fairground Archive, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Blackpool Council and Visit Blackpool – was created in response to decreasing visitor numbers in the famous resort, which has an estimated 127,000 theatre seats to fill each week (up to 23,000 a day).

Linked in to a wider drive to revitalise Blackpool's tourist trade, the scheme decided to bring the spotlight back on to the town's cultural quarter by bringing something new to its programme of entertainments. Aptly, the events that followed in 2007 and 2008 celebrated the town's rich history of fairground, music hall, circus and sea-side entertainments. Each proved very successful, attracting an average audience of 1000, and additional heritage tours and talks have also seen a good uptake with residents and visitors alike.

The National Fairground Archive

All the Admission All Classes events drew heavily on The National Fairground Archive, which is dedicated to bringing material related to fairs and fairground entertainment in Britain back to life in a re-imagined, modern context.

As the archive director, Professor Vanessa Toulmin, explained, "original documents about fairground culture are well preserved and used to inspire a wider audience outside of the box." The archive is highly experienced at bringing the rich resources of the archive to the public, through performance, exhibitions of posters and handbills, or the integration of archived material into digital resources.

Admission All Classes podcasts

One of the most popular resources still available from the Admission All Classes project is the guided walk – Blackpool Palaces of Delight – which is available to [download as a podcast](#). It guides the listener around a number of Blackpool's historical attractions, detailing architectural features and other fascinating information about their past usage.

The guide also features anecdotes from historians and local characters who add their knowledge and humour to the mix. Acclaimed actress Prunella Scales also contributes, as she and her husband, Timothy West, have long been fans of the acclaimed theatre designer Frank Matcham, who conceived the town's impressive Grand Theatre.

"That is the genius of Matcham," says Scales in the podcast. "To adapt huge spaces to quite intimate performance". Timothy West also contributes, explaining how the Grand's impressive sense of opulence makes it one of his favourite theatres.

Promising web statistics

Blackpool Palaces of Delight is one of eight podcasts that the Fairground Archive has produced, which have already been downloaded more than 15,000 times. As a result of the scheme the archive's web statistics have also improved, now regularly achieving between 25,000-45,000 unique hits per month.

Vannessa Toulmin is particularly pleased by the scheme's progress, and in keeping with an old showman saying, said: "it's not the flash that gets the cash; it's the show that gets the dough!" Following on from the events the Ida Barr Variety Parade will be held at the Sheffield Lyceum in May 2009, the proceeds of which will be put towards a range of scholarships.

For more detailed information on the Admission All Classes scheme please visit the case study section on the [MLA research website](#).