SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE, LOWESTOFT
The Library, Clapham Road, Lowestoft

ARCHON number: 175

Visited: 23/11/2011      By: AR & LH

Staff or officers met during visit:

Date of subscription to TNA Standard: 1992

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CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Suffolk Record Office (SRO) operates as an integrated county-wide service based in three locations: Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft. A local access point is also provided in Sudbury Library.

The Suffolk Record Office Manager has an identified budget and reports to the Head of Service Development (Culture, Sport & Communities) which is part of Culture Information Inclusion & learning services within the Adult & Community Services Directorate.

Alternative governance arrangements have been under consideration since July 2010. A public consultation was run between November 2011 and February 2012 seeking views on a proposal to create a new heritage organisation for Suffolk initially incorporating the Record Office, the County Council’s archaeology service and the Museum of East Anglian Life, and on further work to investigate the feasibility of a new Suffolk heritage centre.

Proposals to create a unitary structure of local government for Suffolk were dropped in 2010. The area therefore retains a two tier structure of a County Council with nine district and borough councils.

STAFFING

Suffolk Record Office has a staff complement of 22 FTE which includes 6 qualified archivists across the three sites.

A management team which is responsible for the service across the three sites consists of three Registered archivists, the SRO Manager, the Collections Manager and the Searchroom Services Manager.
The management team are based in Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds managing operations for all sites; however, co-ordination of record office business activity and other professional issues (business planning, collections management, appraisal etc) requires regular travel across the county to each site. This makes it possible to provide some limited staff cover and also ensure that supplies and resources including exhibition material are moved between the separate locations.

Staff at Lowestoft consists of an archivist and a public service manager who is responsible for searchroom assistants, including a pool of casual staff.

Previous inspections have noted that for a record office of this size with large and complex collections distributed across three sites and high visitor numbers plus a wide range of outreach activity this level of staff is barely adequate. Problems can arise due to unavoidable absence and the record office is forced to draw on the professional and managerial staff to maintain the frontline public service and outreach activities.

Staff training and development
Staff participate in in-house training within the directorate and beyond, have access to funding for formal training courses and activities related to professional development. Two members of staff have recently been supported through studies to gain professional archival qualification.

Training is also provided on document handling and other preservation subjects.

Volunteers/community links
SRO has developed very good links with its community of users, local groups and volunteers. These links are a conscious and integral part of the way in which the SRO maintains and develops its services, its collections and undertakes outreach.

There is an active Friends of SRO (established 1983) which contributes to a wide range of record office activities, alerts staff to archives at risk and purchases archives.

SRO has a large number of volunteers and runs an extensive range of projects which bring significant benefits to the service, its users and the volunteers themselves. The volunteer experience at SRO is a rich one and provides individuals with numerous opportunities for personal development, learning new skills and participation in rewarding projects. SRO won ARA’s first Archive Volunteering of the Year Project in 2010 with the ‘Making a difference’ volunteer cataloguing backlog project involving 69 volunteers.

SRO continues to build up an extensive network of links with local and community groups, such as the Port of Lowestoft Research Society. Volunteers have begun a project to scan over 14,000 photographs of vessels
built, registered or based at Lowestoft from the late 19th century to the present. Individual volunteers work on a variety of projects, including repackaging, listing new accessions, indexing, transcribing and cataloguing.

These links are being extended to communities that have no previous experience of contact with the SRO and traditional archive organisations and contributes to the wider inclusion and participation aims of the County Council. The links are often built upon collecting and outreach activity which in turn promotes further opportunities in these areas of activity.

SRO works with local schools, colleges and universities to offer work experience placements to students, ranging from GCSE age through to postgraduate.

SITE AND BUILDING

The Lowestoft Office was established in 1985 to serve the Waveney district and is housed in Lowestoft Central Library, which was designed for Lowestoft Borough in the late 1960s and opened in 1974. The record office has shared occupancy with the library service. The library is a modern brick and concrete building, constructed on three floors with a large basement.

It is in a central location and is well situated for public transport. There is no public car parking but car parks are in the vicinity.

The record office’s strong room and library reserve stock stacks are located in the basement, the library service is located on the ground and first floors, a café and drop in centre is based on the ground floor, the record office search room and offices are located on the first floor and the library service offices are located on the second floor. Additional storage space for local studies material is also on the second floor. Accessible from the second floor is a small plant room.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Opening hours, reception and admissions arrangements
The record office is open Monday, Wednesday-Friday 9-5.30, Tuesday 9-7.00, and Saturday 9-5, Sunday 10-4. Documents are not produced at lunch time Monday to Friday and all day on Sunday. Documents for use on Saturday must be pre-ordered by 2pm on the preceding Friday.

The record office is a member of the County Archives Research Network (CARN) system.
Documents are produced as requested to CARN card holders; non card holders are permitted to use the search room facilities but not to order or use archival material.

The search room is situated on the first floor in a self contained unit. The entrance to the archive is signposted. Entry is via a wood and glass door and the reception desk where readers sign in is located to the left. Lockers are located along the right hand wall near the entrance.

Disabled access is via a ramp into the ground floor of the library and by way of a lift to the first floor, where the search room is situated.

**Search room**
The search room is located in the former lecture/film theatre. It has been purposely re-designed for use as a search room. It is well lit with large windows at the far end and fluorescent tube lighting. Both forms of lighting benefit from ultra violet film fitted in 2002/3. The search room has CCTV which is monitored internally.

The reception has 3 desks with a glass fronted office behind. Opposite the reception desk is a display case which promotes collections, often examples of underused archives or relating to topical events and the changing seasons. A selection of leaflets, parish packs and sale items are on display. Additional display space is available on the right hand wall (at the time of the visit this was linked to reading month on circus stars and the hippodrome in Lowestoft).

There are 4 microfilm readers, 6 microfiche readers, a reader-printer, and 4 PCs with internet access, and a stand-alone PC and stand-alone laptop providing access to sources on CD and DVD. Beneath the windows 2 desks are available for readers to use digital cameras. The room also contains a local studies reference collection and map cabinets together with desks for consulting original material, including maps. The top of the map drawers are also used as surfaces for consulting maps. Preservation equipment and aids for researchers (such as a magnifier) are provided.

The room is fitted with smoke detectors and intruder alarms.

**Finding aids**
The search room contains paper lists which are supplemented by useful place, person and subject indexes. CALM is used for accessions, cataloguing and documenting conservation work. Catalogue information is available online through Suffolk Heritage Direct, A2A and the indexes to the National Register of Archives.

Returns to TNA’s annual survey of accessions have been regularly submitted.

**Rate of use**
The Lowestoft office received 5458 onsite visitors during 2010/11, made 4036 document productions and handled 1847 remote enquiries.
Overall, during the 2010-11 reporting year SRO received 29,441 visits, made 30,387 productions and received 12,343 written enquiries. These are very high figures in comparison with other county record offices.

**Security**

**Website and publications**
There is a useful Record Office presence on the County Council’s website which provides a wide range of information on collections, using SRO and research guides, policies, services offered and events. Essential information for making a visit is also included. SRO local studies stock can be searched using the Suffolk Libraries catalogue on the website.

The Record Office manages Suffolk Heritage Direct – a searchable gateway to Suffolk’s heritage collections which also includes the Britten Pears Library, some museums and Archaeology services. It includes images of objects, artefacts, photographs and documents, resources for teachers and lifelong learners and key contacts for heritage organisations.

**Research service**
A remote research service is available and details are available at the Record Office and on the website. A total of 476.86 hours of paid research was undertaken across SRO during 2010-11.

**Reader consultation**
The Record Office participates in the PSQG visitor satisfaction survey, the latest being in March 2011. Overall rating is 98% good or very good.

Feedback is also sought from the Friends’ Group, researchers and other local stakeholders.

**Other public areas**
Public facilities, including wcs with disabled access, are available on the ground floor and first floor of the library building. There is a café open to the public on the ground floor and there is a meeting room with seating for 40, available 7 days a week until 9pm.

Exhibition space is available in the lobby area of the library on the ground; it is used for copies but not for original archival material. A display case is located on the second floor of the library. There is also the Learning Centre which the archive staff can borrow for sessions etc. All these public areas are not under the direct supervision of the record office.
STRONG ROOM

General

The strong room forms part of the basement which is divided into two compartments and is approached by a lift and stairs, which both open onto lobbies just outside the basement doors. The remainder of the basement is shelved for library reserve stock. The storage area consists of two interconnected sections of roughly equal size (c35' x 25' each) with brick and concrete walls. Off from the strong room, is an additional, smaller room (formerly the dark room) which has been upgraded for use as archival storage. Next door to this, is the now defunct former safe shelved to hold non-archival material.

Security arrangements


Flood and damp prevention

There are a number of flooding and damp hazards present in the strong room area. These are fully appreciated and measures taken to ensure risk is minimised.

The walls and ceiling are constructed with concrete and breeze block. Underground external walls are monitored for condensation and damp; no problems were reported. The ends of racking runs are a sufficient distance from external walls.

The pipework in the strong room is largely defunct and much has since been removed; the remainder has been lagged. A pipe runs at ceiling height along the internal wall taking overflow rainwater from the roof to the drains but it is understood to be empty most of the time and monitored for leaks.

The air-conditioning units in the strong room have drip trays and monitored for leaks.
An aquasentry leak detection system has been installed with a maintenance contract for regular servicing. Two non return valves have been fitted on the main drains to the Lowestoft Library building in 2011.

The adjoining former dark room contains a groundwater drainage sump, with a float and pump device, alarmed to the staff area of the search room to indicate if it should ever come into operation.

**Fire protection**

Fire protection is basic.

Fire resistance is understood to be between two and four hours. There is no automatic extinguishing system or smoke extraction. Smoke and heat detectors are located in the basement and the building is alarmed to the Fire Brigade (about 3 minutes response time). A CO2 fire extinguisher is located in the strong room and another in the Library stack.

The basement location and inadequate facilities for the rapid egress of water means that collections would be at risk from water damage as a result of fire fighting above.

**Environmental controls**

Two air conditioning units are employed, wall mounted, one in each section of the strong room. A dehumidifier is present but not generally used. The former dark room has no environmental controls; the door between it and the strong room is kept open.

Tiny tag monitors are distributed throughout the strong room with additional separate display units allowing daily visual checks to be undertaken by staff. On the date of the inspection readings were noted: 19.1°C and 55.1 RH.

The environmental monitoring data provided for the period April 2010 to September 2011 indicates that the temperature is reasonably stable within the range recommended by PD5454 with evidence of gradual seasonal drift up and down, but remaining between 15°C and 19°C for all but two weeks of the period when temperature fell below 15°C.

The relative humidity remains within the recommended range with some gradual seasonal drift which is acceptable. Any gradual movement is between 48% and 58% which tends to be at the higher end of the range and care should be taken when the RH approaches 60% due to the risk of mould. The secondary protection provided by boxing should lessen the impact of fluctuation and mitigate the risk.

**Storage arrangements**
One section of the strong room is fitted almost entirely with mobile shelving on a slightly raised floor, with the other section a mixture of mobile and static shelving. There are racks of static shelving on three walls, including shelves for rolled maps and plans. Most of the material is boxed. There are also plastic boxes stored on the floor at back of the room.

Ultra violet filters are fitted to the fluorescent lighting.

There is a work table and electric sockets for lamps, lap top, etc.

**Any major problems**

The strong room is full and there is no expansion space for future accessions. Some material is also boxed in plastic containers against the back wall in the main strong room.

**Special storage**

There are no special storage facilities although photographic collections and records other than paper and parchment are held here.

**Outstores**

There is no outstore.

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**CONSERVATION**

The Conservation unit is based at SRO, Ipswich

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**STAFF OFFICES**

An office accommodating the Public Service Manager and other members of staff is located behind the reception desk in the search room. It contains two workstations and staff lockers. It is rather small but adequate for quiet work and is on hand for support in the search room. A large window in the staff office provides a clear view of the search room.

The former projection room is now the archivist’s office. There are two work stations. There is a large window which provides a clear view of the search room.

The offices on the second floor (which is not used by the public) are given over to the administrative needs of the library service. Archive staff can use the meeting room/office for 1:1’s, the common room facilities and wcs and the photocopying facilities where the custodian for the entire building is located.

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**EXPANSION SPACE**
None. Some Lowestoft material is stored at Ipswich.

**DOCUMENT RECEPTION/SORTING/ISOLATION FACILITIES**

The room is also used by volunteers and

There is no dedicated archive reception space.

**MODERN RECORDS /INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

SRO is not responsible for the records management function in Suffolk County Council and arrangements for the Council’s records are described in the report for Ipswich.

**COLLECTING POLICY AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARCHIVE COLLECTORS**

SRO has a sound and holistic approach to acquisition and developing its collections which recognises that success in this area rests on the strength of its relationship with the creators of records and the local community, and that this can take time to come to fruition. This approach makes the collecting policy a ‘living’ and dynamic document.

SRO holds the usual range of collections for a large and active county record office covering a large area, and their subject matter reflects the evolving nature of the county’s history.

Significant collections include those for the County Council and predecessor local government bodies (which includes schools), the Diocese, landed estates, businesses, local associations and charities, courts and hospitals. These collections include controlled categories of record subject to the Manorial Documents Rules and Public Records Act. SRO also holds the archive of the Saumarez family of Shrubland Park which was accepted by the government in lieu of tax liabilities and allocated to the record office in 2007.

The collecting policy is published on the website and is supported by appraisal guidelines for the main types of deposit to ensure consistency of approach across the county.

Whilst there has been little surveying undertaken in recent years it would be inaccurate and unfair to describe collecting as reactive. An analysis of accessions was carried out in 2000 to identify strengths and weaknesses in collections. The results were reviewed in 2004 and 2008 and continue to inform the SRO approach. An area of attention in 2012 will be sport to tie in
with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. A survey is planned of sporting clubs and societies.

The foundation of SRO’s collecting strategy is the building of relationships with local organisations, individuals, creators and depositors and the community as a whole. Good connections exist with local museums especially the maritime museums and other heritage organisations, in particular those that belong to the Waveney Heritage Forum.

Good relations exist with local depositors, such as courts.

OUTREACH, AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

SRO undertakes an impressive range of education and outreach activity based on its collections throughout the county. Programmes of activity are co-ordinated centrally and are delivered by one site, across all sites or in collaboration with other partners, authors and tutors. These activities contribute to the priorities of the Adult and Communities Services Directorate demonstrating the value of the Record Office and its collections to the wider objectives of the County Council and the cultural life of Suffolk. Evidence of the impact of these activities is considered within SRO. Many of these activities demonstrate interesting and innovative developments of more traditional forms and are often consciously integrated into other core functions of the record office, such as collections development.

All the record offices run programmes of formal and informal courses, workshops, talks and walks, which are developed and marketed three times a year. The record office also regularly adds details of events to the Waveney Tourism Sunrise Coast Events pages and has joined the newly formed Waveney Heritage Forum. Staff have also been involved in providing a programme of talks during the season at the local Pontins Pakefield holiday camp.

The record office opens on Sundays with an emphasis on a local studies service with a number of events for families and adults, e.g. family and property history drop-in sessions, scrapbooking and Christmas cracker-making. The service is more informal on Sundays to encourage those who might not otherwise come in to use the services. The events have been attended by children and their parents and grand-parents and have given all generations an introduction to the Record Office and the resources available.

There have been a number of school visits to the record office: pupils visited from Roman Hill Primary School and used old teaching aids, maps and microfilm to try and identify areas of the town and learn about its development. Pupils at Benjamin Britten High School in Lowestoft helped to develop a new guided walk and a workshop as part of their activities week.

The first batch of UCS 3rd Year BA History students completed their
Professional Practice in the Humanities module in the Ipswich and Lowestoft Record Offices during the Autumn/Winter 2010. This linked the learning experience in the formal education sphere to work experience in the public sector assisting with preparation for future employment.

The Meeting Room is used to run income generating classes. The workshops cover beginners and advanced family history, early and more modern property history, family history sources on the internet, palaeography, nonconformist records, maps, military ancestors and using Ancestry. All the workshops include a mix of information about sources, looking at originals and the opportunity to ask questions before finishing with a tour of the office.

The record office worked with the local Salvation Army citadel in Lowestoft on their plans for celebrating their 125th anniversary by offering display space in the library, and providing them with copies of photographs and information about their archives.

A laminated folder of captioned photographs for long-stay residents of Blyford Court, sheltered housing scheme in Lowestoft, many of whom have dementia, has been created for use in reminiscence sessions.