SUFFOLK RECORD OFFICE, BURY ST EDMUNDS
77 Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds

ARCHON number: 174

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

Staff or officers met during visit:

Date of subscription to TNA Standard: 1992

Existing approvals:  Public
                   TNA
                   Diocesan (St Edmundsbury and Ipswich)

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.

Bury St Edmunds provides a base for the Searchroom Services Manager. Staff there consist of an archivist and a public service manager who is responsible for the team of 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 has 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 Suffolk Local History Council parish recorders. 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.

In addition to individual volunteers, various volunteer groups meet in Bury St Edmunds, including NADFAS, Mildenhall transcribers and the Suffolk Family History Society. NADFAS Heritage volunteers are working to clean and treat the Cullum Library Collection with guidance provided by the Record Office’s Conservator. The SFHS volunteers are indexing a number of parish registers. Two groups meet on Tuesday each week and have recently undertaken work on Theatre Royal playbills, sale particulars and listing new accessions. Members of the Past and Present Society are working on the augmentation of information on the photographic collection catalogue prior to uploading on the website.

Links have been established with local Scout groups to collect and list scouting archives across the county prior to deposit.

SRO works closely with local schools, colleges and universities to offer work experience placements to students, ranging from GCSE age to post-graduate.

---

**SITE AND BUILDINGS**

The record office is a two storey brick building, with a basement. It was built in the 1960s as a county libraries headquarters but the record office has been based there since 1974.

The office has a quiet central location but is not on a bus route and by foot is about 15 minutes from the bus station and about 20 minutes from the railway station.

The adjacent car park has been acquired (for redevelopment) but 1 disabled car parking space has been retained. Staff parking space is available on site. The nearby private pay and display car park behind Shire Hall is available for the public to use and there is limited parking in front of the record office.

---

**PUBLIC FACILITIES**

**Opening hours, reception and admissions arrangements**

The record office is open Monday-Saturday 9-5. Documents are not produced at lunch time. 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; visitors without a card are permitted to use the search room facilities, but cannot order or use archival material.
The entrance to the building is via a flight of steps. This leads to the entrance lobby, where there is a display of books for sale in aid of the Friends of Suffolk Record Office on the right hand side and exhibition panels on the left hand side. A staircase to the search room faces the door. A few steps up from the lobby by the main staircase on the right hand side is a display area with exhibition boards and a display case for small topical displays that change on a regular basis. The display at the time of the inspection was about manorial records.

There is disabled access to the ground floor of the building but not to the search room on the upper floor. Customers who are unable to access the search room upstairs are normally accommodated and invigilated in the Microform Room or the Education Room when consulting original documents.

**Search rooms**

**Microform Room**

This room on the ground floor has 7 microfilm and 11 microfiche readers, 1 reader printer, a magnifier and 1 terminal providing internet access etc, with a bank of microfiche and film cabinets.

Towards the rear of this room is the public service and reception desk which is located in front of the strong room.

Redacted under FOI exemption 31(1)

There are reproduction OS maps and parish packs (popular with schools) for sale in front of the reception desk. Conservation supplies are also sold.

The staff wc facilities are accessible via the Public Service and Reception Desk.

**Search Room**

The search room on the first floor is reached by the only staircase in the building. The cupola that provides light to the stairs and landing on the first floor was replaced in 2006. There are two doorways into the search room, each adjacent to the public service desk, where visitors sign in. The search room has fluorescent tube lighting and large windows at each side of the room fitted with film protection from ultra-violet light and blinds. Additional lockers are located beside the public service desk.

This room has seating arranged across 3 large tables in the main area and one smaller table for those wishing to use a laptop seating 18 readers, although more can be accommodated by bringing in extra chairs as required. There is also a map table and several plan cabinets containing OS and other printed maps.
The greater part of available wall space is fitted with shelves for finding aids and reference works. One section of the search room houses part of the Cullum Reference Collection and genealogical sources plus the the ICT section (5 PCs providing internet access, plus one stand alone PC and one stand alone laptop providing access to sources on CD, DVD etc).

Documents are issued by a triplicate slip system and brought up by a document lift behind the public service desk.

Children's furniture, books, drawing materials have been provided in the search room to help keep children amused whilst parents undertake their research.

**Finding aids**
Finding aids are found on shelves around the search room. There is a range of card indexes, summary lists and paper catalogues. There is a good local studies reference collection, including selected local studies reference material relating to neighbouring counties. Each branch has its own collection of boxes of 'topographical ephemera' (non archival material relating to parish/place/subject) to be used alongside primary material.

CALM is used for accessions, cataloguing and recording conservation procedures. Catalogue information is available online through Suffolk Heritage Direct, A2A and the indexes to the National Register of Archives.

In the self-assessment exercise 2010, 12.35% of the collections were described as box-listed or had collection-level descriptions only, with an additional 23.01 % unlisted.

Returns have been regularly submitted to the annual survey of accessions for the National Register of Archives.

**Rate of use**
During 2010-11 the record office received 5, 402 remote enquiries, 12, 992 onsite visitors and made 9, 652 document productions.

Overall, SRO received 29, 441 visits, made 30, 387 document productions and received 12, 343 remote enquiries.

**Security**

Redacted under FOI exemption 31(1)
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 provided. A total of 476.86 hours of paid research was undertaken by SRO during 2010-11.

Reader consultation
The service participated in the PSQG visitor satisfaction survey in 2011 and achieved a 98% rating of good or very good.

Other public areas
The Education Room is a ground floor room on the south side of the building and is not openly accessible from the public areas. It is a spacious room and it is well stocked with books from the Cullum library along its walls. The room is used to accommodate researchers who are unable to access the search room upstairs for consulting archival material. It is also used for talks and education visits, is used by volunteers and is available for hire. Staff can book the room to sort and arrange large accessions and collections. It has not been redecorated since the 1960s but maintenance work has provided the opportunity to update parts of it. An interactive white board, laptop, and data projector are available, as well as a normal projector, screen, and flipchart.

Public facilities are available in rooms leading off the Microform Room. These include wc (with disabled access) and a small common room with lockers and tea/coffee making facilities.

STRONG ROOMS

General
A new central heating system was installed in 2011 which means that there is a better control of temperature within the entire building.

All systems are maintained and regularly tested.

**Security arrangements**

---

**Flood and damp prevention**

The risk of flooding or damp penetration affecting the collections has been assessed and minimised; nevertheless, the threat of flooding at the outstore needs to be taken seriously and kept under review.

There are no water pipes in the strong room and annex. The main flood risk is to the outstore as the River Lark and its flood plains are close by but there is no flood risk to the other buildings.

**Fire protection**

Fire precautions and counter measures are good.

There is an automatic IG55 fire extinction system in the strong room and annex. The fire system was upgraded in 2011 with additional heat and smoke detectors installed and the fire detection alarms are linked directly to the Fire Brigade.
Significant upgrading of fire precautions to the document lift shaft and to the cupboards adjoining the lift took place in 2006. In 2011, the fire system was upgraded, which included the replacement of the fire doors in the rest of the building to meet fire regulations.

Environmental controls

The environmental conditions appear to be reasonably stable within an acceptable range despite the need to keep the strong room doors open during opening hours. However, this is not ideal and it has proven difficult to maintain control over the conditions in the annex due to its construction.

The strong room doors are open during the working day but plastic curtains have been installed, to minimise the flow of air from other areas of the building which are heated, in to the strong room. A new central heating system was installed in 2011 which means that there is a better control of temperature within the entire building. Environmental monitoring is by stand-alone dataloggers, with additional separate displays in the strong room which staff monitor and record 3 times a day.

There are three air conditioning units in the strong room which are maintained on a quarterly basis and have a small dehumidification capability.

The temperature in the strong room is fairly stable but the annex temperature is more susceptible to external climatic conditions and can become cold in winter whilst relative humidity in both rooms increases during the winter months. On the day of the inspection the readings in the annex was 15.1°C and 59% RH, and in the strong room 17.4°C and 50.8 % RH.

Environmental monitoring data for the period April 2010 to September 2011 indicates that the temperature is reasonably stable for long periods within the recommended range; however, fluctuations are not particularly gradual at times. For the majority of the time the temperature is within the range 13°C and 18°C with short periods outside this range.

The relative humidity is also reasonably stable with gradual change between 45% and 55%; however, there are lengthy periods when RH is between 55% and 60% and care should be taken when RH is around the top end of this range due to the risk of mould. The secondary protection provided by boxing should reduce the impact of fluctuation on the records themselves and mitigate the risk.

Storage arrangements
The strong room is furnished almost entirely with Railex mobile shelving, though there is static shelving present in the annex as well as static map shelving along the walls of the strong room. The tracking systems for the mobile racking had been embedded in the concrete floor and there were some minor problems with this, so there is now an ongoing maintenance contract for the mobile racking.

The strong room and annexe are both clean and tidy. All but a few of the items in the strong room are boxed.

**Any major problems**

An acute lack of accrual space in the main strong room and outstore is a significant problem.

**Special storage**

There are no special storage facilities.

**Outstore**

The outstore or new strong room is a one storey brick built conversion of a former garage for library vans measuring about 42 by 25 feet. It is situated near the county archaeological unit in a gated compound with other county buildings. There are no windows and there is a false roof; the roof space is kept ventilated. There is a small entrance lobby and the light switches can be isolated.

Set on a concrete floor the archive accommodation consists mainly of Stelstor mobile shelving. The building was repainted in the summer and the rotten wooden fascia replaced.

In March 2011 new air conditioning units were installed and water pipes and redundant pipework were removed.

Continuous environmental monitoring is by a datalogger with the recorded data downloaded monthly for analysis. A stand-alone monitor is checked once a day by the custodians who alert the record office staff if there are problems to ensure early detection and reporting of any malfunctions of the system. The custodians/cleaners are a private contract company which is owned by the County Council and their offices are next door to the outstore.

Environmental monitoring data provided from April 2010 indicates that the temperature is relatively stable within the recommended ranges with seasonal drift between 15° C and 20° C. The relative humidity fluctuates markedly with variation between 35% and 60% RH. 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.
The strong room benefits from a detection system only, linked to a monitoring and alert service.

The main threat to the outstore is flooding. The River Lark is close by and the outstore is on the flood plain. Work further upstream has reduced the chance of flooding. Flood defences have been installed for mounting a flood barrier and sealing the building. Both custodians and archive staff have been trained on how to install it. Installation of the flood barrier, however, is dependent upon staff being notified of the flood risk. Staff are fully aware of Floodline contact details for monitoring flood warnings. If flooding occurs there are wide flood plains for the water to flow onto away from the buildings.

The records held in the outstore are collections not so heavily used e.g. microfilmed collections and will registers, uncatalogued collections and closed collections e.g. hospital and magistrate records. Access is usually required once a week. The Diocesan collection is due to move to Ipswich from the strong room [13.5m3] and the Hervey collection is due to move to the main strong room.

CONSERVATION

The Conservation unit is based at SRO, Ipswich

STAFF OFFICES

There are 5 staff offices on the first floor of the main repository building.

There is a scanning/digitisation room and a photocopying room. There is an office for the Search room Services Manager with a large table for sorting and a small staff office where local Acts are stored. This room contains 2 PCs and accommodates the MDR project officer and the disaster kit. There is a larger staff office for the archivist and public service manager. Several offices are shelved with overflow books from the Cullum and local history collection.

There is a small but well equipped staff room on the ground floor at the south side of the building beyond the strong room. Adjacent to it and near to the staff entrance where records are brought into the building is a small office which is used by staff and volunteers.

EXPANSION SPACE

There is none at the main site and very little in the outstore. Some collections are stored at Ipswich.
DOCUMENT RECEPTION/SORTING/ISOLATION FACILITIES

The office at Bury does not include a dedicated area for receiving, assessing and treating accessions. Accessions arrive at the staff entrance from the carpark and are normally processed in office space occupied by the Archivist and Public Service Manager. Records requiring isolation are sent to Ipswich to be placed in the store room or freezer.

The basement is used as a general storage area with a separate secure boiler room. The storage area has shelving along all the walls and is divided into two spaces; one housing new archival boxes, office files, production slips etc, the other housing OS maps for sorting, overflow of local studies material and newspapers awaiting microfilming, exhibition material, spare shelving and a table used for packaging.

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. The local press is monitored for information about the closure of businesses and SRO is referred to records at risk by the Friends Group and other local heritage groups.

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 and other heritage organisations.

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.

Further detail on the SRO approach to education, outreach and community engagement and the strategies adopted is included in the Ipswich report. This section focuses on elements of the extensive range of activity at the Bury office.

The record office has run a number of successful projects to create resources that schools can use. For example, the record office worked closely with the Theatre Royal and local schools in Bury as part of the Populating the Past HLF-funded project, to develop two educational CD-Roms. As part of the Suffolk Voices Restored Oral History project, the record office has also worked with schools and run workshops using the recordings at Bury and Ipswich Record Offices and further workshops at Copleston High School. A leaflet advertising the school workshops has been developed and it was piloted in the west of the county, but it is increasingly difficult for schools to arrange visits to the record office, so in response the workshops have been adapted for delivery in the schools.
The Education room is used for very popular income generating classes. Both Bury and Ipswich offer 5 and 10 week courses on topics directly related to Record Office sources such as Landscape History, Law and Order, Growth and Development of Suffolk Towns, Suffolk Churches, Chapels and Congregations, Elizabethan Suffolk and Paupers, Workhouses and the Poor Law and Palaeography. Visiting tutors, previously from Cambridge Extra Mural Studies (but now independent), run other courses including Gardening History, Victorian Novelists as Social Historians, Classics of European Literature which keep the Education room in regular use and attract a wide variety of people to the record office.

The record office also runs training sessions for the blue and green badge guides in Bury and maintains a collection of reference books for their use. The Bury Record Office is a member of the Bury Tourism Group and has created pages for the Bury St Edmunds Tourism website with prints from the archives and information about opening times and events [see http://www.visit-burystedmunds.co.uk/Attractions-In-Bury-St-Edmunds/bury-record-office.htm].

The record office works closely with with the Tourist Information Centres in Bury and Ipswich to arrange walks in Bury and Ipswich.

The record office creates an exibition in the lobby which changes on a regular basis. The subject matter for on site and off site exhibitions is designed to attract people who might not otherwise take an interest in the record office. The record office also supports several Bury Pub History Nights by providing displays and advice on subjects such as property history research.