



## Northumberland Archives Trust Newsletter Winter 2023

### Update on Grant Applications

This, our third newsletter, is designed to give supporters an update on what NACT has been doing over recent months. Supporters will have received a copy of the Annual Report by our Chair, Sir Philip Mawer, which summarised the good progress made by the Trust following its difficult birth in 2020 when the Covid pandemic put the world into lockdown.

2021 saw the trust make its first attempts to raise money for the Archive Service to fund several small projects and by the end of 2023 over £100,000 will have been raised from a variety of funders. Recent grants received are listed below, and we are grateful to all the organisations concerned for their support.

Grants received for specific projects	£
Community Foundation (Clayton)	3,372
Josephine Butler (Butler Society papers)	2,000
Strathmartine Trust (Atkinson & Marshall)	5,000
Bright Trust (Northumberland Healthcare)	10,000
Lord Crewe (Cataloguing plus school modules)	6,000
Community Foundation (Photocentre Collection)	10,000
Bosanquet Family for Cataloguing Project	2,500
Gibson Family for Cataloguing Project	1,000
Community Foundation (Ashington Schools Project)	£15,602
<b>Grants received for specific projects</b>	<b>£55,474</b>



If you want to learn more about these projects, you can find information about them on the NACT website at

<https://northumberlandarchivestrust.org>

We continue to pursue our aim of widening access to the archives, particularly for hard-to-reach parts of the community.

## The Cataloguing Project

John Webster

Encouraged by these early application successes, the Trust decided to tackle a much more ambitious project, whilst continuing with several smaller-scale applications. The background to what we have called - accurately, if rather unglamorously - "The Cataloguing Project" is given below.

Estate collections, records of landed families, some dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, are at the heart of the collections deposited with Northumberland Archives. These records tell the stories of the landed family itself, of the families and communities that lived and worked on or provided services to the estate and so much more. They tell us about the influence exercised by Northumbrians locally, nationally and internationally within local and national politics, agricultural practice, industrial development, cultural and religious life, philanthropy and many other spheres of activity.

Significant quantities of estate collections held by Northumberland Archives remain uncatalogued and therefore inaccessible. Recently, a scoping exercise was carried out to enumerate the number of collections to be catalogued and studied in more depth. Also, as part of the exercise, more detailed inspection of several of the collections was carried out to exemplify the potential interest of the material that lies within them.

The Woodhorn archives office identified records of 42 estates that are currently unlisted. These collections comprise 1100 archive boxes. Some of the collections are made up of multiple accessions totalling 100+ boxes. The Berwick office identified a further 5 estate collections with a further 67 boxes to be processed.

Out of those 47 collections, 12 were identified as being of significant cultural and historic importance and worthy of priority status. For these 12 collections, an estimate was made of the resources required to catalogue their contents and thus make them known and available for further study. This indicated that it would require the dedicated work of an archivist and assistant for two years to complete their cataloguing and analysis.

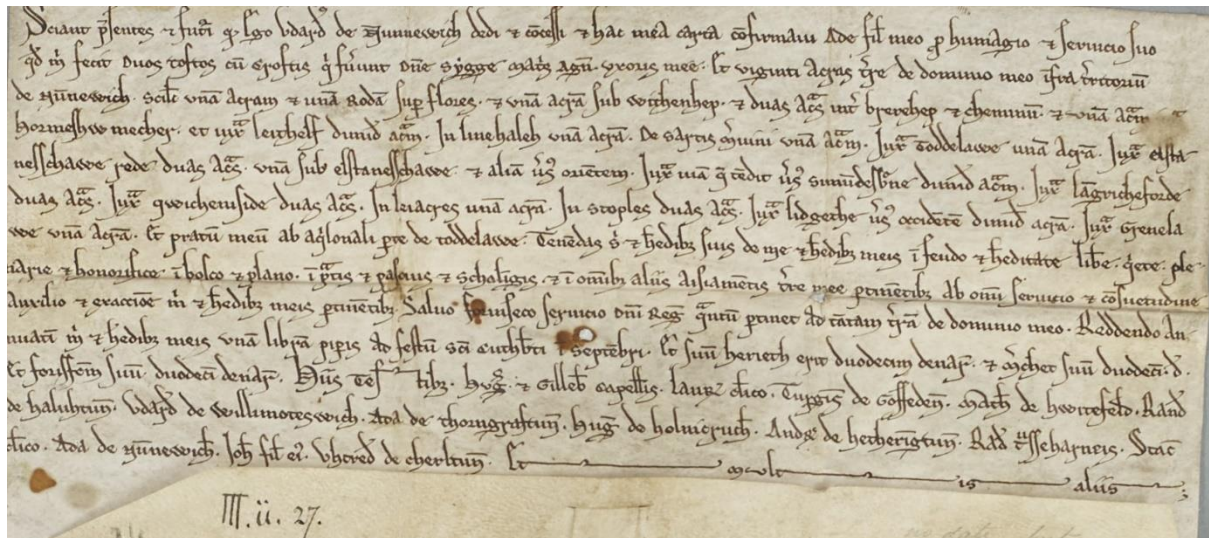
NACT is seeking grants totalling £235,000 to fund the employment of two such members of staff to catalogue these collections and, where funding permits, digitise



selected documents of significance. Textual descriptions and digital images will be added into CALM, an online catalogue available across the world.

If you would like to learn more about what is in these 12 collections, you can read the news item on the website at:

<https://northumberlandarchivestrust.org/hidden-stories-in-the-archives>



*One medieval gem from the archives (an extract is shown above) written in Latin round about 1250, is the grant of land by Udard of Nunnewick to Adam, his son. Modern Nunwick lies 22 km north-west of Hexham, on the west bank of the River North Tyne and is now the property of the Allgood family. Adam received twenty acres of land, made up of seventeen parcels at various locations of about 1 - 2 acres at each. He also received two tofts (made up of a small number of farms) and crofts from his maternal grandmother. As if that was not enough, he also received a 'heriot' of twelve pence when a serf died, and a 'merchet' of twelve pence payable when a serf applied for permission to marry. It all seems a very one-sided master-serf relationship.*

## Plans to Extend the Blyth Schools Programme to Other Areas

Morag Boyes

In 2022, funding was awarded by the Platten Family Fund, through the Community Foundation for a Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) based educational project that involved working with primary schools in Blyth to explore the industrial history of the town and use this to design how Blyth might look 100 years into the future. The grant helped cover staff costs, school workshops, transport for pupils, engagement with partners, and the purchase of some equipment.

Each school received two workshops facilitated by the Senior Archivist and Project Officer involved. The first workshop, at the beginning of the project, provided a historical background to industry in Blyth using archival material. Prior to this project, a number of educational resources focused on industry in Blyth were developed and





made available on the Archive Service online LEARN platform. Attitudes towards the town improved amongst the children during the project and by the end of it 69% of the children involved were confident or very confident using computer-assisted design (CAD) software. Northumberland Archives were able to develop a programme of STEM activities enriched by archival documents that could be used as a blueprint for projects with schools in other parts of Northumberland. The feedback from their teachers shows that the pupils' visit to Northumbria University raised the aspirations of the children and many of them talked to project staff after it about their own desire to go to university.

Following the success of "Blyth To The Future", the Trust is working with the Archive Service to raise funds to extend the project to other areas. An application was made to the Community Foundation for a project in Ashington, with a budget estimate of £15,000, and we heard at the start of December that this had been successful. We are hugely grateful to the Platten Trust and the Community Foundation for their continued support.



*Design Engineers of the Future?*



## The Origins of the Archive Service in Northumberland

Sue Wood & Linda Bankier

The Archive Service, as it is now known, started life as the Northumberland Record Office in 1958. In 1957 Northumberland County Council appointed a County Records Committee with the purpose of establishing a County Record Office. Until this point records of the County Council and its predecessor authorities had been stored in basement rooms in the County Hall building in the Moot Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne.

By 1958 the County Record Office had been established at the Moot Hall with records removed from the basement to better storage accommodation and a programme of cataloguing commenced.

In 1962 a former Anti-Aircraft Operations Control Centre at Melton Park, North Gosforth, was acquired as the new County Record Office. When racked, this provided storage for 10,000 linear feet of records thereby allowing the accrual of collections for a number of years. By the 1990s further accommodation was required and a second service point was opened in an old police uniform store in The Kylins, Morpeth. In 2006 the service was re-located to new premises at Woodhorn, near Ashington.



*Moot Hall on the left of this mid-20c photograph,  
Note the grime on buildings from burning coal in domestic fires.*



The Berwick Record Office was first opened in 1980 to provide public access to the town of Berwick's historic Borough Archives which are of national significance and date back to the early 1500s. At that stage, the records were kept in 3 prisoner's cells on the top floor of the Council Office building, a former prison, in Wallace Green. The accommodation in the cells was unsuitable for the long-term preservation of the records - very damp in winter and too hot in the summer - and did not provide any room for expansion.

From 1987, the Record Office had various homes including two cottages beside the Planning Department in Wallace Green where the top floors were converted into a public search room and adjoining archive store for the records.

In August 1990, Linda Bankier, started work as the newly created post of full time Archivist in Charge, with the remit of providing a comprehensive archive service for the North Northumberland area.

In 2009, Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council ceased to exist, and Northumberland became a unitary authority under Northumberland County Council. The Record Office continued its work but was now only funded by the County Council. It remained in its premises in Wallace Green until 2015 when it was decided that its home should be converted into office accommodation. The service was offered space in the Library building in Walkergate and a separate store within the town. It has continued to operate this split site configuration since then. Not a very satisfactory arrangement.

Since 2015, the service has sought to find a new home where it can once again have both the records and the public access point on the same site. This has coincided with the aspiration to redevelop the Berwick Barracks site in the town. This work is ongoing as the "Living Barracks" which you can read more about in Sir Philip Mawer's article below. In the meantime, Berwick Record Office continues to provide an archive service to the north of the county, ensuring the long-term preservation of archives about the area for future generations and providing public access to them.

## **The Work of an Archivist**

**Chris Loftus - archivist at Northumberland Archives**

It is probably a bit of a mystery to most people as to what an archivist does on a day-to-day basis, so we asked Chris to describe what goes on.

Being surrounded by fascinating and varied historic documents is a daily perk for the archivists at Northumberland Archives, and one that is never taken for granted. But ensuring that this history - of the county and its people - survives and is available to researchers requires a not insignificant amount of work. This work can broadly be separated into two main categories: preservation and access.



The importance of preservation for archives is obvious; without appropriate care, important documents will not survive. But preservation involves more than simply making sure material is safely in a box. In fact, it really begins even before the material has found its way to the archive when we begin talking to donors about the acquisition of records.

We first need to make sure material fits with our collecting policy; that it is of historical significance and pertains to the history of Northumberland. Once we have arranged the logistics of acquiring material and formally acknowledged our taking custody of it (called 'accessioning') we carry out an initial review of the records, paying significant attention to their physical condition. We undertake small conservation jobs ourselves, for example replacing rusty paper clips with brass equivalents and rehousing documents in acid-free, archival standard enclosures. This type of storage ensures that degradation of material is kept to a minimum. If the documents are particularly damaged or at risk, we may employ the services of a specialist conservator who can offer treatment or advice. Documents are then stored in one of our seven strong rooms where the temperature and relative humidity are monitored to ensure we are providing optimal storage conditions.

As satisfying as it may be to safely tuck well preserved archives away in secure rooms, what good is the material that tells of Northumberland's rich history if no one can find or consult it? As with preservation, facilitating access to archive material is an involved but equally rewarding task. Archivists need to make sure we have a good intellectual control of our collections, or to put it another way, to 'know what we've got'. We try to accurately catalogue material; capturing the pertinent information about each series, file or item, and then presenting this in a clear and understandable format to anyone who consults our catalogues. To maximize discoverability for users, we aim to highlight important names, places and dates and provide appropriate background information from the record's creators. Our online catalogue opens up our collections to the world and can also carry images of many of our items to aid customers in their research.

Managing standard archive collections can have its challenges but it is important to point out the ever-increasing world of digital archives can provide even more daunting issues. Ensuring digital records, photographs, emails with attachments and links, or any of the other plethora of potential electronic archive formats are preserved and accessible for the long term is no easy task. Northumberland Archives have undertaken a great deal of work in this emerging field of collections care, but there is a great deal still to do.

Aside from the significant commitment of time that the management of collections demands, there are numerous other tasks that might fill an archivist's day. We love engaging with various communities by delivering talks and study sessions to a wide variety of audiences, from school children to local history societies, from academics to special interest groups. We write articles and blogs for the archive's website and social media channels, which is a vital way to communicate with our users and the wider archive's sector. And then overseeing the Search Room, dealing with



publication requests, collecting statistics, answering email enquiries and more, leaves us with working days that are rarely quiet. Variation is therefore an apt word; not just to describe the rich collections held at Northumberland Archives, but also for the many interesting tasks that archivists undertake to care for them.

## The Archive Service and Berwick Barracks

Sir Philip Mawer

In an article earlier this year in the news section of the Trust's website, we outlined the importance of the project to redevelop Berwick's Grade 1-listed Barracks in providing a new home for the important collections stored by the Berwick Record Office. But what about the importance of the archives themselves to the success of that project?

As the project continues, Archive Service staff are deeply involved with other partners in planning for the new museum and gallery facilities, as well as those for the Archive Service itself which are planned for the site. All of this work will come to a head when the business case for the new culture and heritage centre in the redeveloped Barracks is finalised in the summer of next year.

The developing plans for the site confirm that the Archive Service is not a simple add-on to the new facilities but a crucial part of their success. The collections held by the Service contain the stories which will bring the history of Berwick and the Eastern Borders to life, drawing out their significance for today and tomorrow, as well as for yesterday.

A recently published Guide to and History of the Barracks\* - produced to mark the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Barracks in 1721 - amply illustrates this. Given Berwick's Border location, you might think it obvious why England's first purpose-built Barracks were located there. Yet study of the town's records shows that the impetus for building the Barracks did not just derive from Berwick's strategic location but also from continuous complaints by local citizens about the nuisance and expense of having soldiers billeted on them. One regiment in the reign of King Charles billeted on the town was estimated to have cost its citizens upwards of £3,000 (about £0.5 million in today's terms), reducing a great many families to penury.

Even when the Barracks were built and opened following the first Jacobite rebellion, getting the soldiers to occupy them did not prove at all straightforward. It was not until after the cost of cooking utensils needed by the soldiers if they were to live in the Barracks had been met by a 'voluntary contribution' by the alehouse keepers and others liable to quarter the soldiers that they moved in.





Life in the Barracks was hard. The men slept 2 in a bed until 1822 and married men were often joined by their wife and children. In 1813, for example, there were 93 married men in the Barracks and 56 children.

Nor did the building of the Barracks lessen the tension between soldiers and citizens, as the Proceedings of Berwick's Quarter Sessions record. Nevertheless, soldiers were important sources of income to local residents. Thirsty soldiers meant that by 1806, there were 66 alehouses in Berwick, 8 of them near the Barracks alone!

Gradually, over the course of the nineteenth century, the relationship between citizens and soldiery improved, particularly following the permanent stationing in the Barracks of the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, the King's Own Scottish Borderers, in 1881. In 1947, as if to seal the transformed relationship, the KOSB was granted the Freedom of the then Borough of Berwick.

This is just a snapshot of one bit of the complex history not only of the Barracks themselves but of this most northerly part of Northumberland. The proposed move of the Berwick Record Office into the Barracks will offer an opportunity for so many more of its stories to be uncovered and told.

*\* 'Berwick Barracks: a History and Guide' by Stephen Platten*

## Sir Philip Mawer Steps Down from Chair of NACT



*Front Row (L to R): Linda Bankier, Sue Shaw, Sir Philip Mawer, Sue Wood, Morag Boyes*

*Back Row (L to R): John Webster, Stuart Bankier, John Carr-Ellison, Willy Browne-Swinburne*



The above photograph, showing all the Trustees apart from Prof. Annie Tindley who was absent due to work commitments, was taken on the occasion of the last committee meeting chaired on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 by Sir Philip Mawer, who has led the Trust since its formation in 2020. He has stepped down after four years to spend more time with family and friends.

### **A Thank You from Sir Philip Mawer**

As 2023 draws to a close, so does my time in the Chair of the Northumberland Archives Charitable Trust (NACT). It has been a huge privilege to chair the Trust during the first few years of its existence.

The Trust was born in the Spring of 2020, in difficult circumstances because of the Covid pandemic. This meant that the first in-person meeting of the Board did not take place until December 2021.

Nonetheless, thanks to the hard work of colleagues and the support of the Trust's Patrons and Members, the decision to set up the Trust has been amply justified by events. I am particularly pleased that, as I step down, the total amount of funding raised by the Trust towards projects run by the Northumberland Archive Service has reached six figures. A huge thank you to all those individual funders and funding bodies who have made this achievement possible.

Northumberland's historic archives are one of the county's greatest treasures and the staff of the Archive Service who care for them among its most dedicated servants. I am confident that my successor, Sue Shaw, about whom you can read more elsewhere in this newsletter, has a strong base from which to develop the work of the Trust in the years ahead. I wish her and the other members of the Trust's Board every success in ensuring that the Trust continues to fulfil its objective of *Preserving our Past for the Sake of our Future*.

### **Morag Boyes on Working with Philip**

Philip is excellent at gently persuading people to do something positive for local communities. It happened to me after I offered to volunteer with the Trust. Following a conversation with Philip, I found I had agreed to take on the role of Secretary. This was the first time I had ever undertaken working with a Charity in any capacity and I felt slightly anxious. I need not have worried, as during the three years we have worked together, Philip has supported my administrative efforts with a great sense of humour and incredible eye for detail. It has been a great pleasure working alongside Philip.



### **And a Thank You to Sir Philip Mawer from Sue Shaw**

My first task as I take over as Chair of NACT must be to thank Philip on behalf of myself and my Trustee colleagues for his huge contribution to the Trust. Without his drive, experience, and guidance, establishing a new charity through the Covid lockdowns would have been much more difficult. He has been a great pleasure to work with and we wish him well.

The main purpose of the Trust is to raise funding to enhance the services that Northumberland Archives can provide. Fundraising has accelerated over the last couple of years on Philip's watch and our ambitions are increasing. To support the Cataloguing Project there are currently two substantial applications under consideration by funders, and more are being prepared.

Looking forward, we have a strongly committed Board of Trustees with diverse skills. It is a privilege for us to work with Sue Wood, Linda Bankier and their colleagues to make their work a little easier. It would be difficult to find a more dedicated, effective and enthusiastic team of archivists.

As those of you who have studied the Trust's website will know, I am a retired government lawyer who has always been fascinated by history. At various stages in my life I have used archives, the first being the old Public Record Office in Chancery Lane in London. After my retirement I completed the online Oxford Continuing Education Advanced Diploma in Local History, which gave me a good grounding in historical research, using and interpreting original documents. I am very committed to ensuring that other people, both now and in the future, should have the research opportunities in archives that I have so much enjoyed.

Philip's chairing of the Trust is a hard act for me to follow, but I shall do my best to ensure that the Trust supports the Archive Service with maximum effectiveness.