

## **AGMA Statutory Functions Committee**

Date: 21 January 2022

Subject: Greater Manchester County Record Office and Greater Manchester Archives & Local Studies Partnership

Report of: Neil MacInnes, Head of Libraries, Galleries and Culture, Manchester City Council  
Sam Elliott, Head of Service, Bolton Council  
Philip Cooke, Citywide Services Manager, Libraries and Archives - Manchester City Council

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### **PURPOSE OF REPORT:**

The Committee is asked to consider the progress of Archives+ and the Greater Manchester Archives and Local Studies Partnership.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Committee is asked to note the progress of Archives+ the Greater Manchester Archives and Local Studies Partnership.

### **CONTACT OFFICER:**

Philip Cooke, Citywide Services Manager, Libraries and Archives - Manchester City Council

## 1.0 Background

- 1.1 Greater Manchester County Record Office (GMCRO) is operated by Manchester City Council (MCC) on behalf of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA). GMCRO was opened by the former Greater Manchester Council (GMC) in 1976. Since 1986 GMCRO has since been supported by all AGMA districts and other joint AGMA authorities. GMCRO houses 4 miles of archives and seeks to identify, collect, preserve, and promote the widest possible public access to the documentary heritage of Greater Manchester in accordance with the statutory requirement of the Public Records Act 1958 and 1967, the Local Government (Records) Act 1962 and the Local Government Act 1972.
- 1.2 GMCRO was previously based at Marshall Street in Manchester City Centre and moved to Manchester Central Library in early 2014 as part of a wider archive partnership called Archives+. Archives+ had made archives more accessible by creating exciting interpretive exhibition spaces to provide new ways for more people to discover the richness and relevance of archives, share their own stories and have a personalised experience of the City Region's history. Manchester's iconic Central Library reopened after a four year in 2014, £50m transformation programme and is now one of the most popular libraries in the United Kingdom.
- 1.3 The Archives+ partners include the North West Film Archive (Manchester Metropolitan University), Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Trust (The University of Manchester), the Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society.
- 1.4 In 2012 a feasibility study commissioned by AGMA recommended the creation of a formal Partnership to provide an overarching strategy and development plan for the local authority archive and local studies services in Greater Manchester. There are significant potential benefits to be gained in terms of collaborating on service improvement and future sustainability.
- 1.5 At the Statutory Functions Committee in June 2012, the Committee agreed to provide governance to enable the Partnership to be set up. It also agreed to create an officer group to lead the work of the Partnership and report to the AGMA Statutory Functions

Committee. GMCRO provides strategic leadership to the partnership. The Greater Manchester Archives and Local Studies Partnership was formed, as a result and consists of representatives of each of the 10 GM authorities.

- 1.6 The Archives+ Partnership and GM Archives and Local Studies Partnerships (GMALSP) are held in high regard nationally as a model of best practice. Officers from our partnerships regularly speak at national archives conferences.

## **2.0 GMCRO and Archives+ - seven years on**

### **2.1 Our Partnership**

The Archives+ Partnership consists of the following organisations, which are located at Manchester Central Library

- Manchester City Council – Libraries and Archives
- Greater Manchester County Record Office
- North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University  
Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre (The University of Manchester)
- Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society.

The Partnership received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund from 2013 to 2017.

- Manchester Jewish Museum temporarily re-located to Central Library in 2019 and 2020 and have now move back to their transformed Museum in Summer 2021

### **2.2 Archives + for everyone**

Archives+ has pushed the boundaries of what archive services can do and who they engage with. Each partner has their own knowledge and skills to make us better together.

It is now seven years since Central Library re-opened following significant transformation.

In 2019, over 2 million people visited the library, making it the most visited public library in the country. The library closed in March 2020, reopening in July 2020, and the use of the archives has grown steadily since.

As a focal point of the library, Archives+ has gone from strength to strength. Prior to the project, each Archives+ partner reached only 15,000 people annually.

Audience development is about more than numbers through the door. Prior to Covid, through the activity programme the project has reached a far wider audience than similar activity undertaken previously:

- The age of people engaged in the Archives+ activity programme is far wider and more evenly spread.
- Peaks in the age of engagement with archives are now at ages 6–10 years and 26–59 years, rather than over 55 years old, which is the most common age usually for visitors to archives services.
- approximately 70% of visitors are White, compared to the previous almost 100% White audience at Greater Manchester County Record Office.
- The numbers of families and young people engaging with archives has increased significantly.

Again, the activity programme has restarted and is seeing steadily increasing numbers of people engaging with activities.

## **2.2 A sense of ownership**

Archives+ is something people want to be part of. Community groups are constantly depositing their archive collections and holding exhibitions in Central Library. The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah's Heritage Lottery Funded Coming in from the Cold project has increased engagement with community groups relating to ethnic minority community groups and increasing diversity of collections and engagement from minority communities is a priority for 2021-22.

## **2.3 Feedback and quotes about Manchester Central Library**

Manchester Central Library is as popular as ever for its visitors. It's currently number 13 of 'Things to Do' in Manchester on Tripadvisor.

Review from TripAdvisor in August 2021

"Brilliant History and Building all for FREE! Another one of Manchester's fabulous FREE resources and even if you did have to pay it would be worth it. Fabulous history about Manchester and Greater Manchester, Coronation Street, books, guides, stunning architecture and much more.

Review from Google Oct 2021

"Bumped into this place by accident. But fell in love with it immediately. Manchester people are blessed to have such a nice library"

Review from Tripadvisor October 2020

"A lovely way to spend a couple of hours with interesting exhibits"

Responding to an ongoing survey over the last 18 months at Central Library, 87% of customers said that their visit to Central Library has made them feel happier. This is a key role of Archives services – to improve people's wellbeing.

## **3. Archives+ over the last 12 months**

3.1 This has been a challenging 12 months for Archives+ and its partners but they have continued to provide invaluable services to their customers.

Central Library has remained open throughout the last 12 months despite the pandemic. During 2-3 months of this time, access to the archives has been limited as due to Government restrictions access was only possible for Internet access and to borrow books.

Since July 2021, there has been full access to the archives search room and the archives resources. Visitors to the archives exhibitions and services has steadily increased.

We have created and displayed one Archives exhibition in this period within Archives+. Between June and August, a photographic and video exhibition was produced by Manchester Archives and North West Film Archive to commemorate the life of Duke of Edinburgh and his association with Manchester.

- 3.2 In recognition of the quality and popularity of Archives+, Manchester Central Library has been made the Northern Hub for the 1921 Census of England and Wales. This means we are only one of three venues able to offer free access to the census. This is a fantastic opportunity to enable our residents to gain free access to this historically important information, and to raise the profile of Archives services across the region. The 1921 census became available online via FindMyPast on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021. It provides a fascinating insight into the post-World War I country, and is an invaluable resource for people researching their family history. It is made even more important by the knowledge that no other Census of England and Wales will be released until 2051 as the 1931 Census was destroyed in a fire, and the 1941 Census was not taken because of World War 2. As expected Manchester Central Library has been really busy with people using the 1921 Census since 6<sup>th</sup> January. The support of the experts at the Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society is proving invaluable, with their helpdesk providing support on Monday-Friday, 10.30-3.30.
- 3.3 The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre (AIURC) and Education Trust continued to deliver services remotely during the restrictions with support from Archives+ partners which saw a sharp increase in demand for Anti-racism and Black/Global Majority History material and resources. The RACE Centre continued to deliver events and activities for schools, communities, and researchers to raise awareness of the hidden and marginalised histories in our collections to enable future historians, sociologists, and policy makers to have real stories and lived experience to support more meaningful connection, engagement, and co-curation with all of Greater Manchester's different communities. During 2020/2021 the AIU teams lead and participated in over 50 different workshops, conferences and talks delivered in person and face to face locally, regionally, and nationally. The Education Trust was successful in gaining £50K of Resourcing Racial Justice Funding in November 2020 to support their Covid 19 collecting project for 12 months which enabled the collection of stories where Black, Asian and Global Majority communities that were

disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, framed the narrative, and centred their experiences in what was archived for future generations. The RACE centre and Education Trust was also successful in receiving an extension and uplift of the NLHF funded "Coming in from the Cold" Project. The project that was due to be completed in March 2021 and has supported over 54 community groups to date enabling more diverse heritage and history to be more accessible and visible was awarded a further £250K to continue to build on the work already delivered and ensure sustainability and longer-term support infrastructure to be developed for community heritage projects until August 2023.

- 3.4 The North West Film Archives concentrated on cataloguing and indexing and video digitisation programme during the last 12 months, with over 1,200 titles being added to the catalogue, and over 3500 tapes digitised. Significant public access exhibition work in the year included two NWFA films featured in the Duke of Edinburgh exhibition, NWFA material featuring Jewish Lads Brigade Camps is included in a permanent exhibition in the new Manchester Jewish Museum building; and NWFA material featured in a new film created for the 'Use Hearing Protection' exhibition about Factory Records at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester in June 2021.
- 3.5 Despite the pandemic, the Manchester & Lancashire Family History Society had a successful year. The Society volunteers provided a Virtual Helpdesk Service to replace the suspended face-to-face Family History Helpdesk service which reopened in Manchester Central Library in September 2021, and now operates every Monday-Friday. The Society published a series of Vimeo films illustrating the use of a variety of records available within the library. Collaborations with Archives+ partners included the broadcast of a Podcast heralding the launch in early 2022 of the 1921 Census. The podcast is one of the many features of the Society's year-long project, Census 21, to celebrate the life and times surrounding the year of the 1921 Census. Other items featured included a World Timeline for 1921, a radio play and countless blogs. The MLFHS helpdesk has served more people than ever before since 6<sup>th</sup> January, supporting people with the 1921 census, as outlined in 3.2
- 3.6 Manchester Libraries and Archives was awarded £485,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to be the North West hub of the British Library's Unlocking the UK Sound

Heritage. The project, which runs from 2019 to May 2022, is nearing completion. The hub has so far digitised 3,800 tapes out of a pre-pandemic target of 5,000. Greater Manchester collections completed in the last 12 months include: the Bolton Oral History Project held at Bolton History Centre (1981-1983, 240 oral history cassettes), Oldham Oral Histories held at Oldham Archives (1980s-1990s, 194 cassettes), the Manchester Studies Oral History and Here To Stay immigration collections held at Tameside Local Studies and Archives (1970s-1980s, 500 open tape reels and 140 minidisks), the Working Class Movement Library collection (1970s-1990s, 100 oral history cassettes) and the Royal Northern College of Music (1960s-1990s, 200 concert recordings). Over the last year remote volunteers have contributed 60 days of summarising, clipping and curating audio content. During lockdown the hub contributed to the Manchester Libraries Memory Box project, which made available packages of photographs and sound clips relating to local areas and topics to inspire intergenerational conversations. The team managed a successful music project in lockdown with partners in Liverpool, Morecambe, and Manchester in which young musicians wrote 15 new protest songs in response to newly-digitised oral histories and gig recordings.

- 3.7 We have been working with Manchester Art Gallery and the University of Manchester on the Manchester Together Archive. This project (which supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund) aims to develop a digital archiving platform to support the digitisation, development, and interpretation of more than 10,000 items that were left in the spontaneous memorials in St Ann's Square and elsewhere in Manchester after the Arena attack on 22nd May 2017.
- 3.8 In July 2021 we successfully gathered in, and preserved messages placed on the Marcus Rashford mural in Withington. The mural was defaced following England's loss in the final of the European Championships. In the following week the mural was covered in messages of hope and support from local residents and visitors from across the country. We worked with partners and Marcus himself to gather the messages. When they are returned from Harwell Restoration, we will work with stakeholders to decide next steps in making these messages accessible. This is a great example of contemporary collecting.



## **4. Greater Manchester and Local Studies Partnership over the last 12 months**

- 4.1 This has been a challenging 12 months for GMALSP and each of the individual authorities.
- 4.2 Each authority has had several months where the physical archives services have not been available for the customers, but all are available now. GMALSP partners gave each other advice during this period around service provision in a Covid friendly fashion, and the GMCRO Conservation Officer provided advice to all authorities on such things as quarantining. Even though services were physically closed during this period, Archives+ and GMALSP continued to operate, and in some ways were more important than ever. Most GMALSP members continued to offer a virtual enquiry service. This provided continued access to important material held throughout the various archives.
- 4.3 Wigan Council's state-of-the-art archive facilities was opened in June 2021 at the newly renovated Grade II listed Leigh Town Hall. Thanks to a £1.3m grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and match funding from Wigan Council, visitors were welcomed back into Leigh Town Hall and collections of historical records dating back more than 800 years. Visitors are be able see a brand-new exhibition which celebrates the history of Leigh, Atherton and Tyldesley through the amazing collections in the Borough's historic archives. This new family attraction will also host a programme of activities and events for everyone, designed to bring new audiences to the service. The new facilities include a refurbished searchroom with improved access to collections, a conservation studio for repairing and digitising archives, and state-of-the-art strongrooms for storing and preserving the Borough's historic records. The new archives also features an education space where schools will participate in an exciting new programme of activity.
- 4.4 Each GMALSP service has supported customers with the 1921 Census since 6<sup>th</sup> January, also signposting people to Manchester Central Library for free access to the Census.

## **4.5 GMALSP Action Plan 2020-2023**

Despite the pandemic GMALSP has continued to work effectively together, for the benefit of all 10 GM authorities, to help each authority help cope and recover from the pandemic. Elements of the GMALSP action plan 2020-23 have begun to be progressed.

### **4.5.1 Digital Preservation**

GMCRO created a Digital Preservation Archivist post to support this area of work in July 2020. The Digital Preservation Archivist supported all GMALSP members to ensure they are approaching digital preservation in an effective manner. Some authorities have reduced the risks around digital records by storing records on backed-up server space and GMCRO are now providing a solution to enable all Authorities to do this in 2022.

### **4.5.2 Creating Covid-19 archives: Collecting Manchester people's stories#**

All Archives+ partners and some GMALSP authorities put out calls for collecting of Covid-19 stories of people's lives during lockdown. As restrictions and implications of Covid-19 will be in place for some time in some form, this is an ongoing and long-term exercise.

NWFA have asked for films and have received some extremely interesting videos. AIU RRRC are focusing on the Covid stories of BAME people and have put a huge amount of work in to developing ethical ways to do this. Their work takes into consideration the disproportionate impact of Covid on BAME communities.

Manchester Libraries and Archives have been focusing on the city's response to Covid and the impact felt by the council and community. This work has included a lot of work on born digital records such as staff emails and capturing websites.

Many of the GMALSP Partners are also collecting stories around Covid. Trafford have worked with schools. Tameside Archives have worked with an artist. Stockport and

Wigan have been collecting material from residents and their respective Councils.

#### **4.5.3 Black Lives Matter and diversity**

The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre and Educational Trust have provided support to organisations across the country as the profile of race discrimination have increased over the last 18 months.

This has ever intensified the need for each GMALSP's archives to be able to tell the story of its BAME residents and communities and increasing the diversity of our collections is a key priority for coming years.

#### **4.5.4 GM Lives Replacement**

GM Lives, which is the web portal for GM Archives, is not fit for purpose, and for a number of years an alternative solution to showcase GM Archives in a much more effective, customer focused way.

Significant progress has been made with this. Using our Greater Manchester Library Management System contract, 3 GM Authorities have now migrated their Archives data. Trafford and Manchester will soon be live, joining Stockport on the system. It is likely more authorities will follow. A web portal will soon be developed to provide access to a joint catalogue to all authorities archives that are on the system. This will be funded by the New Burdens funding received by GMCRO. This funding is awarded for the transfer of the public records from across Greater Manchester to GMCRO on behalf of services which are not approved Places of Deposit.

### **5.0 Future Priorities**

#### **5.1 Future Priorities for Archives+**

- The Archives+ Exhibition area will benefit from a refresh due to Manchester City Council capital funding. This will make the equipment in the exhibition area sustainable for the next seven years. The refresh will also involve the development and rebranding of the film pods. They will become 'Sound and Vision', including

NWFA material, the new BFI Library product, some content from the Unlocking Our Sound Heritage and material from MMU's Voices project which is researching Greater Manchester accents.

- 1921 Census now available via Find My Past and free to access at Manchester Central Library will continue to be extremely popular with family history researchers and will bring opportunities for Archives+ to raise the profile of the partnership.
- The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah RACE Centre (AIURC) and Education Trust will continue its Coming in From the Cold project, supporting community heritage projects until August 2023. It will continue to Centre continued to deliver events and activities for schools, communities, and researchers to raise awareness of the hidden and marginalised histories in our collections.
- The Unlocking Our Sound Heritage comes to a close in May 2022. The hub now runs an income-generating digitisation-on-demand service. As we approach the last six months of the project, the focus is now on fundraising, accessibility, and advocacy so that we can continue the work of saving the region's sound archives, even when the formal funded project is completed.
- The NWFA has recently submitted a significant application bid to the AHRC to facilitate the purchase of two new film scanners, which will enable the digitisation and preservation of some our most at risk film material, as well as enhance the amount of digitised material available for access and exhibitions. Heritage 2022 will continue to develop including 1,000 titles from this material being added to the BFI Replay platform by the end of 2022. The NWFA's programme of public film shows will resume when possible, with material being screened to general and specialist audiences across the region. NWFA online catalogues and the film pods will be updated with new content catalogued during lockdown – over 3,000 new titles available.
- The Manchester and Lancashire Family History Society Helpdesk will resume full-time, from the beginning of 22. Events include a Family History Fair scheduled for March. January will see the release of the 1921 Census Returns by FindMyPast,

and there will be an event to conclude the year-long Census 21. Project work will include the Catholic Registers Indexes project covering Manchester & Salford Dioceses and the Zion Letters project begun with help from the Jewish Museum. By far the most prestigious project, however, will be the resumption of the scanning of the Admission Registers of the Royal Manchester School for the Deaf and Dumb, to be completed in time for delivery to the trustees of The Seashell Trust for inclusion in the School's bi-centenary celebrations in 2023.

## 5.2 Future Priorities for GMALSP

In January 2020, a workshop was held with all GM authorities to decide on the priorities for the 2020-23 GMALSP plan. Although the pandemic has forced Archives services to concentrate on different priorities in the short term, these remain our future vision, and will be the focus of the partnership for the next 18 months. The following is a summary of the priorities agreed at this workshop, plus the priority for Archives+ and our post-Covid recovery priorities:

- **Reopen all our physical archive services.** Providing full access to archives for our residents and researchers and supporting the recovery of the region
- **Collection of Covid Archives.** All partners to continue to collect stories and make these available in an effective manner.
- **Diversity and Inclusion and contemporary collecting.** Ensure we make our archives more representative of the diverse populations within Greater Manchester. Diversify our volunteer base and increase the diversity of audiences. Develop approaches to contemporary collecting, using some of the techniques used as part of the Covid stories collecting. Work together on certain collections for example Local Authority records, Adoption and Care records.
- **Digital by Design.** We will continue to work with partners to digitise our collections and make them available online, through several authorities going live with Archives web catalogue and a GM Archives catalogue being produced

- **Digital Preservation.** GMCRO is supporting each of the GMALSP authorities to decide on the most appropriate set of actions to benefit each authority, including preserving digital records in backed up server spaces
- **Engagement, Advocacy and Events.** Ensure archives services use local, regional, national, and international commemorations, celebrations, and events to increase the profile of archives and increase audiences. This includes GM Festival of Libraries in June 2022. Census 1921 is now available via Find My Past and free to access at Manchester Central Library will continue to be extremely popular with family history researchers and will bring opportunities for Archives+ to raise the profile of the partnership.
- **Learning.** Continue to work with schools and partners to ensure the archive collections are used as an inspiration for education, life-long learning developing new skills and creating a strong sense of place.
- **Income Generation.** Ensure a multi-stranded approach to raising income and providing sustainability
- **Procedures, Policies and Raising Standards** – GMALSP work with each other to ensure high levels of customer service and preservation of archives
- **Partnership.** We will continue to build capacity by working in partnership with the Archives+ partners and the local universities

## 6.0 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to note the progress of Archives+ and the Greater Manchester Archives and Local Studies Partnership.