

News from the Source



Partners' and friends' update from Worcester Archive Source Project

Greetings again from the Worcester Archive Source Project and welcome to our fourth newsletter

We are based at the Worcestershire Record Office until March 2012, working on our Heritage Lottery Funded Project to catalogue and share the contents of the Worcester City archive.

We have bid a temporary goodbye, with our very best wishes, to Beth who has gone on maternity leave until June 2011. In the meantime, your newsletter is being produced by Adrian Gregson, though we suggest any contacts on outreach matters be sent to Beth's manager, Paul Hudson, in the first instance. Paul's email is given below.

Kat has recently celebrated her second anniversary with us and has unearthed more treasures which you can find out about later on. There has been an exciting step forward in that the Record Office is closer to having an on-line catalogue. There is still much work to do but piloting has been taking place and we hope for real progress by the end of the year. Obviously, this has a key impact on this WASP project and the ability for people to be able to search the WASP archives using an online index.

Before she went off, Beth was working with community groups in Dines Green, at the Green Centre, as well as with Asian and Caribbean women in the City Centre Community Centre. More of this later. She had also completed a series of sessions in St. George's RC Primary School that should start to serve as a sustainable model for future school/record office involvement.

Contact: Kathryn Steenson – WASP Cataloguing Archivist KSteenson@worcestershire.gov.uk
Paul Hudson – Record Office Outreach Manager PHudson2@worcestershire.gov.uk

Forthcoming WASP events

WASP is still involved in outreach work despite Beth's absence.

"Mr. Beane the mediaeval merchant" – 10am – 4pm Monday 26th July at The Commandery (as part of The Festival of Archaeology)

Heritage Open Weekend 10th September – with *Discover History* – including a tour of Worcester starting at 10.30, 2.30 and 6.00, with a review of documents associated with places in the tour, back at the History Centre

Evening talk on public health documents, for the George Marshall Medical Museum on 29th September

Still in the planning stages are more work with primary schools this Autumn and in Spring 2011, a community-based activity in the Warndon and Gorse Hill area later next year, a project with a secondary school, and an exhibition and community project leading up to the opening of the new Worcester History Centre and Library in 2012.

We are always happy to talk to groups who are interested in working with us, and things are always changing, so keep an eye on our website: www.worcestershire.gov.uk/wasp

Building on success – St. George's school revisited



After the successful work done with St. George's Catholic Primary School in Autumn 2009, Beth was invited back to follow up the sessions across all year groups.

This level of sustainability is one of the key objectives of the WASP project – being able to embed interest and connections between the Record Office and education partners. Such successful projects rely of course on the teachers' interest and involvement – and we have been lucky in our pilots - but also the children being engaged and informed in new ways.

Each year group had slightly different sessions:

Years 1 and 2 – "What were homes like in the past?"

Year 3 – "How has life changed in our local area?"

Year 5 – "Lives of the Tudor rich and poor"

Year 6 – "What was it like to be a Victorian poor child?"

The sessions were interactive and hands on for the pupils and met many requirements of the new curriculum on Personal Learning and Thinking Skills. Year 5 even created some short dramas based on what they had learnt in their session. Much of the material was about the Tudor clothier, Arnold Beane, a favourite with WASP audiences!

The sessions working with Years 1,2,3,5 and 6 are now available to share with other classes in schools across the City, delivered by the Record Office through its Learning Group. For any further information please contact Paul Hudson at the History Centre.

Volunteer Profile

Sarah Burlace has been working with us from the early days of WASP. She first got involved on the Worcester College of Technology/Worcestershire Lifestyles project – 'An Archive Source map of old St. Andrew's parish'. Since then Sarah has caught the history bug. She spent some three months doing research for the Dines Green project last year. This Spring she has spent another three months as an outreach assistant for the Asian Women's Group. Sarah helped to bring the sessions alive by coming in Victorian costume, as a matron of the workhouse/House of industry (see picture).



Sarah is excellent at making group participants feel welcome and involved and is great at reminding staff of everyone's name! She is also better than Beth at reading old documents! A big thank you is due to Sarah for her work and interest.

Meanwhile, our volunteers have continued with work, researching characters and places for use in the GIS map that is being put together. (Work on the GIS project is progressing and is now sat with the Council's IT department to form the links with Kat's cataloguing work) The cataloguing volunteering continues apace. The transcription of the Freeman's Registers has reached almost 1500 entries, which will shortly be available to search from the Record Office webpage. Other volunteers continue bundle-listing schools and Court of Pleas records.



Hilary, Lynda and Helen are pictured working on their research.

We are always keen to hear from new volunteers who have some experience of documentary research. For more information contact Kat on 01905 728704

Asian and African Caribbean Women celebrate city centre history



The Asian and Caribbean Women's Group project based at the city centre community centre was completed and we held a celebration day on the outcomes. Ten women had been involved – 6 Pakistani and 4 of Jamaican origin. They spent five weeks exploring the local history of the area, looking at the records of the House of Industry, the Commandery, Fort Royal and the Civil War, the battle in Sidbury, Lea and Perrins, the gloving industry, and records of individual houses.

The women thought the investigations into the House of industry, looking at accounts of the Poor, the Hop Market Charity Committee and the public health records, were most interesting. The relationship between these records and times and their own lives was particularly enlightening.

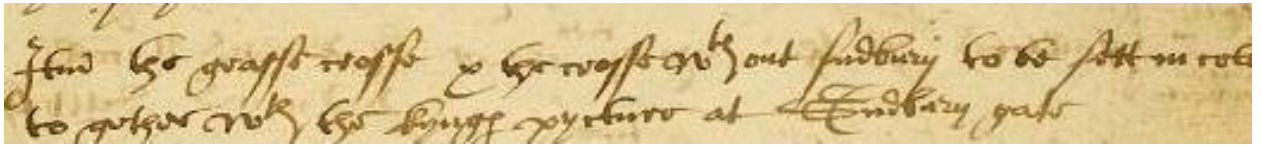
The women were able to share their thoughts on life in the past and also reflected on their own life stories. Some of this was embroidered in Urdu onto a collage art piece.

The activities were created with the help of community artist, Kate Brookes on 17th May and Beth was able to say goodbye in style with a joint event with Age Concern at the City Community Centre. About sixty people came along to see the artwork the group had created and sample some South Asian food and traditional Henna handpainting.

Children were involved in 'I Spy' to spot things on the artwork – for instance rows of houses modelled on the Speed map, a bottle of Worcester sauce, pockets of spices, secretary hand from a Chamber Order Book and a map of Fort Royal. The children also hung 'wishes from history' on Asian and English flags. There were Henna tattoos, a local history exhibit and a Black History display.



Wonderful WASP words No. 4 (and 5!) – Secretary hand



Secretary Hand. Anyone who has used documents from the 15th to the 17th centuries will have encountered this style of handwriting. It looks daunting because of its unfamiliar letter shapes, such as the backwards 'e', sporadic ligature 's' and the sloped 'h'. Handwriting was taught by private writing masters and in the first public schools founded during this time. It was considered one of the quickest forms of handwriting to write and one of the easiest to read, and came to be used for personal and legal papers as well as the business, government and commerce uses implied by its name.

Kathryn's Corner In each newsletter we will bring you a flavour of the Worcester City Collection by explaining some of the document highlights. This time it's the turn of:

Petition against the Chief Constable – from his own men! 1892

This document may not be pretty, but it is certainly revealing! It is a petition signed by constables and sergeants in the Worcester Police force declaring that they had lost confidence in the Chief Constable Arthur Sommers as a truthful and sober man. In 1892, he involved in a drunken assault against his wife in the Police Charge House. In the words of a witness, Sergeant Thomas: "Mrs Sommers came running into the Charge Room screaming and said I must come to you for protection Sergt he has kicked me...he rushed at his wife and struck her a violent blow on the face and she fell down on the floor and fainted". Sommers then threatened to drown himself in the River Severn and fled into the High Street, where the commotion had attracted a crowd. Despite being Chief Constable for only 8 years, Sommers had previously had a disagreement with Viscount Cobham over policing. The public attack on his wife was the last straw: questioning of other police officers revealed that Sommers had frequently been drunk on duty and had been suspected of embezzling police funds. Presented with these serious accusations and this petition, he had little choice but to resign (on the grounds of ill health).

