

Peterborough's Archives Strategy



Making Peterborough's archival heritage accessible to all so that individuals and communities are empowered to learn about their past and celebrate in their preserved heritage

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Introduction

Archives are essentially written records that are preserved because of their historical importance.

They begin life as day-to-day records generated by individuals, businesses or corporate bodies that are then kept because they explain the actions and lives of the people or bodies that created them.

They are then made available to use by the 'school child, the student, the researcher, the family or village historian, the individual seeking evidence of their identity or rights, and the citizen wishing to explore almost any topic of interest'¹.

When the archives of a local area like Peterborough are brought together and made available for public use, they collectively provide a vast cultural resource that shows what Peterborough was like in the past, how and why it has developed in the way that it has, how communities have come and gone, and how individuals have lived and died. This past enables individuals to feel proud of where they have come from, and helps them to find their own place in this shared history.

Every individual or group that uses the archives is participating in a powerful learning experience; by using a unique archive document they connect to the City's past and through this connection they then begin to use essential life skills that enable them to analyse, compare, and interpret the documents before them.

Our place is to support these processes by collecting in a wide and varied range of unique archives; by safe-guarding them and making them easily accessible to all; by supporting the learning process; and by providing interpretations of the collections we hold. These service priorities put us in a strong position to contribute to the City's plans for improvement as expressed in the Cultural Vision, the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the Children and Young People Plan. This strategy will place our actions within this wider framework and will explore the developments we need to make to ensure we can make a valid contribution.

¹ *Listening to the Past, Speaking to the Future*, Report of the Archives Taskforce, MLA, 2004

Statutory framework for the service

- The Local Government (Records) Acts (principally 1962, 1972 and 1992) requires local authorities to make proper arrangements for promoting adequate use of their own records and other records in their custody. It empowers county councils (and via the 1992 Act unitary authorities) to acquire records created by others by purchase, gift or deposit.
- The Public Record Act of 1958 provides for the deposit of Public records in places other than The National Archives, provided these places have been appointed as places of deposit by the Lord Chancellor. Appointment depends on the provision of adequate facilities for storage and safe-keeping and for public access as defined in the Act, determined by inspection.
- Manorial and tithe records are specifically governed by statute; here too local places of deposit are recognised following inspection.
- The care of Parochial records is governed by the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, 1978, stipulating the designation in each diocese of one or more diocesan record office. Almost universally local authority record offices have been appointed to this role.
- An increasing body of legislation governs access to records, particularly the authority's administrative records. Specific classes of these records must be preserved, and public access provided, under the Acts of Parliament and secondary legislation.
 - The Local Government Act, 1972 provides local electors with the right to see the minutes of a local authority, an abstract of the accounts, and any report by an auditor on these accounts; any order for the payment of money; and any record required to be deposited with a local authority.
 - The Local Government Act 1974 establishes the Commission for Local Administration to investigate written complaints of injustice arising from mal-administration by a local authority, and provides that records relevant to the investigation must be produced.
 - The Data Protection Act 1998 protects the rights of data subjects to personal privacy while facilitating the free flow of information within the EU and relates to records structured around the names of individuals.
 - The Freedom of Information Act is opening the way for far wider statutory access to local authority (and other) records. The Lord Chancellor has issued a Code of Practice under Section 46 of the act on the Management of Records by Public Bodies which states 'records selected for permanent preservation and no longer in regular use by the authority should be transferred as soon as possible to an archival institution that has adequate storage and public access facilities'.

Our service in context

Peterborough Archives Service was launched on 13 November 2004, based in Peterborough Central Library.

Peterborough City Council has employed an Archives Officer and Archives Assistant as the services' core members of staff. However, the Archives Officer now also line manages the Local Studies librarian because of the natural link between archives and local studies and family history which have long been a part of the Central Library's offer. A solid integration between these services will make best use of resources and ensure that the customer's experience of using resources whether 'library' or 'archive' based is as seamless as possible.

As the Peterborough Archives Service is a relatively new venture for the council it is worth outlining the 9 traditional functions of a local government run Archive Service:

- **Acquiring** archive material, including records generated by the Council that are identified as worthy of long-term preservation and records of other significant institutions, organizations and individuals that relate to the heritage of the area
- **Storing** these archives in conditions that ensure their long-term preservation in accordance with recognized professional standards such as BS 5454
- **Conserving** these archives by undertaking remedial conservation work where necessary and copying these records onto other formats in order to safe guard the preservation of the originals
- **Providing information** about the archives holdings by describing the collections (usually in the form of lists, finding aids and guides) and making these descriptions as widely available as possible
- **Providing access** to these archives with onsite facilities for public consultation of the records in a secure and supervised environment
- **Undertaking outreach** to ensure that the service is known and seen as accessible to all the various types of people who live in or visit the Peterborough area
- **Promoting learning** by running events and activities to reach target audiences to contribute to a culture of life long learning within the community
- **Developing a virtual service** by maintaining and enhancing the services' web site and online information services
- **Answering enquiries** on all aspects of the service and its holdings and providing a paid research service when necessary

These functions are all vital components of the service we seek to offer to Peterborough residents. Underpinning these is our main driver as championed by the Museum Library and Archives Council (MLA)'s Archives Taskforce where

we want to place the user and the contribution and impact that archives can make on individuals and communities at the centre of our service provision. Our vision is the same as that championed by the task force:

An archival heritage unlocked and made open to all citizens in a way that empowers them to use archives for personal, community, social and economic benefit

Traditionally, the role of archives has been focused on preserving the past, and the aspects of the service that ensure the security of the records in our care have been placed at the forefront of the services' role. However, it is now recognized universally across the sector that although these are vital components of the services we provide, they are support functions which build a framework around which users can experience, learn and benefit from the resources that we hold. It is the impact that archives can have on the individual and communities that is the main focus of our provision.

We believe that by focusing on action to advance this vision, real progress can be achieved and significant social value delivered. Long term sustainability will come from engaging as many people as possible with the archival heritage whether for learning, personal development, business use or community activism

The focus on the use of archives by individuals and communities enables us to explore our current service offer and identify key service developments under the following themes:

- Personal and community well-being and health
- Community cohesion and celebrating diversity
- Life long learning and education
- Sense of pride, identity and belonging

Service development areas explored

1. Personal and community well-being and health

The archives that we hold are open to everyone to come and use for any research purpose. Interestingly, 85% of our current users are motivated to access the archive collections out of a personal interest, 10% use the archives to support their formal education and 5% use them in connection with their business or work. It is worth highlighting that those that come out of personal interest, are motivated to use our resources for the sheer enjoyment of doing so. They use the archives for personal gain, ultimately for the sense of well-being that perusing their topic of interest gives to them.

The sense of well-being that using archives gives to those users is at the core of our service. However, we currently only have a small customer base which needs to increase to justify the work that we do in collecting and safe guarding the collections that we hold.

We have recently moved our local studies and archives research facilities from the first floor of the library to the ground floor as part of the Central Library refurbishment. This has meant that we now have a larger dedicated research space for our users. This is a significant improvement that provides a more solid basis for encouraging greater use of our collections. This move has also cemented the integration between archives, local studies and family history which now operate from the same space. Again, this provides a stronger structure from which to encourage greater use of our resources as users can be encouraged to cross over from one type of material to another.

Over the last four years we have promoted our collections and services through exhibitions, and have sought to have a presence at cultural events in the City, in order to promote our offer. In reality this has not led to a take up of our services, and it is recognized that we have not been clear enough about who we are targeting through these promotions.

Success in engaging new users has come when we have been proactive in seeking partners who are already working with identifiable groups of individuals. We have then been able offer structured learning opportunities to these established groups based on our collections.

We found considerable benefit from working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mental Health Partnership Trust running an eight week series of local history workshops with mental health patients. Through this we aimed to inspire the participants to become passionate about their local history, introduced them to the sources available, and taught them the skills they need to conduct individual research in the future. The benefits to the participants was a sense of enjoyment and achievement with raised self esteem, and we did see an ongoing

take up of our service from those individuals. Fostering these sorts of relationships with other providers is fundamental to the future of our service and vital to our ability to deliver under the City's priorities.

As take up of our research facilities increases we need to work closely with senior managers in the Central Library to ensure that adequate resourcing of the archives and local history area is maintained. We want to ensure that the quality of what we offer does not decrease as a result of higher demand.

2. Community cohesion and celebrating diversity

As the written heritage of the city, the archives that we hold document the coming together and growth of communities in Peterborough and can be used to celebrate the diversity and richness that comes from changing patterns of migration in and out of the City. There is therefore so much potential within our service to make a fantastic contribution to community cohesion.

As active collectors of material that documents the history of Peterborough, there is much work needed to ensure that the material we take in adequately reflects the communities that now exist in Peterborough. This means working to foster relationships with key community leaders so that a relationship of trust is built up between the service and community groups, so that new material is offered to the archive from all sectors of the City.

To kick start this process, we are looking to set up a community project based around local areas in Peterborough where we teach groups from each local area about the area's history, and then work with them to collect new material in to document the present. This project is currently in the early stages of development and will be dependent on a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

3. Lifelong learning and education

The use of archives and local studies by individuals who are motivated by personal interest and enjoyment is the very definition of lifelong learning. Our user base is predominantly made up of individuals over the age of 65, who are keeping their minds active, and learning new research skills through personal research into their family tree or local area.

We already support this process by running regular family history taster sessions, and we run annual sessions for the local University of the Third Age group, Peterborough Family History Group and the Peterborough Local History Group.

However, we also have a part to play in the formal education process which needs to be further exploited. We have recently successfully undertaken

sessions with adult literacy groups and run a session for Northborough School Year 5 (Key Stage 2 History). We have also developed links with Peterborough Regional College by giving lectures for 2nd year degree History students on History today module and 3rd Year Archaeology & landscape students. These sessions have proved that our resources are an excellent base for supporting key stages within the National Curriculum, and also for adult education programmes held locally.

We need to explore developing partnerships within the Central Library and other local heritage organizations (such as the museum) to ensure that we can further contribute to the work already ongoing with local schools and colleges. Our aim is to deliver sessions to schools and colleges on a rolling programme rather than an ad hoc basis. Due to our small team this will need to be achieved through partnership with other heritage based council services who have built up the necessary expertise and links.

In order to support learning across the board, whether that is the individual coming to use our research facilities for lifelong learning or the school child coming as part of a group visit we need accurate and up to date information of what material we have. If the material is not adequately described it ultimately cannot be accessed and we are actually storing material that is useless to our customers. We have taken in large volumes of archive material from our predecessor authorities (Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire) that is currently inaccessible because we do not have the necessary staff capacity for cataloguing. We are currently developing a strategy for handling our backlogs which is the first step necessary to secure outside funding for carrying out this vital background task.

Another vital component to supporting the learning process is being able to provide information about our holdings on the web and developing a virtual element to our service. To this end we have already brought and developed a complete archive management system (CALM for Archives) that enables all of our background work (collecting, cataloguing, answering enquiries etc) to be handled centrally through one database. We are now procuring the Internet module that will allow our customers to search and view our catalogues online. This is a big step forward in terms of the quality of service we can offer our users. Previously, searching for a relevant archive collection meant trawling through large WORD based catalogues. With the new software, a free text search will retrieve all the collections relevant to the user's individual interest.

4. Sense of pride, identity and belonging

Fostering a sense of pride, identity and belonging is a thread that runs through all that we provide as a service because our resources revolve around family genealogy and the local area. Our work to target specific groups such as mental

health patients, and those in formal education programmes, will increase our ability to contribute to this agenda further.

As we are confident that this is an area where we already make a valuable contribution we need to explore methods of capturing the pride and sense of identity that our individual users come away with from using our resources. The family historian who has just pieced together the missing part of the family puzzle or learnt a fascinating fact about one of their ancestors is literally bursting when they relay those gems back to members of staff. It has now been 4 years since we last conducted any structured customer consultation, and we will therefore be working on a project to gather evidence of customer satisfaction from the services we provide.

As a service we are immensely proud of the resources that we hold relating to Peterborough. Our collections date back to the thirteenth century and are unique and irreplaceable. We are proud to meet national standards in the storage of archives, and the quality of our storage is indicative of the value we place on Peterborough's heritage. However, we are reaching full capacity with our current store, and need to begin looking at strategies for expansion to ensure that we can continue to store incoming collections to the highest possible standards.

Similarly, as our collections grow we need to ensure that we can look after them to the highest possible standards. We are finding that we are increasingly taking in material that is badly damaged and needs remedial work done to it before it can be used by the public. We do not have in-house facilities for carrying out specialist conservation work and we therefore need to work on setting up a Service Level Agreement with a local authority or a private conservator to ensure that we can get our material conserved when necessary. We also need to assess the equipment that we do have for cleaning and packaging with a view to increasing what we can do ourselves to save on outside costs.

Service Development Areas - Overview



Our store is reaching the end of its capacity.

We need to explore options to extend current storage or find a suitable alternative.

We also need to look into ways of managing the conservation of our collections.



Our new local studies and archives room is open to the public to use on a self-service basis during Central Library opening times. Appointments to access the archive collections with dedicated staff support can be made Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.

This is our core service provision – access to unique resources for any person with any purpose.

We need to work with the Central Library to look at the resourcing of the self-service provision to ensure that customers are adequately supported in their use and are provided with quality guidance in their research regardless of when they visit.



Increasing our impact on the City's priorities and increasing our user base by:

- Working with partners to provide structured learning opportunities for under represented groups - building on the success of our work with mental health patients
- Working with other cultural services to tap into schools and colleges and offer appropriate formal learning opportunities
- Running a community based project which looks at the past and documents the future – empowering participants to provide us with their living history



We want to make it clear to customers what we hold in our collections so that they can then use our resources for their own purposes. We therefore need to develop a strategy for handling our cataloguing backlogs.

We also want our users to be able to search our catalogues online. To this end we will be installing the internet module of CALM for Archives and will continue work to customize this complete archives management system to our purposes.



In order to document the services' strengths we need to gather in feedback from our users.

This is especially important following our relocation and improved research space.

Service Development Areas – Action Plan

Areas for Development	Where we want to be	Actions to get us there	Timescale
<p><i>Personal and community well being and health</i></p> <p>Offer learning sessions to targeted community groups</p>	<p>Run rolling programme of partnership projects – maximum of 2 per year with current staffing capacity</p>	<p>Contact Mental Health Trust and offer to run new project with new group to sustain link</p> <p>Identify new partners and work on building relationships/developing learning offers</p>	<p>2008</p> <p>2008 onwards</p>
<p><i>Personal and community well being and health</i></p> <p>Use and staffing of public local studies and archives room</p>	<p>Ensure the public have access to dedicated member of staff at all times during opening hours</p>	<p>Conduct review of use against current staffing</p> <p>Put forward proposals on resourcing to Senior Managers</p> <p>Implement agreed proposals</p>	<p>February 2009</p> <p>March 2009</p> <p>2009 onwards</p>
<p><i>Community Cohesion and Celebrating Diversity</i></p> <p>Engage with residents from key areas in Peterborough. Empower them to discover their areas' past and enable them to share and document their experiences to build up a picture of the present day (the archives of the future).</p>	<p>Develop HLF bid for community project based around the Peterborough Development Corporation Archive</p>	<p>Research potential partner organizations and gather letters of support</p> <p>Build up key community contacts</p> <p>Meet with HLF advisor</p> <p>Develop and submit bid</p>	<p>2009-2011</p>
<p><i>Lifelong learning and education</i></p> <p>Develop learning offer to schools and colleges based around archive resources</p>	<p>Rolling programme of school and college sessions</p>	<p>Develop links with other learning providers within the council with a heritage focus (i.e. museum/library)</p> <p>Develop resources/sessions using archives</p> <p>Develop strategy for engaging with schools/colleges to get a manageable take up of offer</p>	<p>2009-2011</p>

<p><i>Lifelong learning and education</i></p> <p>Develop strategy for handling cataloguing backlogs</p>	<p>Cataloguing backlog properly documented and assessed</p> <p>Significant reduction in backlog in the next 5 years</p>	<p>Customize CALM to record, monitor and prioritize cataloguing backlog</p> <p>Apply for outside funding for reducing backlog</p>	<p>2008 onwards</p>
<p><i>Lifelong learning and education</i></p> <p>Develop and enhance our online information service</p>	<p>Fully searchable online catalogues for all our collections</p>	<p>Procure and install internet module for CALM</p> <p>Develop web pages with ICT</p> <p>Launch catalogues</p> <p>Review provision and scope out project for developing authority files and indexing to support searching</p>	<p>November 2008</p> <p>January 2009</p> <p>April 2009</p> <p>September 2009</p>
<p><i>Sense of pride, identity and belonging</i></p> <p>Customer consultation exercise</p>	<p>Assess current satisfaction levels and capture the archive services contribution to sense of pride</p>	<p>Develop methodology</p> <p>Conduct survey</p> <p>Review results</p>	<p>2009 onwards</p>
<p><i>Sense of pride, identity and belonging</i></p> <p>Archive quality storage for growing collections</p>	<p>Secure BS5454 compliant storage for the next 5-15 years</p>	<p>Conduct options appraisal</p> <p>Submit report and recommendations to senior managers</p>	<p>2009 onwards</p>
<p><i>Sense of pride, identity and belonging</i></p> <p>Secure facilities and expertise for conservation of collections</p>	<p>A clear strategy for ensuring we can get conservation work done on our collections when needed</p>	<p>Research possibility of setting up Service Level Agreement with neighboring local authority for conducting conservation work</p> <p>Develop our in-house range of equipment and levels of expertise</p>	<p>2009 onwards</p>

Performance Indicators

In 2007, Peterborough Archives Service was inspected and appointed as a Place of Deposit for Public Records by the National Archives. This means that we are entrusted by the National Archives to hold and provide access to records that are produced by national government, and we will be offered material that is of local significance to Peterborough. This marks a significant achievement for our service, which was established only 3 years prior to being given this status.

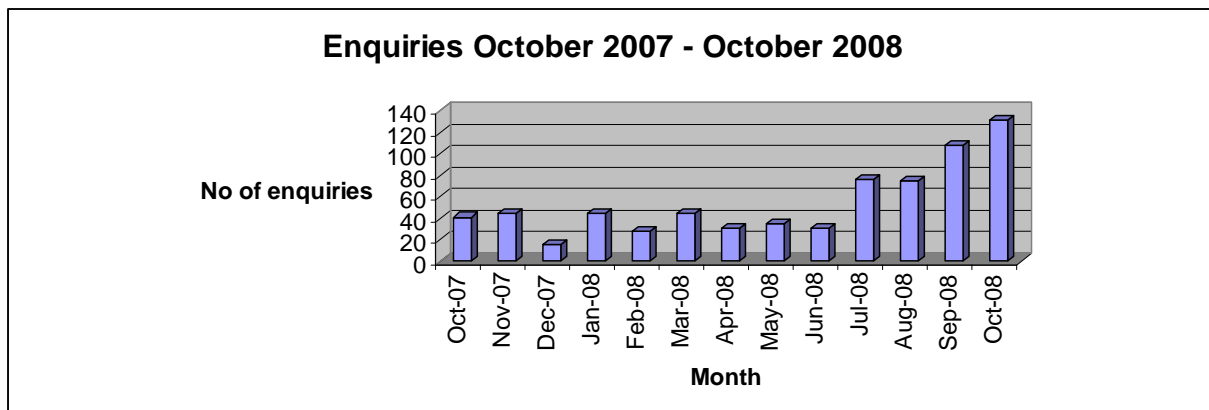
We now participate in the National Archives annual self assessment exercise which rigorously marks our provision and performance against standards in the care and use of archives. In 2007 we were rated as a 1 star service which is in line with national trends for unitary authority services (we are still awaiting our rating for 2008).

It is our aim to move to a two star service and to help us achieve this transition we will be subscribing to the National Archives *Standard for Record Repositories* which also assesses the service against a key set of criteria. The National Archives are then committed to help us to identify ways to improve, which in turn will help us with our self assessment rating.

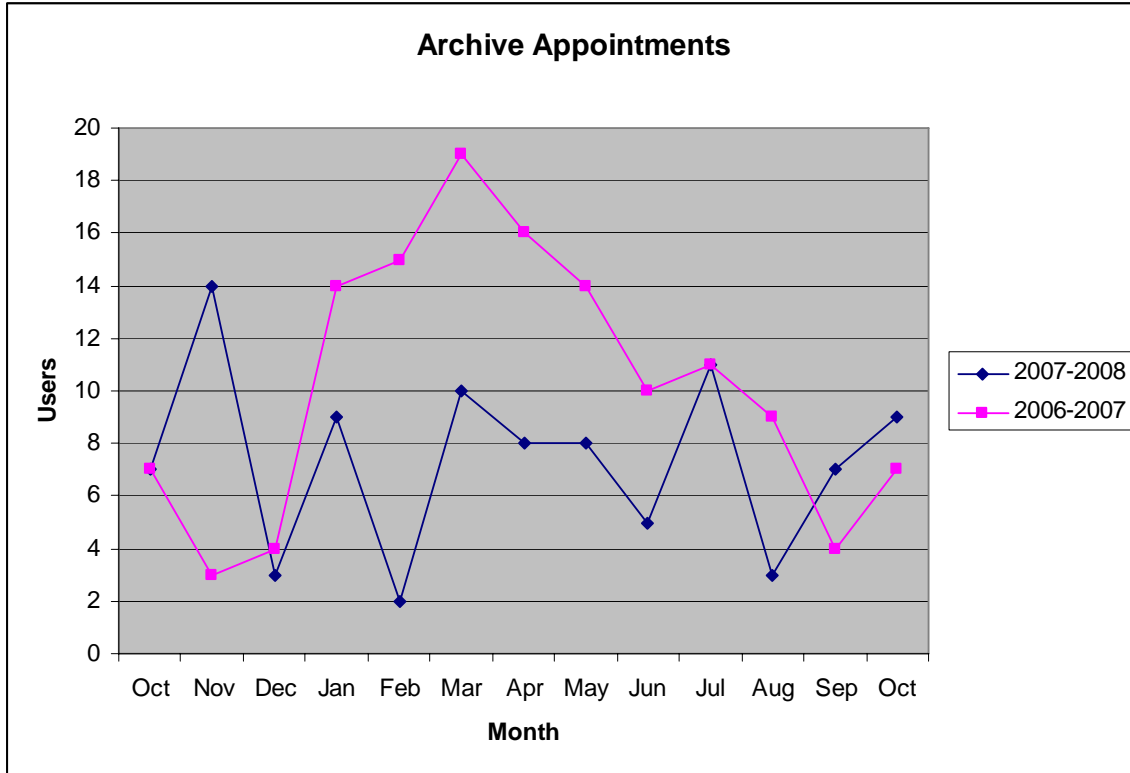
In 2007, our weakest area was identified as access and outreach and this strategy therefore has a strong focus on increasing and diversifying our customer base which must be a priority if we are to achieve the desired rating increase.

When we receive our score from the 2008 survey we will be putting together a detailed improvement plan which will set out in detail the actions necessary to move us into the next rating bracket.

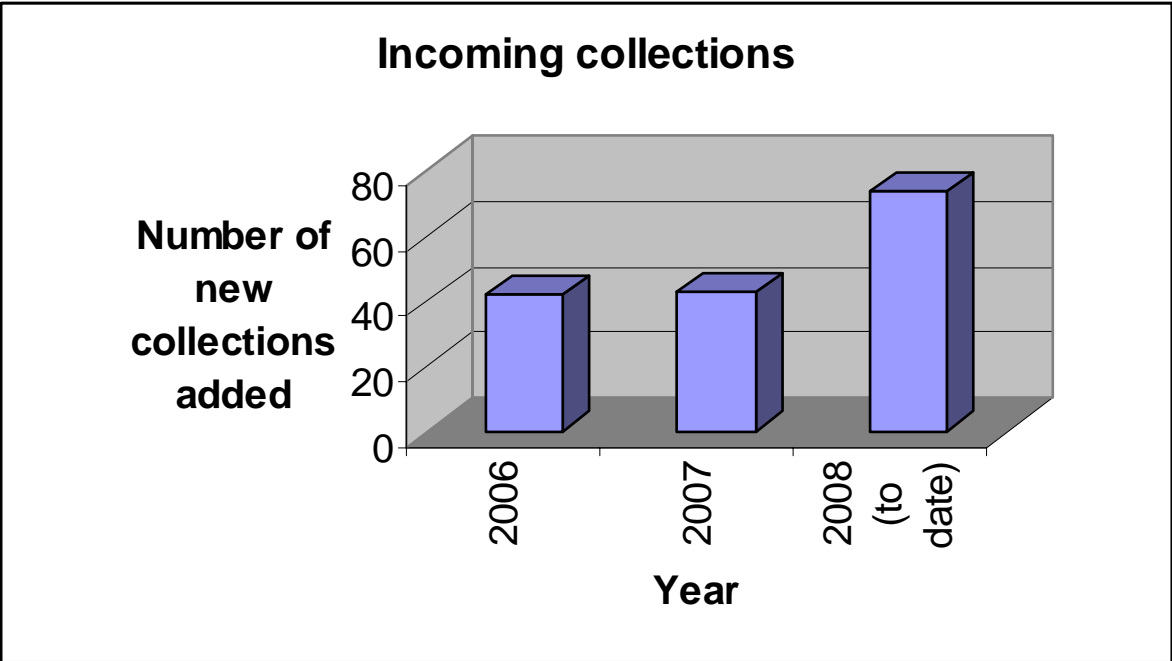
Current use/growth of the service



We moved into our new local studies and archives reading room in July 2008 and the above graph shows how our dealings with customers has dramatically increased through this improved arrangement. Archive staff are now much better placed to deal with face to face enquiries.



In terms of appointments to view archive collections, the graph shows that numbers have dropped this year compared to last year. Our usage by groups has remained more stable with 92 users visiting as part of a group this year compared to 94 in 2006/2007. However, the downward trend in use by individuals is indicative of the need to work to strengthen and diversify our customer base.



As the above graph illustrates we have had a significant increase in the number of incoming collections this year, partly due to multiple deposits from Cambridgeshire Archives Service. This increase does put pressure on our ability to process and catalogue material ready for customers to use. Identifying ways of handling our backlogs is therefore important if this new pattern of growth continues.

Conclusion

Over the next 5 years we need to ensure that we can grow and diversify our customer base so that the richness that archives can bring to the lives of individuals and communities is fully exploited. In doing this we must continue to maintain the high standards that we have set in the care and preservation of the collections that we hold so that future generations will also be able to benefit from our holdings.

The next 5 years needs to be a time when the service thrives, and as this happens we need to ensure that we have the infrastructure to be able to cope with the necessary increases in demand, working in partnership with the library and others to offer a quality service to all that come to use us.