

Report of Supporting Norfolk's Archive Ecology Consultation Event Regarding Cataloguing Support Needs

Norfolk Record Office - 12 July 2018: 18:30-20:30

Attendance

The event was hosted by the Norfolk Record Office ('NRO') and was attended by 17 people representing the following organisations: Carleton Rode History Group; Heacham History Group; Loddon and District Local History Group; Make Your Mark; Neatishead, Barton Turf and Irstead Community Heritage Group; Newton Flotman and Saxlingham Thorpe Heritage Group; Norfolk Industrial Archaeology Society; Norfolk Wherry Trust; Reepham Archive; Surlingham Local Interest Group; Loddon Parish Study; Waveney Heritage CIC; as well as an individual with a large family archive of family papers. The event was advertised using the NRO's mailing list and social media.

Timetable of the event

After the County Archivist introduced the *Supporting Norfolk's Archive Ecology* project ('SNAE') attendees were invited to introduce themselves and to describe their activities, aspirations and issues regarding managing digital objects and digitisation. This developed into a discussion of what the attendees wanted from the NRO in terms of advice and actions. Where appropriate, the NRO commented on their approach. Digital communication fell outside of the discussion.

Details of attendees current situation regarding digitisation and managing digital objects

In most instances, the groups identified their digital assets as being digital representation of heritage objects, a few identified their cataloguing outputs and typescript transcripts as being digital assets which themselves needed to be managed.

One of the groups estimated their digital assets as taking up about 1.5 TB of storage space. Other groups referred to their collection as thousands of files. Some groups, which had either recently become established or were about to establish themselves, as well as the individual holder of a large family collection, were after advice on how to get started with digitisation and managing digital objects.

The main purpose of digitisation, after the creation of surrogate digital masters from borrowed items in private hands, was for exhibitions, publication of hard copies and the creation of hard copies for use locally by the community and researchers. Except for one or two groups, the creation of large series of digital images for online dissemination did not appear to be a current priority. Other purposes of digitisation expressed by at least one group were, to take advantage of OCR technology to open up access to typescript documents; allow access to fragile documents; and to take advantage of digital technology to interpret and analyse historical material.

Most groups backed up their digital assets on at least two different systems, often external hard drives. One or two groups had a more robust system in which they used cloud storage. There was no mention of data integrity or verification checks nor to the use of metadata fields within data objects themselves, though some people referred to them.

What advice were the attendees after regarding digitisation

The attendees were almost unanimous in their wish for practical advice above theoretical advice. Below is a list of the areas for which the attendees wanted advice and other activities together with an indication of the level of demand.

- Advice on target file formats and resolutions. (All groups)
- Advice on appropriate equipment for digitising archive material. (Most groups)
- Easy access to equipment which could digitise a variety of items, especially items larger than A3. Attendees stressed the large geographic area covered by Norfolk and emphasised equipment needed to be accessible on a local level. (Most groups)
- Advice on managing digital assets and file naming conventions because of the difficulty in finding items in their digital collections. This related to the request, which repeated comments from the cataloguing consultation event, for advice on collection management systems and cataloguing standards. (Most groups)
- Advice on copyright and data protection and related issues such as licencing and orphan works. Most groups saw copyright as a potential barrier to their activities. A related issue was advice on the management of a group's own intellectual property. (All groups)
- A request for the NRO to negotiate copyright arrangements with large rights holders on behalf of community history and archive groups. (Some groups)
- Advice on dealing with redundant formats and early digital formats and carriers. (Few groups)
- The creation of a list of trusted freeware which could assist the creation and management of digital assets. (All groups)
- Advice on establishing digitisation workflows. (All groups)
- Advice also sought for use of technology for interpreting digital objects. (Some groups)