

Access to the Local History Collection & Archive at Headstone Manor & Museum

At the end of 2019, and following public consultation, the Local History Collection & Archive at Headstone Manor & Museum was closed to public enquiry and research use until October 2020. During this closure period, we planned for the Collection to have a critically needed audit and physical restructure, with the goals of improving cataloguing, care of the collection, and future preservation. The main intention of the closure was to bring the Collection into line with the current guidelines for archives and museums and increase public access to the collections. One end goal of this plan was to re-open our services in with a brand-new research room and online catalogue.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures implemented in the spring of 2020, the on-site work needed to achieve our goals was greatly impeded and unfortunately despite our best efforts, we have not been able to achieve our original targets.

During the lockdown period our team worked from home, continuing to develop our digital catalogue and promote our collections on social media and our website. We also used this time to tackle other policy and legal issues which have come up over the years involving material with the collection, including copyright, retention schedules, and data privacy. However, as most of our critical work required direct interaction with the physical material in the collection, inevitably the lack of on-site access for staff and volunteers has pushed our schedule back further than anticipated.

We are pleased to say that, even with these challenges, we are able to re-open our email enquiry service from Monday 12th October 2020. However, as a result of the backlog we experienced and the ongoing restrictions for on-site work for staff, there will be no in-person appointments at this time. The email enquiry service will operate on a 14-day turnaround, and queries will be answered via scans of relevant material or in summary form gleaned from limited research where possible. Please note that due to copyright and data privacy, some material will not be able to be shared digitally. In addition, there may be some enquiries that we simply cannot answer or deliver within the 14 days whilst we continue to catalogue and restructure, but we will ensure that these enquiries are recorded and customers are informed of an estimated timeframe.

As for wider public access to the collection, our aim is to launch the digital catalogue in December 2020, and more details will be announced soon on the museum website. The catalogue has been completely reformatted by our partners at Axiell in order to make it a more user-friendly way to browse and search both the Museum and Archive. Objects are being added to the catalogue monthly, aided in part by our virtual documentation projects undertaken from home by our dedicated volunteers. Plans to open our new in-

person research room have also been greatly affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. The health and safety of our visitors and staff are very important to us and it is not feasible, nor safe, to open this service at this time due to the size and ventilation of the space and the necessity for staff supervision of visitors. Our aim, should government guidelines allow, is to open the new research room by the end of March 2021. This service will be managed through an appointment-based system to anyone who wishes to view our collections and use our resources. We look forward to sharing further details with you in the new year.

We thank you for reading this announcement and we are open to any questions regarding the re-opening of our collections. To reach us please email collections@headstonemanor.org. To find out more information about our collections please visit: <https://headstonemanor.org/the-collection/local-history-collection/>