Collections Report for AGM 2016
Brief notes
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Importance of the collection

DHC was founded to preserve, protect and promote the heritage of the Forest of Dean. To tell the story of the landscape, history and people of the Forest, and why it is special and unique. The collection is of central importance to the Centre. The Forest story is told through a huge variety of objects that illustrate archaeology, natural history, work, mining, forestry, school, home and other aspects of our lives. In this museum, you will not find expensive paintings, fine furniture, jewels etc. This museum is full of ordinary objects, but they tell extraordinary stories about the lives of the people in the Forest.

One example that has been donated lately is the diaries of Thomas Hale from the late 1800's. He writes about his work at Shakemantle Iron mine, his garden, family life, church, weather, events and more. Fascinating reading. A glimpse into another life, and adds a personal story to the history we read about in books.

My role as Collections Officer

These diaries exemplify my role; looking after the collection and making such items accessible to visitors and researchers.

Not been an easy year – as the post has been reduced from full time to two days a week. I have been working this year on:

The bulk of my time is collections management; documentation, cataloguing, collections care, maintaining national museum guidelines and accreditation standards.

Archaeology – DHC is the designated repository for all archaeological archives in the Forest of Dean. I help various researchers with their enquiries throughout the year. A huge issue, not just for DHC, but also nationally, is lack of storage space. Representatives from the main museums in Gloucestershire, including myself, have been meeting to address this issue. We have created new archaeological deposition guidelines for implementation 2017. This will bring our guidelines up to date and reduce the amount of material sent to us. In the future we hope to rationalise the archaeology collections.

Oral History - The Dean Heritage Centre project as part of the HLF funded Foresters Forest project is to digitise our unique collection of audio cassette tapes from the 1980's and 1990's. These are recorded interviews of Foresters talking about various aspects of their lives in the Forest of Dean. They are fascinating to listen to and reveal what life was like in the Forest fifty to a hundred years

ago. People talk about their experiences in mining, forestry, various industries, childhood, schools, growing up, shopping, towns and villages, Forest dialect and much more. The collection was begun by Elsie Olivey, a founder of Dean Heritage Museum, who could see Forest life rapidly changing and decided to preserve people's memories by recording them.

These tapes are fragile and decay over time; we are in danger of losing them. Digitising them will not only preserve the audio recordings but also enable access to a wide range of people. The digitised recordings will be available to listen to at Dean Heritage Centre and we hope to create an online searchable database. We will also be working in collaboration with other partners in the Foresters Forest project on a Forest dialect project, archiving new oral histories and other educational resources. Although we have carried out some work in the development phase, the project will start next Spring for 5 years.

Dennis Potter – incredible archive of documents; drafts, manuscripts, unpublished manuscripts, production notes and letters. No work has been carried out for the past year as I cannot fit this in to two days. Not finished cataloguing. But a lot of potential for this archive in the future – time allowing would like to look into.

Finally – a big thank you to all the volunteers for all their work on collections, without whom I could not do my job. Thanks also to everyone who helped/supported/donated to DHC.