How Kresen Kernow has helped tell lost stories of



As Kresen Kernow opens its doors, we find out how the National Lottery funded archive centre has started a new chapter for Cornwall's heritage and the town of Redruth.

A leap forward for preservation

With 1.5million documents charting 850 years, Kresen Kernow holds a wealth of stories of Cornish heritage and identity.

As well as bringing multiple archives safely under one roof, the project enabled the purchase of much better, and faster equipment. For the first time, the archive can properly share the history within its walls online.

The new equipment also means volunteer researchers can be much more involved, something which Rebecca Ball, Digital Access Officer at Kresen Kernow, described as a "real leap forward".

Not only does the archive have a new high-quality scanner that allows both employees and volunteers to finally digitise whole books, visitors also have two scanners for their own use. This shortens personal scanning from up to a month down to an instant.



As powerful as this technology is for saving the at-risk collections, it’s also easy to handle, allowing more people to be involved in preservation

Opening up the archives

According to Claire Wardle, Volunteer Coordinator at Kresen Kernow, the fully accessible building gives more groups of people a chance to be involved in the community, whether it’s by volunteering or simply learning about its history. The growing body of 90 volunteers is made up of online and on-and off-site helpers, who assist with carrying out events, transcribing and digitising.

Chloe Phillips, Learning Lead at Kresen Kernow, explained that the new building gives the staff the opportunities to do everything they were restricted to do before due to limited space and facilities. Now, they can proudly show off Cornwall’s heritage and finally say ‘yes’ to schools and other groups of people. Pupils get to take advantage of the new learning room, use original documents and get a hands-on approach to history.

Catalyst for change

Katrina Griffiths, Kresen Kernow Assistant, said: “It’s been amazing to see the whole process from start to finish and to see the dream come alive.” As a Redruth native, she believes that even though it’s still too early to see drastic changes, the townspeople are feeling more optimistic, like “something good is coming.”



Architechs have tried to incorporate much of the original structure in the new building

Before it was chosen as the new home for Cornwall's history, the Redruth Brewery site had been derelict for a decade and badly damaged by the elements and vandalism. Fortunately, architects have been able to be faithful to the original structure, incorporating elements such as the authentic pillars and granite floors.

Phenomenal transformation

Tom Weller, a local historian and author, was one of the researchers invited to test out the new facilities before the official opening. Having been a frequent visitor of the old Records Office for years, he claims Kresen Kernow to be "a phenomenal change and a wonderful way of spending money." He was impressed by the way the new building "maintains the historic fabric [of the brewery] while incorporating the new."

Catherine Lorigan, a fellow researcher, has been using the archives for 25 years and is now in the middle of writing her fourth book. She compared the previous building to "a small hut" but praises the new facilities as "absolutely brilliant." Lorigan also celebrates the move which brings the collections of multiple archives together under one roof for the first time. Before Kresen Kernow was created, they had been towns apart. "Well done, The National Lottery Heritage Fund!" she said.

Read our previous post on some of the hidden gems at Kresen Kernow.