Woodhorn Archives

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Real life stories of countless generations of Northumberland people held in the Woodhorn archives will now be easier to explore, thanks to an award of £249,400 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a major catalogue and digitisation project.

The collections of some of Northumberland's largest landed estates, currently housed at Woodhorn, contain hugely important documents about the industrial, commercial and rural history of Northumberland. These archives provide a great insight into the lives of the people living in the area many years ago. Everything from maps, leases, accounts and letters are all kept at Woodhorn and are often used by members of the public.

Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the North East, Ivor Crowther, said: "The collection at Woodhorn contains 800 years worth of fascinating information about the people of Northumberland. Archives take a lot of looking after and need to be stored carefully to ensure their survival; this lottery cash injection will help protect the valuable collections and share them with more people than ever. So if you feel like researching your family tree or simply learning more about the history of Northumberland, Woodhorn is the place to go."

Cataloguing and digitising the archives will give visitors easier access to the collections, and a permanent and safe way of storing them. The collected works are enormously significant on a regional level, marking many pivotal moments in Northumberland's rich history. For example, papers relating to George and Matthew Culley, well known agriculturists from North Northumberland, who at their peak managed 3000-4000 acres of land. Their ideas and work played a large part in the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century.

This project will provide training opportunities for volunteers including learning how to identify, read and catalogue eighteenth – twentieth century documents, providing them with tangible skills to take away from their experience. The newly digitised archives will also provide a unique resource for visiting schools and youth groups. Special training, on how to use and make the most of the archives will be delivered to teachers and used in workshops.

Keith Merrin, Director at Woodhorn, said: "This project enables us to open up many incredible historical records that are currently not accessible to the public and use them both on site and in education and outreach work with communities across Northumberland. We know from our experience at Woodhorn that the rich history of Northumberland, through its archives, has the power to inspire and engage people of all ages and backgrounds."

Two large scale exhibitions will be created so that the fascinating documents, letters and files can be shared with as many people as possible. It will be shown at the museum and then toured around a variety of regional venues.

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK with £209 million in the North East alone.

As of 30 September 2009, HLF have made 24 awards in Wansbeck amounting to £11,643,239.

HLF have previously funded Woodhorn for the project, 'Experience Woodhorn' a £10m capital-based project to establish the museum. In addition HLF funded 'Access to Northumberland's History' with a grant of £268,000, which focussed on the development of activities based upon the archive and museum collections.

Woodhorn Colliery lies in south-east Northumberland close to the town of Ashington. It was a working pit for more than 80 years, from 1894 until its closure in 1981. Using the original pit buildings, the site reopened as a colliery museum in 1989. Today, the former colliery is recognised as the best surviving example of a late 19th to early 20th century colliery from the North East England regional tradition. The project will catalogue and repackage 40,000 estate records and 12,000 items will be digitised with images put into an e-catalogue.

Further information

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