

# Hampshire Archives: Preserving the History of Today for Tomorrow

**Intro:** Welcome to Hampshire HistBites. Join us as we delve into the past and go on a journey to discover some of the county's best and occasionally unknown history. We'll be speaking to experts as well as enthusiasts, asking them to reveal some of our hidden heritage, as well as share with you a few fascinating untold stories.

**Ellie:** Hello and welcome to Hampshire HistBites. This week, we are joined by Zoe Viney from the Wessex Sound & Film Archives based at the Hampshire Record Office. And we will be talking about their Covid-19 project, Making History and Making Movies.

Hello, Zoe.

**Zoe:** Hi.

**Ellie:** Welcome. So what is your role at the archives?

**Zoe:** I am film curator, at Wessex Film & Sound Archive, and I work with the collection of historic film and sound items. So we have a massive collection of 38,000 film and sound items. And it's from across the whole of the old Wessex region. So Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire.

So it's quite a large geographical remit. And my main activity is around outreach and engagement. So getting our films in front of people, educating them about them and just really getting people to understand what we have in the collection, and also to really enjoy them. We are based on-site at Hampshire Record Office in Winchester with our colleagues in Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, so we work quite closely with colleagues who are working with paper documentation.

**Ellie:** Brilliant. I've used the Record Office a lot, and I hadn't realized that there was that subsection.

**Zoe:** Wessex Film & Sound Archive, we've been around about 32 years now. It started by a gentleman back in the late 1980s, David Lee, and he started the nucleus of the collection and it built up from there and we've spent the last 30 odd years building the collection, safeguarding the film and sound items. In terms of the things that we have, we have old Cine film, more modern gauges, tapes, digital and analogue formats. And it's our constant task really to make sure that we have up-to-date copies of the items to ensure that we can always watch them because, you can probably imagine, technology becomes obsolete very quickly ensuring that we have up-to-date copies of things because things do degrade over time particularly tape formats on their last 5 to 10 years of usable life.

**Ellie:** How did you get into archive work?

**Zoe:** I did my first degree at the University of Southampton and I studied Film and History of Art. From there, went on to do a Masters in Museums and Galleries and for me, the film linking with the history side of thing, just progressed really naturally and I was lucky to be able to get a role at Wessex Film & Sound Archive back in 2010 on a short term funded

project called Revitalizing the Regions. A really fantastic opportunity actually, because I was cataloguing films and, and one of the things that I don't get a lot of opportunity to do now is actually to sit down and watch films back-to-back. Whereas my first role in the archive was actually just sitting, watching films and cataloguing and researching them. So my colleague and I, we watched, I think around 600 films between us. I mean, 600 films, it sounds like an awful lot, but when you think that there are 38,000 items within the whole collection, it's really only scratching the surface, but it was a really, really good way to get to know the collection and have a bit of an understanding of the kind of material that the collection holds.

Working in cultural heritage, if anyone listening does that, you will realize there are lots of short-term contracts. There's not a lot of money in the industry any more, so it's about popping from one thing to another and seeing where your skillset lies and, I'm back again now.

**Ellie:** Brilliant. Well, I'm glad you're back again. How has the pandemic affected the archives?

**Zoe:** As for most people working with cultural heritage collections, one of the biggest things that we've found is that it's created this distance between the people working in the archive and their collections. Everybody at Hampshire Record Office, apart from those working on registration of death certificates, which is obviously something that has been quite critical during this period, everyone else has been working from home. And working from home presents challenges because we have been digitising our collection. As I mentioned a moment ago, we're constantly working towards making sure we have everything in the most recent format, but we haven't got everything at home.

It means that we can only work with a certain amount of material. So there is a finite amount of material available to us to view and work with at home. Luckily we've been able to go back on-site between lockdowns, which means staff have been back working with collections, and we've been able to harvest, for want of a better word, material that we can then work with when we are at home.

So that's one of the biggest challenges. Being apart from your collection means that you have that distance and you have to think about new ways of working with material and engaging people with it. The other thing that we've experimented with this year is more contemporary collecting. Wessex Film & Sound Archive, we are always collecting material, but we've always collected in quite a passive way. So if people came to us with material, we would discuss with them, we would view the material and then think about if it was something that we could accession. But this year we have taken a more active stance to actually ask people to submit films to the archive. So that's been quite interesting during the pandemic year, if you like.

**Ellie:** Well, that leads me onto my next question, which is about the current Covid-19 project the Archives Trust is running, Making History and Making Movies, if I've got that correct?

**Zoe:** Yeah, Making History: Making Movies.

**Ellie:** Perfect. What was the idea behind them?

**Zoe:** So, strangely enough, the project that I've been involved in, Making Movies: Making History, was actually something that came to fruition long before the pandemic even raised its head. It was a project that we sought funding for from the BFI, so my project is funded through the National Lottery, BFI distribute the funds from National Lottery. And the idea was that we have a really fantastic representative collection of films from the early parts of the 20th century so 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s. We've got lots of, lots of wonderful film material, but what we won't have in a hundred years time is the same quality footage of what's going on now. And so now obviously takes into account the pandemic, but also we won't have lots of everyday footage, showing the lives of real people, going about their day-to-day activities, going on holiday. We won't have that unless we do something about it, as a result of this need to collect more material. And then as it transpired, the funding was actually awarded in March last year, what we then did is we teamed up with our colleagues in Hampshire Archives and Local Studies to make it a two-pronged approach really to ask people to submit things to the archives. This meant that my involvement was team-working with my colleagues to reach out to people, to collect, not just film and sound items, but also photographs, paper documentation, and things that people were able to collect during the pandemic. And it's been going really well. We've got a really big, long list of accessions.

**Ellie:** Brilliant. I'm really glad that it's taken off. And I suppose with the pandemic this year, it has given people time to rediscover things that perhaps we were starting to lose?

**Zoe:** Yeah. So we've had quite a few people who have submitted diary posts, quite a few people who've been in touch to say that they are keeping a diary and that they would like to submit it, at the point when they finished writing it, if that makes sense. So people have kind of expressed that, 'Yes, I would like to deposit my diary with you.' And then we've said, 'We just keep the dialogue open.' So at the point when you feel ready, that we can accession that from you. Also quite a number of films, locally produced films. I think like you said, this period some people have got more time, some people have got less time during it depending on what you're doing. But those people who have got more time or the inclination have been kind of, sorting, spring cleaning if you like. And that has also been fruitful for us in terms of people clearing out their phones and they found film footage and that kind of thing.

I think one of the things that I'm trying to get across in Making Movies: Making History is, we're not asking people to submit pieces of art, they don't have to be Spielberg to submit a piece of five-minute film to the archive. What we want to see is film footage that shows things that were going on in the region right now. So it could be your daily exercise walking to a deserted town centre or it could be your trip to the supermarket standing in a very long queue. These are things which are part of everyday life, but unless we capture them in our local area, they may well vanish and not be documented.

**Ellie:** So what are you accepting as contributions to the project?

**Zoe:** We're quite broad, really. Generally speaking, for Making Movies: Making History, we're asking for about five minutes of film, just to make it easier for us to receive them from you digitally and accession them. In terms of paper documentation and photographs, we're quite happy to have a discussion with people. So if people think they have something of interest that is reflective of their experience during the Covid-19 crisis, then we would have a chat to them about it. So we're not saying 'No, we won't take that' or 'This is exactly what we want', it's more about saying, 'Okay, yes, diaries, photographs, clips of film from the time are

really, really great, but if you've got something else that you think might be helpful or would be good to include in the archive we'd also like that too.' A good example is, I've been keeping a diary myself as well, which I'm hoping to have accessioned into the archive. Also, I've got the painted rainbows that my son put in our window. And that's the kind of thing which I would probably deposit with the archive alongside my diary. So it's about telling a whole story.

**Ellie:** What happens to the contributions once they are in the archive?

**Zoe:** Most people think of an archive as a place where something gets looked after and it stays safe. And that is predominantly particularly with these items, that's our first port of call. We need to make sure it's in good condition. We need to have a conversation with people to start with as well, to understand what their wishes are for the item. So when people accession items with us, we have to understand what basis they're accessioning them with us on. Whether they're depositing them or gifting them. So there are some forms to fill in to start with, but once we have the items, once we are able to receive those in a COVID safe way and probably after lockdown, we would do a condition check and we would catalogue that. The items will be catalogued. Initially it's usually an entry level catalogue item, and then we would go back and add more detail as and when we have time. Then they would be safely stored in an appropriate box and once the catalogue entry is on the system, it means that they are retrievable. Typically if you have specified that you're happy for people to use them for research, people would then be able to come to the search room, but obviously we're quite sensitive this year, that things are quite different and it's possible that people would rather have the items closed for a period of time so that they are simply stored in the archive and they remain closed for people to look at for a period of time. So it could be that you would like to specify a certain number of years before anyone is allowed to look at them. Just to protect people's privacy really.

**Ellie:** Is it fair to say it's a bit of a novelty to be receiving things from this period when perhaps you're more used to dealing with ledgers that are hundreds of years old.

**Zoe:** Yeah, absolutely. I think the sensitivities involved particularly in the topics that are likely to be covered in diaries, for example, from this year as well, they are likely to be quite personal thoughts that people are recording. They could be quite sensitive and quite distressing in some cases. So it's really quite important for us to ensure that we have a discussion with the individuals who are hoping to accession to make sure that we meet their wishes and expectations. With the film material, one of the things I'm actually hoping to do in the next year or so, if people grant permission for them to be screened, is to pull together a screening of some of the contemporary material and juxtapose it with some of the early 20th century amateur film footage. So we have a comparison of how amateur film makers are using the technology and interacting with it. And again, that's subject to people's permissions. Generally speaking, I would say in the films that we've had so far, people are submitting films that they are happy to have screened. I guess maybe I wouldn't submit film I didn't want people to see. As a general rule, that's what's happened so far, but there is no pressure from any direction. If you wanted to submit a film and you wanted to close the record for a period of time, that would also be okay.

**Ellie:** Who sees the items?

**Zoe:** It's back to the conversations that we have with people who deposit. If, for example, you did want to keep the record closed, we would keep it quite minimal in terms of the staff who have access to them and we would process them minimally, if that makes sense, we would do what we needed to do with them, but we would ensure that, for example, if I was submitting to the archive, all of my colleagues would have access to it potentially, which may not be my preference. So I think we'd have a conversation.

Generally speaking, if you're happy for people to use the source for research they would be accessible to people in the search room. If you've never used a search room before, you call things up and people bring the documents out to you and then you can view them in the search room. So that's our hope really that people will allow people to use documents for research and really just to paint a picture of what life is like right now.

**Ellie:** I suppose one of my final questions is how do we get these items to you if we wish to contribute?

**Zoe:** In terms of film and sound, we can get that at distance really. So again, it's about having a conversation. Depending on the length of the film footage or clips that you have, we would talk to you about what file transfer platform would be best to receive that from you, cause we can send you a file request for those if necessary. But that would be in just about getting in touch. So we do have a blog post with the details on and you'd just get in touch and tell us what you had and then we would give you the means to get them to us. Again, with the paper documentation, it's really about getting in touch with the Record Office. Pop us an email, tell us what you're hoping to contribute and then the conversation will just go from there.

**Ellie:** So it's a nice, easy process, really?

**Zoe:** It is. And it's really tailored as well. I would say one of the things is we want to make sure we get it right for each individual person who comes to us. So it's not a one size fits all approach and it's in the collection and that's it. It's about working with depositors to make sure that we accession it on the basis that they're happy with.

**Ellie:** And, as another novelty, I suppose, is the fact that once you've contributed, you could then go to an archive and you're there, you're in it. So much with research is that you turn up to these archives and there are so many people missing from them, so many stories missing. This is a really fantastic opportunity to make sure your story is there.

**Zoe:** Absolutely. And I think one of the challenges that archives have faced or are facing now is about ensuring that we have representative collections. Looking back on the collections, there are historic challenges with ensuring people from different communities are represented and that we can find them in the collections. So we have a really great opportunity this year to ensure that we reach out to particular communities. The BAME communities in particular. Last year was a really, really important pivotal year in their experience. That's really important that we reach out to people and say 'Look, we really would like film footage from you to go into the archive, to create a fully representative picture of life in the region.'

**Ellie:** Thank you for joining me today, Zoe. That was absolutely amazing and it's so good to know that there's something out there that we can all join in. We have been Hampshire HistBites, and we look forward to seeing you next week.

**Outro:** We hope you enjoyed listening to today's episode. If you would like to find out a little bit more about what we've been talking about, then please visit the website, [www.winchesterheritageopendays.org](http://www.winchesterheritageopendays.org), click on Hampshire HistBites, and there you'll find today's show notes as well as some links to more information.

Thank you.