



Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives & Heritage Annual Report 2025 - 2026



Who We Are

The Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archive and Heritage Service (the Service) includes the Archive Service, jointly funded and managed by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council through a Joint Agreement between the two authorities. The County Museum Service is funded and managed by Staffordshire County Council. The William Salt Library is a charitable library owned and managed by the William Salt Library Trust. The County Council delivers access to the library's collections through the Staffordshire History Centre.

The service operates from the Staffordshire History Centre in Stafford, Stoke-on-Trent City Archives in the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, the Lichfield History Access Point and the Burton Family and Local History Centre in Burton Library.



The service is supported by volunteers at Stafford and Stoke





What We Do

The service cares for archive and museum collections across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, providing public access, learning opportunities, exhibitions, conservation, and community engagement. It works to a three year Forward Plan 2025-2028 supported by an annual delivery plan around three key strategic objectives:

- Maintain a collaborative approach and embed partnerships.
- Deliver a resilient and sustainable service.
- Engage with a wider range of audiences in person and online.



During 2025–2026 the service continued to balance day-to-day public access with long-term work to strengthen collections care, develop digital services, support heritage partners, and embed the offer at the Staffordshire History Centre and Stoke-on-Trent City Archives. The service also worked collaboratively with volunteers, universities, community organisations, friends groups, libraries, and regional sector networks to broaden participation and improve resilience.

Key Highlights

- The service maintained a strong collaborative approach with local, regional, and sector partners, including universities, libraries, museums, and specialist heritage groups.
- Five Staffordshire History Network events were delivered, with 68 attendees representing 30 organisations. Eleven site visits, and around 65 instances of advice were provided to support museums, archives, and community heritage organisations.
- Public engagement remained strong, with very positive feedback on staff support, a successful Staffordshire History Day, and delivery of the Staffordshire History Festival.
- Personal visits increased across the service by 110% to 16,594
- The History Centre celebrated its first birthday in November 2025.
- The formal learning offer launched successfully, with 19 school visits and over 500 pupil contacts across the full age range and continued development of work experience and adult learning activity.
- Exhibitions and displays continued at pace, including J. L. Petit, Beneath Our Feet, Staffordshire and Slavery, Roaring Twenties, and a new exhibition case supporting the Living Heritage City Trail. Footfall for these exhibitions was 13,535 with Roaring Twenties being the most popular.
- Digital work progressed through website content transfer, completion of the collections database transfer, addition of new name indexes, and continued growth in online engagement.
- The service remained financially stable, with a balanced budget and additional grant income secured to support service development and conservation work.



History Centre 1st birthday

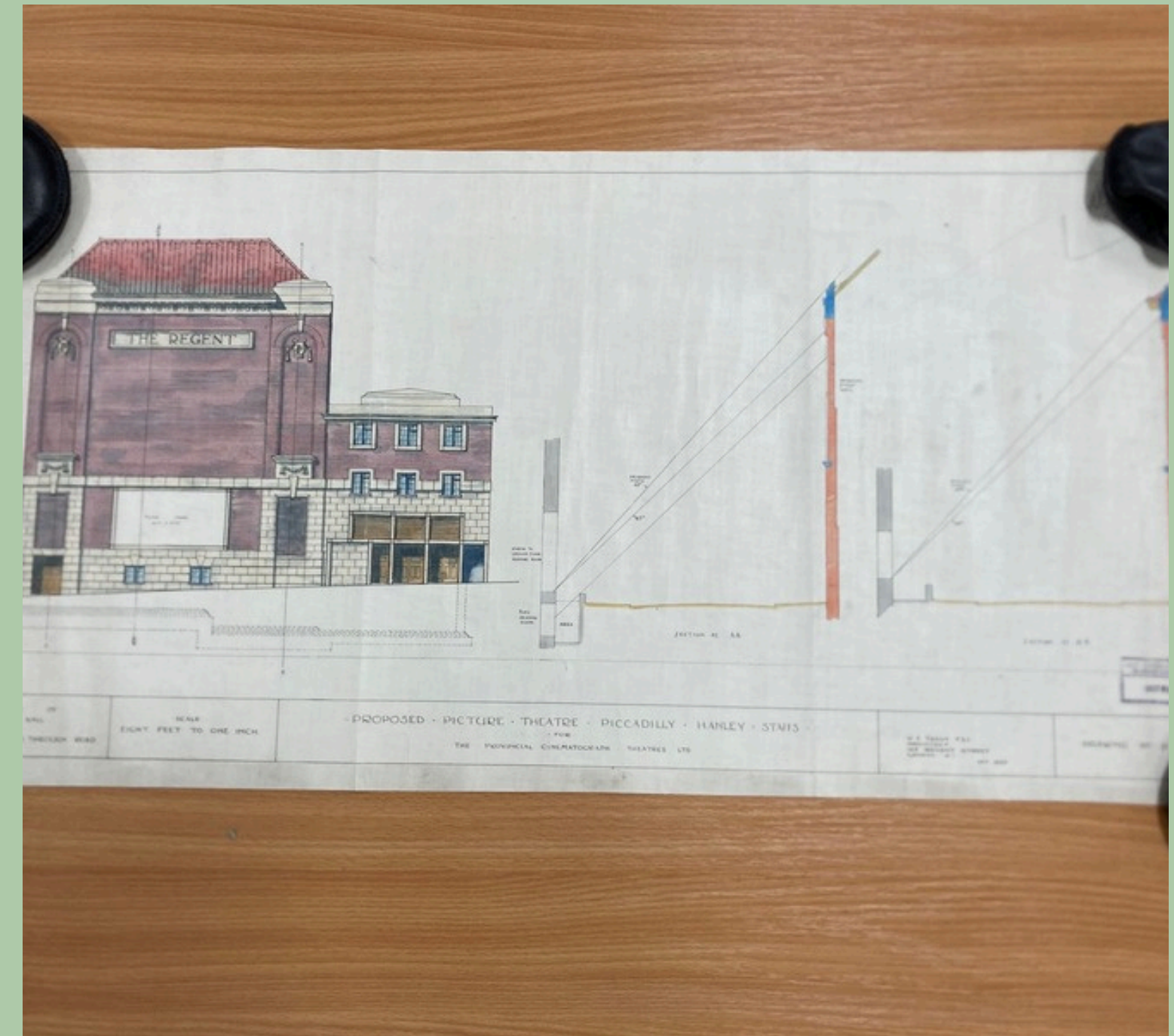


Network event at Lichfield Cathedral

Public Services

Public services remained at the heart of the Service offer throughout 2025–2026. People continued to access collections at the Staffordshire History Centre and Stoke-on-Trent City Archives with support from knowledgeable staff and a strong emphasis on customer care. Feedback from service users remained very positive, with respondents describing the quality of advice and support as good or very good.

Alongside reading room and enquiry services, the team delivered talks, organised visits, exhibitions, learning sessions, and events that helped people explore archives and heritage in accessible and engaging ways. Work also continued to improve the visitor experience through front-of-house procedures, access planning, and marketing activity, helping sites remain welcoming, informative, and relevant to a broad public audience.



Plans of Regent Theatre Stoke, 1927

History Centre Research Room

The use of Research Room at the History Centre has increased in every aspect of the service since 2024/25 with in person visits increasing by 92% from 444 in the previous year to 852, documents that were produced increased by 78% from 2,799 to 4,993.

Scanning/photocopy orders increased by 97% on the previous year to 717 and photographic orders saw an increase of 84.5% to 179 in the year, research orders also increased by 93.5% to 60.

We visited today and thoroughly enjoyed our time in the research room. I wanted to say thank you for how welcome we were made to feel, and how friendly everyone was.



Stoke-on-Trent City Archives



Let me start by saying "Wow!" I wasn't anticipating this level of thoroughness. Thank you so much for the overwhelming information. It is truly appreciated. -from a customer in Canada

The temporary closure due to building work at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery has meant that visitor numbers were lower than last year, however, when compared to the figures for the same period last year the numbers are the same or higher, which is encouraging (Apr-Dec 2025=860, Apr-Mar 2024=1,038).

The service continued to build its core of regular customers and had an increasing number of visitors from various parts of the UK and overseas. All remote services continued to be delivered and showed an increase of nearly 5% in email and postal enquiries in the last financial year.

Engagement

The service engaged a wide range of audiences both in person and online, helping more people connect with the area's archives and heritage. Highlights included the Staffordshire History Day, the Staffordshire History Festival, a successful programme of exhibitions and community displays, and the launch of a formal learning offer for schools from early years through to post-16.

Families and new audiences were encouraged to take part through seasonal activities, targeted events, and the developing access strategy for the Staffordshire History Centre. Digital engagement also remained strong through website improvements, social media activity, online indexes, and new digital content, with engagement levels showing an overall 107% improvement.

The service further strengthened community participation through partnership working, consultation activity, and projects such as Living Heritage City and the 100 Bookshelf initiative.

Family fun days linked to exhibitions brought in high visitor numbers with excellent feedback about the hands-on activities.

Community co-curators including the Women's Institute, The Royal British Legion and Messy Church created displays showcasing their own and our collections.



Victorian Family Fun Day



100 Bookshelves project

Volunteers

Volunteers continued to make a significant contribution to the service, supporting collections work, public engagement, shelf labelling, cleaning and repackaging activity, and wider service development. Recruitment continued at the Staffordshire History Centre, with the service working through a waiting list, while volunteering activity at Stoke-on-Trent City Archives remained steady. A strong social and recognition programme also helped to value volunteers' contribution, including a summer picnic, walking tour, seminar spotlight talks, and Christmas events. The service reported a 32% improvement in volunteer hours against a target of 1% improvement, showing the scale of volunteer commitment across the year.

Three Staffordshire History Centre volunteers have left volunteering as they have now found employment. The service has supported two open door candidates via 12 week placements that supports them to gain skills and workplace experience in a heritage setting. In total 16 placements were delivered for school and college students.



Collections Overview

Collections management remained a core priority. Work continued on archive conservation and preservation programmes, emergency planning, and collections documentation. Staff progressed location coding and plans for moving collections into new strongrooms at the History Centre once environmental conditions are stabilised. Accreditation was maintained, and collections development activity continued through appraisal, disposal planning, back-cataloguing, and targeted digitisation.

Major areas of focus included the Minton Majolica preservation project, digitisation of artwork and selected collections, and preparations for improved access to born-digital archives, although digital preservation implementation remained slower than planned because of staff capacity and system development pressures. A total of 109 new accessions was acquired by the Joint Archive Service.

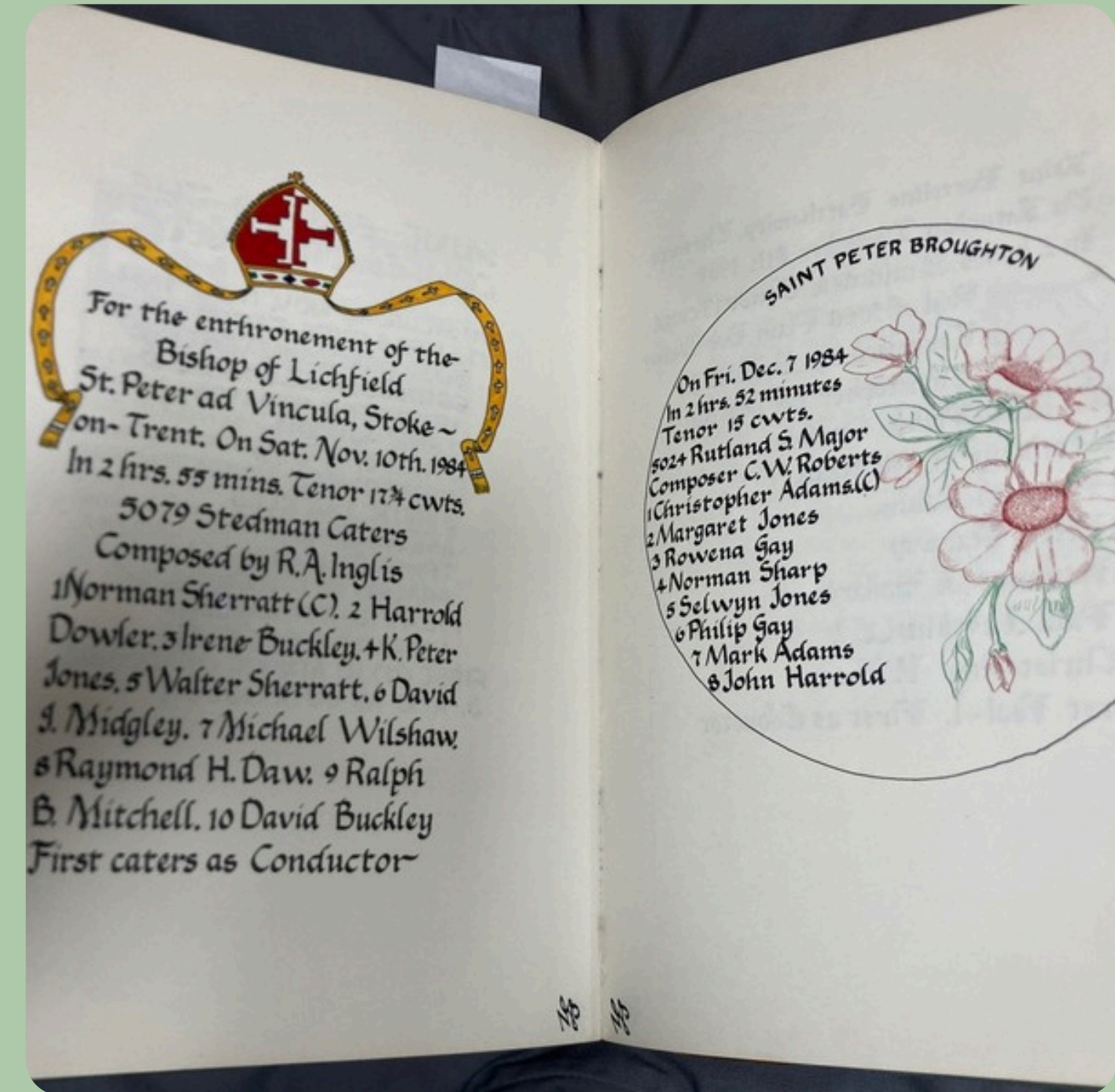


Minton conservation project

Collections in Stoke

Stoke-on-Trent City Archives received 36 new accessions. These additions enhance pottery archives, local religious community records, and visual cultural heritage materials. With key highlights below.

- Significant pottery additions include kiln designs by Noel Barsby Ltd and archives related to Mason's Ironstone China and Geoffrey Godden.
- New religious records cover Methodist registers and the first Jewish community archives from Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.
- Visual and personal papers include peal books from the North Staffordshire Association of Change Ringers, 1927 Regent Theatre plans, and Josiphiah Wedgwood's diary from 1897-1903.



Peal book from the North Staffordshire Association of Change Ringers

Collections in Staffordshire



Orton & Spooner, amusement ride manufacturers in Burton

73 new accessions were accepted at Staffordshire Record Office. All have some form of description on the online catalogue. Cataloguing progress reached 59% completion for new accessions, with 565 new catalogue entries and 1708 enhanced descriptions added with volunteer help. No progress was made this year in reducing our outstanding back-catalogues. Key highlights include:

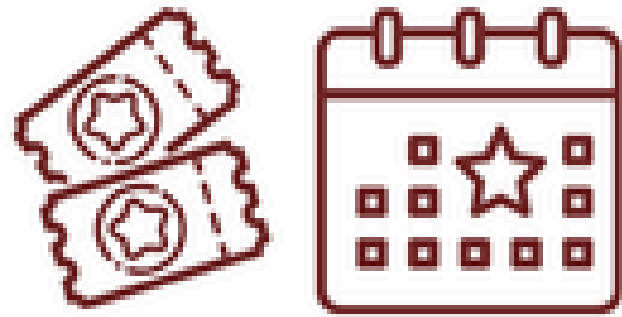
- The largest accession was from the Cannock Chase Methodist Circuit with records from 1789-2004.
- Collections also include minutes from councils, school log books, personal and estate papers, photographs, and business records.
- Business papers from Orton & Spooner, amusement ride manufacturers in Burton, which includes photographs of some of their products such as merry-go-round horses.

The Museum Service accepted 23 new objects into the collection and has 1,213 objects on display throughout the year from its collections which includes the Staffordshire History Centre, Shugborough Estate and other local museums. Examples of new additions include:

- A collection of chisels used by Chatfield & Sons, funeral directors, to make coffins until their closure in 1973.
- A late Victorian calibration set made for the brough of Stafford and used by the trading department to check the accuracy of their working standard measures.

Annual Report 2025/26 - Performance Indicators

almost 6000 attendees at events = 14% increase



over 1000 orders completed

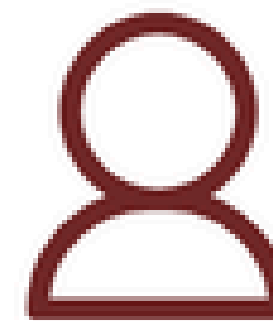


over 1 million visits to our collections websites

7021 volunteer hours
32% ↑

40 organisations advised

over 500 school pupils / students reached



over 16,500 visits (+110%) and over 4,800 enquiries (+20%)

Annual Statistics

Category	Current year (previous year in brackets)	% Change
Individual visits	16,594 (7,909)	+110%
Total Number of documents produced	7,217 (4,322)	+67%
Total number of museum objects on display	1,213 (1,203)	+0.8%
Total number of enquiries received by post, email, and telephone	4,825 (4,013)	+20%
Total orders (including scanning, photography, research)	1,416 (890)	+59%

Annual Statistics

Category	Current year (previous year in brackets)	% Change
Total online use	1,254,749 (605,3125)	+107%
Total number of website visitor sessions (Staffordshirehistory.org.uk)	16,594 (7,909)	+110%
Collections websites (Past Track, Name Indexes, Catalogue & microsites)	7,217 (4,322)	+67%
Social media streams (Facebook, Instagram , YouTube content interactions and impressions. Now excludes Twitter/X)	1,213 (1,203)	+0.8%

Annual Statistics

Category	Current year (previous year in brackets)	% Change
Total number of attendees at service events and learning sessions onsite and offsite	16,594 (7,909)	+110%
Total number of volunteer hours	7,217 (4,322)	+67%

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to staff, volunteers, friends groups, trustees, partner organisations, schools, community groups, and funders who supported the Archives and Heritage Service throughout 2025–2026. Their contribution helped the service maintain high-quality public access, care for collections, deliver exhibitions and learning, and continue building a resilient and outward-looking service for the future.

Staff from Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives and Heritage

Stoke-on-Trent City Archives: Rebecca Jackson, Meriel Lees, Andrew Dawson, Laura Clarke, Mandy Pover, Hayley Barry.

Staffordshire Archives & Heritage: Geraldine Barnes, Rab Cooper, Ben Cunliffe, Sarah English, Dominic Farr, Sophie Harris, Lisa Hibbert, Claire Jackson, Rebecca Jackson, Helen Johnson, Richard Lewis, Henrietta Martinez, Julie O'Neill, Lizzie Short, Amanda Spearman, Bethany Stokes, Liz Street, Bev Sutherland, Joanna Terry, Lisa Williams.

Volunteers for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service and Staffordshire Archives and Heritage (118)

Denise Allman, Patricia Astbury, Richard Astbury, Ken Barlow, Susan Bartlam, Margaret Beard, John Bennett, Georgia Bialkowski, Kath Blackshaw, Matthew Blake, Wendy Botham, Patrick Brough, Mike Bulmer, Korben Butterworth, Judy Clarke, Ian Coldicott, Brian Cooper, Sandra Cooper, Rebecca Cooper, Chris Copp, June Ellis, Alex Enochson, Angelika Etherington-Smith, Ann Fisher, Valerie Gannon, Anne George, Andrew George, Holly Gibson, Sue Gill, Amanda Godfrey, Andy Godfrey, Michael Goldstein, Sue Gregory, Tim Groom, Peter Gurney, Helen Hales, Emily Hanlon, Sandra Hassall, Lesley Hayes, Rhiannon Heeley, Dave Hulson, Eddie Jenkins, Joyce Jones, Lesley Jones, Bob Jones, Mac Joseph, Ravneet Kainth, Lyn Kightley, Andrew Kirkland-Perks, Pamela Kirkland-Perks, Randle Knight, Ruirui Kuai, Janine Lettington, Lindsay Lorenze, Dave Marriot, Caroline Mason, Rachel Mason, Bob Metcalf, Christine Millard, John Miller, Abbie Mills, Linda Mills, Elise More, Karen Morrey, Kevin Mottram, Liz Newman, Cara Nicholls, Catherine Nichols, Rebekah Nicoll, Lorraine Northway, Natasha Penninck, Jacqueline Perkins, Holly Pindar, Helen Pooley, Joy Pownall, Alan Preece, Jim Preston, Nici Preston, Sandra Prokic, Andy Reid, Jen Robinson, Phoebe Russell, Shelley Robotham, John Rooker, Jules Ross, Phil Rowley, Brian Rutter, Gabrielle Sandham, Andrew Sargent, Neil Scragg, Sarah Sharp, Diane Shenton, Colette Siddiqui, Peter Simmonds, Julie Sims, Richard Smith, Mandy Swain, Jill Talbot, Louise Tellwright, Mithra Tonking, Aidan Tonks, Matthew Tonks, Richard Totty, Sharon Towers, Dave Townsend, Catherine Turner, Penny Twibill, Rosamond Unwin, Galyna Vakula, Adam Ward, Nigel Ward, Julie Weetman, Janet Wheeler, Lynne Williams, Ray Wilson, Clive Wood, Vicky Wood, Natasha Yardley.

Friends of the Archive Service (FoSSA)

Our thanks to the committee and members for their support throughout the year: Dianne Barre, Andrew George, Sue Gregory, Val Gannon, Malcolm Price, Andrew Sargent, Richard Totty.

Joint Archive Committee 2025/2026

Elected members of Staffordshire County Council: Cllr. Hayley Coles (Chair), Cllr. Nicholas Lakin, Cllr Lynn Dean (invitee/observer)

Elected members of Stoke-on-Trent City Council: Cllr. Sarah Hill (Vice Chair), Cllr. Sarah Jane Colclough (Substitute)