

Logjam:

*An audit of uncatalogued
collections in the North West*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

The archival heritage of the North West reflects the region's diverse history and culture from the past thousand years up to the present day. It includes the records of great institutions, people and businesses in the region and reflects the region's changing landscape, communities and economies. However, if this heritage is to be fully accessible to the growing number of archive users in the North West, then it will be necessary to catalogue collections as yet uncatalogued and improve the physical availability of the material.

Producing catalogues of the contents of archival collections is the bedrock of the work of an archive service. Without descriptions of the documents it holds, an archive service cannot ensure:

- Efficient and equitable access
- A stimulating learning environment
- Compliance with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation
- An organisation's corporate memory
- Legal, financial and administrative resources
- The security and preservation of documents
- Interpretative exhibitions and publications

In short, archive services with uncatalogued collections cannot fulfil either their record keeping role, or ensure the place of archives at the cultural centre of the community. Without access via catalogues, archival organisations are unable to play a role in people's lives, managing organisations are failing to meet their responsibilities and are wasting money storing inaccessible documents. Taking the form of a detailed audit, the Logjam project was designed to scope the size and type of uncatalogued collections held in 30 of the region's principle archive-holding institutions. In addition to the region's main county and

metropolitan services, the NW's major museum, academic and business repositories were invited to take part. The breakdown of participating repositories is as follows:

- 6 County Record Office repositories
- 14 Metropolitan archive services
- 10 Specialist repositories

The work was funded by Resource and undertaken by the North West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (NWMLAC) on behalf of North West Regional Archive Council (NWRAC).

2 Regional Context

The project is one of the basic building blocks of the implementation of the regional archive strategy. Under the themes of Access and Availability, NWRAC aims to improve and widen physical and remote access to the region's archives for the benefit of all users by making finding aids and collections widely available and developing a collaborative approach to cataloguing backlogs.

3 Project Aims

The aim of the project was to identify, quantify and prioritise uncatalogued archival collections in the North West. Specifically it aimed to:

- produce a detailed picture of the archival collections which are uncatalogued in each repository and the region as a whole
- identify the resources required to catalogue these collections
- prioritise these collections and in particular identify specific priorities for future collaborative projects within the region

4 Outputs

Expected outputs from the project were as follows:

- A regional database of uncatalogued collections which can be used to inform future collaborative projects
- Individualised databases of uncatalogued collections for each participating repository
- A regional report outlining the aggregated results of the audits and recommendations for future action
- Individualised reports for each repository, including an indication of the timescale and resources required to catalogue each collection
- An audit methodology that could be extended to other organisations at a later date.

5 Outcomes

The project aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- The development of a collaborative approach to cataloguing which will assist in addressing the problem of cataloguing backlogs on a regional basis
- Improved access to the region's archives by making finding aids and collections more widely available
- An opportunity for individual repositories to prioritise their cataloguing work and the results to act as an invaluable advocacy tool for the region.

6 Methodology

A professional archivist working on a 12 month contract was employed to undertake an audit of uncatalogued collections in each participating repository. Each collection was individually examined and data was collected concerning the size, type and covering dates of each. This was supplemented by the gathering of data which would be used to give an indication of the resources needed to catalogue each collection.

7 Results

The results of the audit of the audit have been broken up into the following sections:

- Section A – Size of regional and sub-regional cataloguing backlog
- Section B – Size of backlog by collection type
- Section C – Size of backlog covered by the Freedom of Information Act
- Section D – Cataloguing resources required to eliminate the backlog

Section A includes data for all the uncatalogued collections in the 30 participating repositories in the region.

Sections B – D only contain data pertaining to the uncatalogued collections assessed by the project officer. They do not include data for the unseen material held by 1 repository, in which a sample of collections had to be audited.*

* In one repository the scale of the backlog (and the holdings as a whole) were such that an audit of all the uncatalogued collection was unfeasible and it was decided that a sample of collections would be assessed. The repository was asked to provide an extent for the unseen uncatalogued collections, so that the regional figure for uncatalogued holdings could be calculated.

SECTION A - Size of the regional and sub-regional cataloguing backlog

Size of the regional backlog

Total extent of regional archival holdings (linear metres)	Extent of uncatalogued holdings (linear metres)	Number of collections (All media except film)	Number of film titles
79,429	22,820	1,220	10,253

Size of backlog in Merseyside

There are **20,386** linear metres of archival holdings in Merseyside, of which **6,393** linear metres are uncatalogued. In addition, there are **3,895** uncatalogued film titles.

Proportion of uncatalogued holdings in the North West region

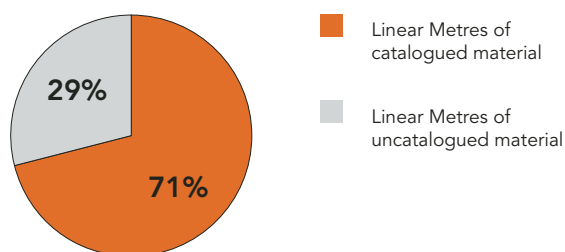


Figure 1

Proportion of uncatalogued holdings in Merseyside

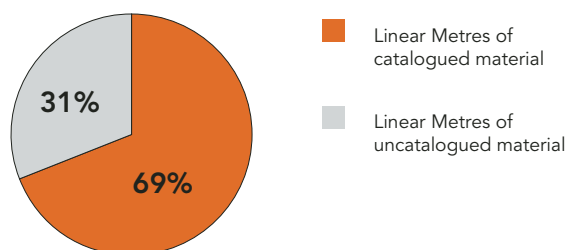


Figure 3

Size of backlog in Greater Manchester

There are **22,753** linear metres of archival holdings in Greater Manchester, of which **6,760** linear metres are uncatalogued. In addition, there are **6,348** uncatalogued film titles.

Proportion of uncatalogued holdings in Greater Manchester

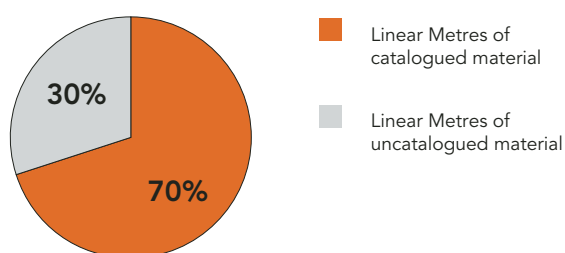


Figure 2

Size of backlog in Lancashire

There are **12,874** linear metres of archival holdings in Lancashire, of which **4,778** linear metres are uncatalogued.*

Proportion of uncatalogued holdings in Lancashire

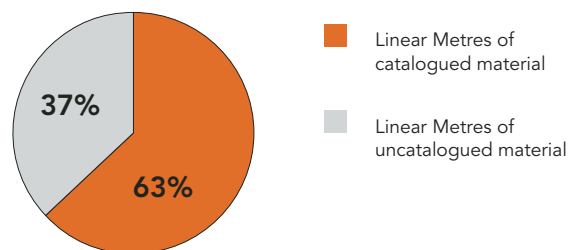


Figure 4

* Film archives in Lancashire and Cheshire are deposited at the North West Film Archive in Manchester, thereby accounting for the lack of uncatalogued film titles in these regions.

Size of backlog in Cheshire

There are 10,000 linear metres of archival holdings in Cheshire, of which 571 linear metres are uncatalogued.*

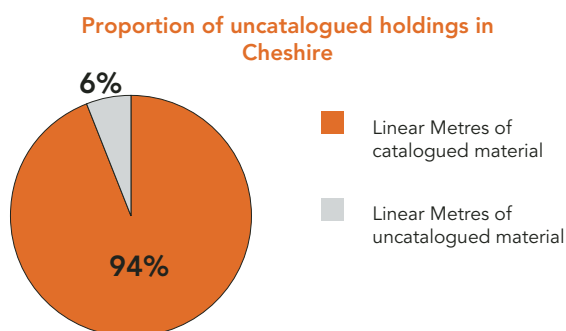


Figure 5

Size of backlog in Cumbria

There are 14,515 linear metres of archival holdings in Cumbria, of which 4,318 linear metres are uncatalogued. In addition, there are 5 uncatalogued film titles.

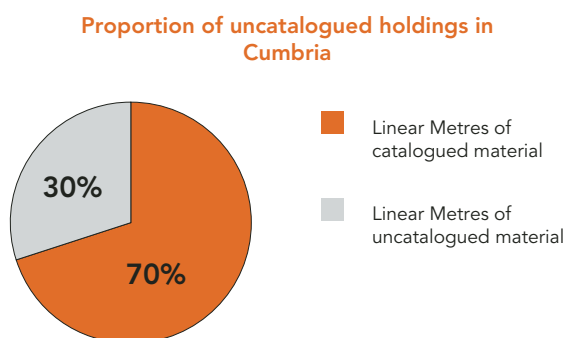


Figure 6

SECTION B - Size of backlog by collection type

Definitions:

Public Records – Archives covered by the Public Records Act 1958, such as hospital records, court records and prison records

Official Records – Archives of local authorities and all of their predecessor bodies

Deposited Records – Archives deposited by private businesses, individuals and organisations

Religious Records – Archives relating to religious institutions, of various types.

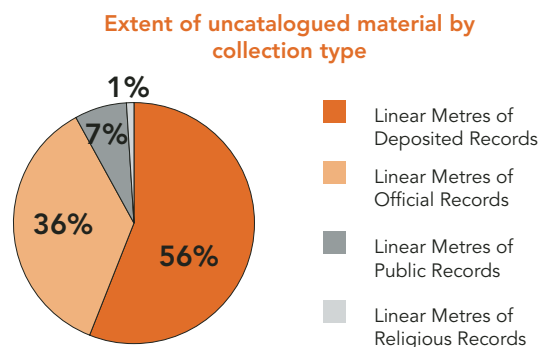


Figure 7

SECTION C – Uncatalogued collections covered by the Freedom of Information Act

Under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), which will be implemented by 2005, archival-holding organisations will be required to provide access to any records covered by the legislation. Public records, records of public authorities and deposited collections owned by local authority archive services are all covered by the Act and will have to be made available to the general public. In addition, repositories will be obliged to answer Freedom of Information enquiries within 20 working days following the receipt of an enquiry. However, without catalogues of these collections it will prove

* Film archives in Lancashire and Cheshire are deposited at the North West Film Archive in Manchester, thereby accounting for the lack of uncatalogued film titles in these regions.

very difficult for repositories to fulfil these obligations. In order to comply with FOI legislation it is important that **every** record covered by the Act is catalogued.

Extent of uncatalogued material covered by FOI

Extent of archival material covered by FOI	Number of film titles covered by FOI
9259.71	866

Number of staff years required to catalogue high priority collections (priority score of 70 and over)

Number of archivist years	Number of paraprofessional years	Number of archivist/paraprofessional years to eliminate backlog of volumes
65	13	2.4

Extent of collections covered by FOI in linear metres

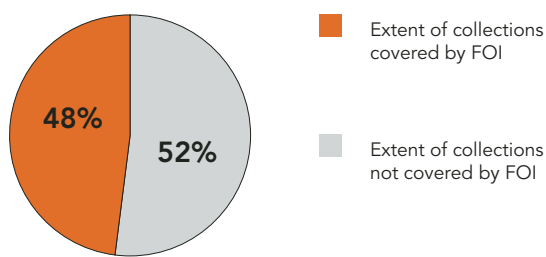


Figure 8

SECTION D – Cataloguing Resources

An important part of the Logjam project was to seek solutions to the backlog of uncatalogued archives. Calculations of the resources required were therefore made on a individual office and regional level.

Number of staff years required to eliminate the backlog

Number of archivist years	Number of paraprofessional years	Number of archivist/paraprofessional years to eliminate backlog of volumes
299	62	9.65

8 What comprises the backlog? - The North West’s Hidden Uncatalogued Archival Heritage

Without a recorded heritage knowledge of our communities, families and individuals – as well as our cities, towns and villages – would be much poorer. However, this knowledge can only be gained if the nation’s archives are accessible. The following examples of uncatalogued records highlight the richness of our archival heritage and illustrates why they are so crucial to the understanding and development of the region.

- **Lowther Family, Earls of Lonsdale**

Like most of most of the exceptional family and estate collections throughout the region, the Lowther family papers reflect the predominantly rural communities in the region, and are a particularly vital source of information for the early history of the North West. This collection contains an abundance of manorial papers, maps, surveys, title deeds, estate accounts and personal correspondence, which reflect the lives of the landed classes and their tenants. Indeed, having been resident in Cumbria for over 1000 years, the uncatalogued Lowther family papers - equivalent to the length of

three football pitches - chart the development of parishes and towns throughout the county and are an important resource for the study of land-ownership, local politics and agricultural history in the North West. The collection also includes important resources for the study of West Cumbria's early industrial expansion and its importance as a centre for overseas trade. But until these records are fully catalogued, the great research potential of these archival treasures remains fundamentally hidden.

- **Earls of Derby**

The Derby papers represent a major uncatalogued collection of personal, political and family papers which are of incredible national significance. As major figures in the world of the nineteenth century politics, the Earls of Derby assumed the most important positions within government. The 14th Earl of Derby, for example, served as Prime Minister on no less than three occasions and also served as Secretary of State for War and the Colonies and Chief Secretary of Ireland. The 15th Earl was Foreign Secretary twice and Secretary of State for the Colonies. The 13th Earl was a leading natural historian of his time, and at his seat at Knowsley he created a world famous menagerie which attracted the leading painters of the day. He was also a notable supporter of Edward Lear and the nonsense poem, *The Owl and Pussycat*, was written for his grandchildren. Accepted in lieu of inheritance tax, these papers are owned by the nation, but are stored and not fully accessible to the nation.

- **Manchester Ship Canal Company**

During the Industrial Revolution, the once rural communities grew into thriving industrial conurbations, and textile mills, engineering works, railways and canals dominated to the landscape. This exceptionally

exciting era is captured in the uncatalogued business records of companies that literally changed the face of the North West, especially those of the Manchester Ship Canal Company. Without the construction of the canal, which was one of the greatest engineering projects of the Victorian era, the North West would not have become one of the most important cotton manufacturers in the world. Its development ensured that cotton could be cheaply transported to the Mersey estuary for exportation to America, and the technical planning that lay behind its construction became a showcase for Manchester's engineering companies, attracting customers from all over the world. Equating to over a quarter of a mile of uncatalogued records, the Manchester Ship Canal collection helps to illustrate how and why the North West became such an important centre for industrial growth. The collection includes financial, personnel and administrative records which illustrate not only the development of the canal company, but also the development of the other industries it supported, such as textiles, coal and manufacturing. However, until it is catalogued, its immense research potential can not be exploited and the true worth of the collection can not be realised.

The collections highlighted within this report only represent a very small sample of the regionally and nationally significant uncatalogued archives in the North West. Had all the collections been catalogued, they could have been included in recent regional Access to Archives projects (www.a2a.org.uk), which aim to create a national, virtual archive catalogue on the World Wide Web. A2A has an enviable record in attracting new users to archives and the north west is regularly the most heavily searched region. Thanks to their uncatalogued status, over six miles of these records are excluded from the current initiative, Mills, Mansions and Corner Shops.

9 Recommendations

Their inclusion would not only have increased access to these collections, but would have helped to promote the region as a centre for the study of the Industrial Revolution.

In addition to increasing accessibility to archives, cataloguing also has a number of other benefits, to communities and organisations. This is most effectively demonstrated by the recent cataloguing project on the Merseyside Jewish Community Archives that took place at the Liverpool Record Office. The project not only made records available to the public for the first time, but it has resulted in a dramatic increase in the level of use of the collections, and the rescue of further archives. Furthermore it has galvanised the Jewish community into celebrating, securing and supporting their history and community.

'I applaud Liverpool Records office and the archivists for getting to grips with such a complex and extensive collection of records. Thanks to their work, they have thrown light onto events that even we in the Jewish of Community had forgotten and in some cases were not even aware of. By cataloguing these records they have provided a fascinating story not just for the Jewish community to research and follow but anyone around the world interested in social history'

The findings of the Logjam audit have revealed that 29% of the region's holdings remain uncatalogued and inaccessible to the public. This equates to 1220 separate archival collections and over 14 miles of archival material, clearly an unacceptable situation. Whilst some repositories have as little as 5% of their holdings uncatalogued, the average percentage of holdings uncatalogued in each repository is 38%. In repositories without an archivist in place to maintain the collections, this figure rises to 69%. 3 organisations in the region had a 100% of their holdings classed as uncatalogued.

"As with all small archive services our problems are money and staffing. We are clearly understaffed and have been since inception, having only one temporary staff in addition to the archivist. This means that we are unable to run a comprehensive service, carry out survey work and we are accumulating a backlog of uncatalogued items..."

The North West's archive holding organisations differ widely in terms of their size, type and resources, but as user numbers in the archival sector have continued to grow in the last few years, many have found it increasingly difficult to devote time to large-scale cataloguing. There are over 140,000 visits annually to archive services in the North West and resources in many of the region's repositories have had to be re-directed from cataloguing towards public service delivery. This includes meeting the demands made upon services by the growing number of postal, telephone and email enquiries.

10 Conclusion

If cataloguing backlogs are to be reduced in the region, additional resources will have to be secured to help ease the tension between cataloguing and public service delivery. The approximate cost of tackling the entire backlog assessed is 29 million pounds and the cost of cataloguing the priority collections is estimated at 4 million pounds. It is recommended that these resources could be secured by means of the following regional cataloguing strategy.

NWMLAC aims to work with and support north west archives to carry out the following 3 part plan:

- **PART 1**

Individual offices prioritise the cataloguing of collections identified as high priority by the Logjam Audit, both within current resources and by securing additional internal resources.

- **PART 2**

Individual offices prioritise the cataloguing of collections identified as high priority by the Logjam Audit, making individual bids to external funders. NWRAC and NWMLAC support these projects.

- **PART 3**

Individual offices combine their resources and seek to solve the problems on a regional basis through an externally funded project. NWRAC and NWMLAC to lead this project.

A substantial proportion of the region's archives remain inaccessible to the people of the North West. These uncatalogued records are an integral part of the region's heritage and chart the development of communities, businesses and institutions from the 12th century to present day. However, unless additional resources can be secured to catalogue these collections, the potential of this unique and remarkable resource will remain unexploited.

The implementation of the regional cataloguing strategy would ensure that the backlog could be drastically reduced. Repositories would have the opportunity to secure resources from up to 3 different funding channels and could ensure a drastic reduction in the region's cataloguing backlog. By working co-operatively, repositories throughout the region could cost-effectively catalogue their collections and strengthen working relationships with other archive-holding organisations in the North West.

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