

Gloucestershire Archives

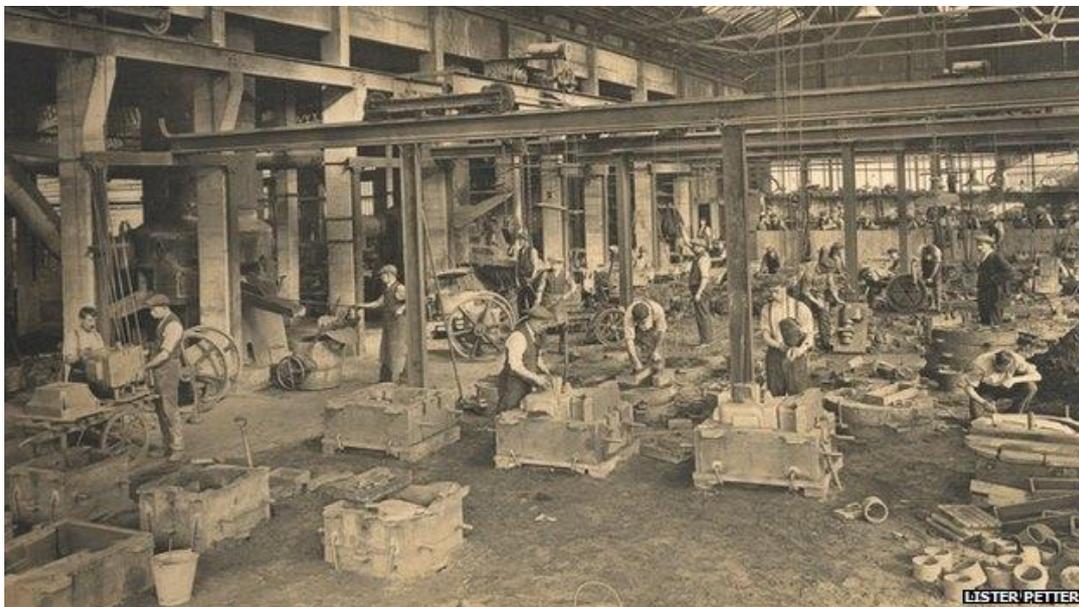


Report on the Listers cataloguing project

Introduction

Gloucestershire Archives was delighted to be awarded £2,000 in 2014 from the Business Archives Council to fund the cataloguing of a significant Gloucestershire-based engineering archive, Listers of Dursley.

R A Lister and Company Limited (latterly known as Lister Petter), one of the oldest firms in the county, was founded in Dursley in 1867 and remained as a family business for nearly 100 years. In its heyday it employed around 5000 people and Lister engines had become world-renowned for reliability – they were a major supplier of sheep-shearing equipment to Australia and New Zealand and their engines drove electricity generators and irrigation pumps throughout the Commonwealth. The firm also manufactured Danish inventor Mikael Pedersen's innovative [Dursley Pedersen](#) bicycle in the early 1900s and was involved in munitions production during World War 1.



Listers workers c.1920

Early in 2014 the firm went into liquidation and new owners closed the Dursley premises down. Local people acted swiftly while the site was being cleared to rescue the surviving business records from destruction. Members of the Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology (GSIA) helped

in the salvage and negotiated with the new owners for the records to be transferred for permanent safe-keeping to Gloucestershire Archives.

Project planning

Gloucestershire Archives' approach to this project was shaped by the enthusiastic involvement of the GSIA members and built on experience learnt by us from previous projects. We decided to use the BAC grant to employ a part-time freelance archivist who would be responsible for creating the overall structure of the catalogue; we planned to train the volunteers so that they would be confident to undertake more detailed listing of specific items. Their local and specialist knowledge would be invaluable in this task.



Records in storage at the factory

However, we were also aware that the records had been kept in damp and mouldy conditions at the factory and that they would need to be dried and cleaned carefully before cataloguing could begin. With limited time to secure additional funding for this to happen, GSIA again stepped up to the mark with a donation of £1,500 to cover the purchase of archival quality storage boxes, other protective packaging materials and some conservation treatment. It also publicised the project by email to its members and quickly recruited a small but dedicated band to undertake the cleaning work. With training and support from our conservator, the volunteers notched up 124 hours during September to November 2014 removing the surface grime - thereby freeing up our conservator to concentrate on dealing with a few particularly damaged items.



Cleaning underway by volunteers at Gloucestershire Archives

In turn, this allowed our freelance archivist to begin her sorting and cataloguing work in earnest early in January, and she had completed the catalogue structure and basic item level descriptions for the whole collection by February. Using an excel spreadsheet template supplied by us, she was able to do some of the final arranging and editing work remotely, making the most of her allotted cataloguing hours. We were pleased that there was sufficient time for her to incorporate two small earlier accessions of Listers records into the new catalogue. Archives staff then uploaded the spreadsheet data into our collections management database (CALM) and we published the catalogue online in March.

The same GSIA volunteer group was keen to see the project through to completion and attended further training workshops in February run by Archives staff to cover aspects of cataloguing and packaging. To date the group has been visiting the Archives once a week to enhance the catalogue descriptions at item level. This activity is continuing beyond the formal end of the grant-funded project.

Additional activity

GSIA has tapped into its network of engine enthusiasts to help sort and identify many hundreds of loose photographs that were rescued along with the written archive. A master set of photographs, with descriptions added to the online Listers catalogue, will be preserved at Gloucestershire Archives. A selection of images will be made available for display at the Dursley Heritage Centre and the Internal Fire Museum of Power in Wales.

Key outcomes

- The BAC grant was a key factor in securing the permanent safe-keeping of this significant business archive as it helped to persuade the current owners to donate rather than deposit the Lister collection at Gloucestershire Archives.

- The project volunteers gained new knowledge and skills, and clearly enjoyed their time at the Archives, commenting that they *'liked finding out how documents are preserved ... and understanding how Gloucestershire Archives' cataloguing system worked'*. Some particularly enjoyed the hands-on cleaning task and asked if they could help to do more of this in the future. They are all keen to be involved in further partnership projects.
- Archives staff too benefitted from the opportunity to develop a range of experience and skills in terms of securing external funding, project planning, managing volunteers and delivering training.
- Feedback from both volunteers and staff has already helped to shape elements of our current major Heritage Lottery Funded partnership project [For the Record](#).
- Among the local community, the project volunteers are acting as 'ambassadors' for Gloucestershire Archives and are promoting our service to people who may have been otherwise unaware. Ray Wilson of GSIA, who was heavily involved in the rescue of the documents, lives near the former Lister factory: he reports *'I am extremely pleased to discover, during the last few months, that all the former employees I've spoken to are delighted that the archives have been saved and will be accessible to future generations'*.
- The catalogue to the Lister Archive is now available via Gloucestershire Archives' online catalogue and will be updated regularly with the volunteers' latest contributions:
<http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/catalogue> (use 'Search the Archives' option, and enter **D3310** as the 'Finding Reference')
- Information will also be accessible via The National Archives' DISCOVERY catalogue

Budget summary

Total Income	BAC grant £2000 GSIA grant £1500
Total Expenditure	Freelance archivist and related costs £2000 Packaging materials and conservation treatments £1500
Volunteer contribution	300 hours +

Julie Courtenay, Collections Team Leader, Gloucestershire Archives, April 2015