

Getting to know you ...

Regular feature profiling New Zealand's
Archive community



Who are you and where are you based?

Christopher Meech, Curator of Archives at Waitaki District Libraries and Archive, based in the North Otago Museum, Oamaru.

What services do you provide?

- Research services in person and remotely
- Photocopying and digital reproduction services
- Free wifi
- Access to Ancestry.com library edition
- A reference collection of publications and indexes
- High quality digital photographs for purchase
- Occasional events and programmes

What do you hold?

We hold community and local authority records for Waitaki District from the earliest days of colonial settlement. Local authority records include those of the Palmerston Borough Council, Oamaru Borough Council,

Waihemo County Council, Waitaki County Council, and the Waitaki District Council.

The community records, which include the history of many local organisations, business, families and people, complement the local authority records well. Together they build a well-rounded picture of life in North Otago. We have a remarkable photograph collection of over 500,000 images. See the North Otago Museum Facebook page for the discussion and interaction generated around local images from the 1970s. These images are an incredible and popular resource. The Archive has a special relationship with the Oamaru Mail and houses its newspaper and photographic archives. We also have maps and plans from throughout North Otago.

Biggest challenge for your Archive?

Despite having a purpose built facility less than 20 years old the single largest issue we face is one of collection storage space. The archive has been unable to receive local authority records for a number of years now due to lack of storage space. Large community archives also pose storage challenges. The community and the Archive want the history of their district to be accessible locally.

Biggest opportunity for your Archive?

Waitaki District Council's focus is collaborative. See the combined website for our cultural institutions - Forrester Gallery, North Otago Museum, Oamaru Opera House and Waitaki District Libraries and Archive – www.culturewaitaki.org.nz. Through this collaboration the Archive can promote collections and services and develop new combined services. We can also participate in and benefit from successful outreach programmes that are collectively developed and delivered. The new website aims to be the collaborative home for each partner and opens exciting possibilities for future digital initiatives.

What is your favourite or most important collection or series and why?

My favourite records are from the Oamaru Woollen Mills and came to the Archive when the mill closed recently. There are about 25 linear metres in total and they date from the 1880s. They are a complete series of business records from a prominent company with deep roots in North Otago. I'm looking forward to fully arranging and describing them and better understanding the history and organizational structure of this remarkable business.

Do you have a recent notable acquisition that you'd like to highlight to ARANZ members?

Recently, while looking through material awaiting accessioning, I discovered a document titled 'Form of passenger list'. The list is on 6 pages (3 leaves) and appears to have been torn from a larger book. It documents the voyage of the William Davie from Graves End, England to Bluff in 1874. It includes names and descriptions of passengers and those who died on the voyage and is an exciting historical find.

Archivist and contact details:

Christopher Meech, Curator of Archives

cmeech@waitaki.govt.nz

General enquires to archive@waitaki.govt.nz