

Getting to know you...

Regular feature profiling New Zealand's archives community



Who are you and where are you based?

Lesley Courtney, Team leader of Research & Archives, Palmerston North City Library.

What do you hold?

We provide a one stop shop for local history needs, including both primary and secondary resources, and a wider collection of New Zealand and Pacific Island resources.

Importantly, we hold the Ian Matheson City Archives collections, of both Council and Community archives. They stretch from the creation of Palmerston North as a new Borough in 1877, through to the present day. We are lucky to be able to complement our Council archives with community records, for a more balanced view of our development and history. This collection includes locally based organisations, businesses and individual/family records.

Our secondary resources include books, genealogical information, official publications, research databases and newspapers.

What services do you provide?

As we are an amalgam of archives and library resources we offer:

- A book collection for borrowing
- A free research service for distance queries, although we have to be practical about the amount of time that we can put into them
- Photocopying or scanning of archival records on request. We also encourage researchers to use their own cameras
- Programmes and events that relate to the scope of research and archives
- A free digitisation station for patrons to scan their own images.
- Provision of high quality images (largely photographs) e.g. for personal or publication purposes
- A digital library – Pataka Ipurangi: Manawatu Memory Online – which holds photographs, archival documents, maps and plans, etc, at <http://digitallibrary.pncc.govt.nz>
- Databases of listings of our archival collections at <http://archivescentral.org.nz> (Council), <http://archives.palmerstonnorth.com> (Community)

Biggest challenge and opportunity for your Archive?

Currently, as the merger of the Archives and former New Zealand and Pacific Islands areas of the Library is a fairly recent development, we are still working through developing this widened service.

It has created both opportunities and challenges in building a new team of six, and a new service which offers both primary and secondary resources. Positively, it has resulted in a larger team with knowledge of the archives and how they might be used. Also customers can now research using the archives seven days a week which is great. More challenging, but exciting, has been the huge learning curve undergone (and still being gone through) for both archives and library staff as we learn new systems and ways of interacting with customers. While we retain our individual expertise, we need to be able to cater for the majority of enquiries faced 'at the counter'.

On just the archives front, like others we face the challenge of needing more storage space, and of course time to eliminate the backlog of records for processing. I suspect this is no surprise to many other archives!

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

It is so hard to answer this as I love the community archives and constantly discover new treasures in our holdings. Some of my favourites, for no other reason than I find them fascinating, are: a tiny notebook that served as a shipboard diary by a Mr Cole in 1885 – his day to day life on board caring for his children and his reflections on other passengers is wonderful to read; Philip Fowler's records (largely photographs) of serving as a pilot based in Greece during WWI – the informal camp life images are great, and we were recently able to send copies of many of them to the museum on the island of Thasos in Greece; All Saint's Children's Home – it's been a privilege to talk to some of the people who have accessed these records, who have shared their own or family members' personal memories.

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

Too many to mention as they are all unique records in their own ways, whether Council or community. But overall I do think that we are very lucky to be entrusted with the community archives that we have, whether it is a full set of business records or a single photograph.

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