

Video transcripts

Edited conversations between Archivists, Steve Connelly and Jan Merchant with artist Kyra Clegg.

Talking Archives

Music

Steve: As a local authority archivist, in some ways you were first and foremost preserving the records on behalf of the Council, and the rest of it, we thought that it would be a good idea to accept records from other places, because we are a place that could be trusted to look after things. But there's far more of an inclusive approach now, saying that although we're still the official repository of official records...that's almost played down a bit as you've got to be seen to be representing everyone in the community

Jan: Rather than in a bigger archive, we get to experience all aspects...which is a really good thing as you're getting to be the detective, as well as the preserver, as well as the manager ...And you're coming across, you're meeting with people, who these archives really make a difference to their lives, especially when they're doing their family history.. that you've actually found a piece of information for somebody that has answered a question, be it a small question or a big question...and the joy and the pleasure that they have, that you see on their faces or get back in an email or whatever, it does make your day..

Steve: There is that sort of thing as well, sometimes when visitors see, they're so used to seeing digital documents, so when you actually produce a document, and they say, 'oh, is this actually...?'. They sometimes find it quite hard to comprehend

Music

Steve: It's quite rewarding when somebody's coming in to do a fairly serious piece of research as well...you do get a bit of a buzz out of that, you know that the stuff that

you hold is respected academically, that it's going to be the basis of somebody's research...

Jan: ..that they're going to write a history based on the records we've got in here

Steve: ..we get a little acknowledgment, become a footnote here and there.. but it's still good to know that the stuff, it's appealing across a broad range of people, people who are doing very serious academic research, people who are doing local history for fun or just a desire to know more about the area that they live in or came from, and there's people doing their family history as well

Thomas Matthews- Rachel Anderson- letters

Wedding music

Jan: There's fifty-three letters from Thomas, writing in London, to Rachel in Perth and there's only two of Rachel's letters survived. They're love letters... Thomas trying to persuade Rachel to go ahead and marry him. Thomas was a widower with at least four children – this is in the 1830s that they were written– 1830 and 1831 – and he's writing from London to Perth, but it's also evident from the letters that he's visiting her regularly in Perth, because there's a lot of information about his travelling...how he travels there, being on the coach – inside and outside the coach – how long it's taking, what the weather's like, that he's caught a chill because he's had to ride fifty miles in the rain on a horse...But the bulk of them is Thomas saying to Rachel: look, you've got to set a wedding date. They've obviously met at some point and come to an understanding, but he's desperately trying to get her to set this date that she keeps putting off.

Jan: One of the main reasons that Rachel seems to be dithering over whether to marry him or not reflects on the status of women generally at that point. She's obviously got her own property or money and a lot of the early letters are concerned with what's going to happen to that property if she marries him. At that time, a women's property became that of her husband on marriage. Thomas really, really goes out of his way to say, don't use this as an excuse not to marry me, because I've

written.. a pre-nup, basically, to say the money stays with you, it is yours to do as you will. His children by his first marriage are already provided for and he's got a good job with the War Office, so he doesn't need her money. I think that's one of the things that her friends were wondering about as well.

Jan: They're just a fascinating group of letters. You read them and you think, you're transported to the middle of this, almost teenage...squabble, although it was a very serious business, marriage. It certainly was at that time because of course for women it was either being in some kind of governess role or domestic role within the wider family – or marriage. And that was all they could do

Pipe music

CE52-2-1 Allan Breck Stewart description

Steve: Yes, I quite like showing visiting children, when we have school groups round, the description and dress of Allan Breck Stewart. I think it's old enough to be quite quaint but almost modern enough handwriting to have a stab at trying to read it themselves. They find it quite funny when they look through it and see that this character from *Kidnapped* is a real person and wasn't quite as handsome perhaps as the Hollywood stars like David McCallum and Michael Caine who've played him in the films.

The character was a real person who was wanted for the Appin murder so the Collector of Customs was sent a letter from the authorities saying to keep an eye open for him trying to slip on to a vessel and escape back to France from whence he'd come. These events form part of the backdrop for *Kidnapped* – David Balfour falls in with Allan Breck Stewart.

Of course, the breck stands for spotty and when you read it, it says he's very much marked with the small pox and describes his physical stature which is not the most impressive, being round shouldered and in-kneed. Obviously a man who could handle himself in a fight....

Winners

Fruit machine sounds and music

Jan: The history of a society is a history of winners because their's are the records that have survived in the archive, that've been chosen. So that all the Council records have been kept and you could argue that they're the winners. But the displaced people, those on the fringes of society – we don't keep their records

Kyra: Except for the criminal records?

Steve: Yes, you always often say that to family historians – that you're more likely to find out something about somebody if they had a troubled life, if they did come into conflict with the authorities. So you have the records of the 'losers' in that sense...

Jan: But they're official losers, aren't they? Officialdom has marked them as losers

Music

Jan: when people come to the Archive, what are they looking for? – a lot of people want answers – sometimes you can't get the answers that you're after – sometimes you get different answers...

Steve: It's a jigsaw, so they're looking for the next piece of information...

Jan: a lot of the material that's in the Archive is there by pure chance..

Steve: We will be part of the Archive ourselves, in some ways, in the way we thought...some of our actual records, a few will survive until the archive of the future....

Jan: what has survived is just a little bit of what was there [created] originally...