



People in the News

Sarah Wickham

Heritage Quay was a winner in the 'Buildings That Inspire' category of the 2016 Guardian University Awards and was also the winner in the 'under 2,000 square metres' category of the SCONUL Library Design Awards. The panel of judges for the SCONUL award said, 'The University of Huddersfield's Heritage Quay is an excellent example of a repurposing of social space within a wider library and student services environment'. We wanted to learn more about Heritage Quay so went to meet Sarah Wickham, who is the University's Archivist and Records Manager.

Sarah told us that the Heritage Quay project came about through a keen awareness of the gap between the actual and potential use of the archive collections because of the low level of information about them and the lack of space to accommodate and deal with them. Sarah explained, 'We were eager to secure additional resource to help us make the step change in providing access to them. This project is about collections information and staffing resources as much as the space to house and showcase collections properly and provide the appropriate accommodation for users. We're hugely grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund and the University both for the money and the encouragement/challenge that this has brought.'

'a keen awareness of the gap between the actual and potential use of the archive collections'

As part of the planning, the Library undertook a large piece of research and consultation work on target audiences for the collections. 'We talked to people inside the University, of course, but, more importantly, to people outside, and particularly people who hadn't used archives before. This shaped the activities we planned for and have been delivering since 2014. It also fed into the interpretation strategy which shapes how we exhibit collections – and, finally, into the design of the physical facility of Heritage Quay. Our collections are quite diverse in terms of format and subject matter, from British 21st-century contemporary music to heavy industry to sport (see next photograph), so we have some quite distinct audiences with some very specialist needs! I think the architects probably found it quite frustrating to wait until we had done this piece of work before we could finalize the brief and the design, but the space works all the better now for having waited then.'

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The collection is diverse in terms of format and subject matter. *Photo: Simon Hadley*

Sarah explained that they designed the spaces to accommodate academic users, from the 'traditional' quiet searchroom for individual study to the group space used for classes and lectures. They also ensured that the spaces were flexible enough to accommodate other activities – like young people's dance, performances by Heritage Quay's touring theatre partner Mikron and musical performances – as well as the more traditional lectures and meetings held by local archaeological and historical societies.



An under-fives dance group making use of the flexible space. *Photo: University of Huddersfield*



Playing the score for a silent film. *Photo: University of Huddersfield*

103 We asked Sarah how Heritage Quay has balanced the duty to secure and preserve archives with making them more accessible. Sarah began by quoting Arthur G Doughty, who rejoiced in the job title of Dominion Archivist of Canada and who, in 1924, said archives 'are the gift of one generation to another'. She has always found the stewardship role a challenging one to live out. She explained, 'Working in archives is always a fine balance between making material as widely available as possible whilst ensuring its continuing preservation. There's no point preserving things if their content is not going to be accessed – but often the very act of accessing an item makes it vulnerable to damage and loss. Paper is pretty robust, but photographic and magnetic media are particularly volatile. We have an unusually high proportion of sound and photographic materials in the Heritage Quay collections, so we've undertaken a lot of digitization of obsolete formats to ensure the continuing preservation of the content. We built facilities into the design of Heritage Quay to ensure that these digitized materials were available – through our multimedia, but also by having equipment like a record player, cassette recorder and VHS player available in our listening room so we can digitize on demand when needed. (We have a piano too for those researchers who need it!)

'archives "are the gift of one generation to another"'

'We have a piano too for those researchers who need it'



David Smith, Participation and Engagement Officer, installing a viol. *Photo: University of Huddersfield*

Sarah went on to explain that, through the project, there has also been a significant chunk of work on more traditional remedial conservation. 'The large proportion of our capital works saw the creation of repositories to the current gold standard for archive storage, PD5454:2012, which is the most effective way of managing the risks across the entire collections. But the absolute frontline defence is good handling by users and staff – and tactful communication of the reasons we ask people not to lick their fingers when they turn pages, for example! And lots and lots of archival boxes which provide a stable microclimate for material, help with security, and make things easier to handle.'



Traditional conservation, display and storage also continues. *Photos: Simon Hadley*

Since collections are increasingly born digital and often only available in digital format, we asked Sarah how the design of the Library facilitates access to those collections. She explained, 'We used interactive technology built into Heritage Quay so that people have access at their fingertips to digital formats. For us, "access" doesn't simply mean museum-style collections in glass cases – although there's a bit of that – or someone sitting in the searchroom ploughing through boxes of material – although it includes that too. It means hands-on access, whether through using your hands to control our gesture wall, or multi-touch tables, or direct hands-on access to original material. The "thrill of the real" is absolutely critical for our audiences, so interactivity in our context might be identifying photographs and film footage (a really popular activity with some of our super-dedicated volunteers!), or young people creating a play based on the collections, or a piece of art, or cutting your own vinyl record. The flexible spaces we have make that possible – but interaction with collections is underpinned by enthusiastic, knowledgeable and helpful staff, of course!'

'The "thrill of the real" is absolutely critical for our audiences'



Keeping it real – experimenting with the gesture wall. *Photo: Simon Hadley*

105 Clearly, a great deal of thought has gone into an innovative, technologically advanced and interactive space, but we wanted to know if there were any surprises for users when the newly constructed Heritage Quay opened. 'Lots!' said Sarah, 'chiefly within the collections themselves. People were also surprised by the multimedia, which offers a real wow factor. The other key thing was how welcome members of the public felt on the University campus as new users of the service – we routinely hear visitors say that they have never been on campus before, but felt able to come to one of our events or access the collections.'

'People were also surprised by the multimedia, which offers a real wow factor'

We asked Sarah about what the new space meant to her and the Library staff and if it has changed the way they work. 'It's completely transformed the way we provide archive services – not only the range of what we do, but also the way we think about collections and work with our partners, whether they're academics within the institution, external organizations or our public programming groups. At a very basic level, having all the collections together in one place, organized logically and easily retrievable, has saved an enormous amount of time – I estimate about 0.5 FTE, which – in a team of 5.5 FTE delivering archives *and* information/records management services – is a considerable amount. It's been really significant for the team to have gone from half a person working in archives in 2011 to seeing an integrated information/records and archives management team and to have been recognized for our work by the awards we've won. Archive Service Accreditation, the quality assurance scheme for archives in all sectors overseen by The National Archives, was the icing on the cake last year.'

'It's completely transformed the way we provide archive services'



Sarah with her team at Heritage Quay. Photo: University of Huddersfield

Sarah and her team have achieved a great deal already, and we asked what their plans are for the future. 'More celebrations of the smaller things!' said Sarah. 'This was our team's New Year's resolution (and we are sticking to it so far). In the short term, we have planned a couple of tweaks to the facilities and equipment in the light of what we've learned from being open for two-and-a-half years. Then a full programme of events and activities is planned, taking us into the summer, before we evaluate everything and make decisions about sustaining activity and creating new models for what we do. Finally, there are some new partnerships in the pipeline, including a couple of exciting ones which will take us in new directions. The whole team wants the project's legacy to be a real gift to the next generation(s).'

We feel sure that the legacy for the next generations is not only in safe hands, but creative ones too.

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Lorraine Estelle

Co-Editor, *Insights*, GB

E-mail: lorraine.estelle@counterusage.org

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7941-9848>

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