

Getting to know you...

Regular feature profiling New Zealand's Archive community



Kathleen Stringer next to the collection of road board archives rescued from the Council basement. *Photographer: Helen Alexander, 2015.*

Who are you and where are you based?

Hello I am Kathleen Stringer and I am employed by the Ashburton District Council as Archivist for the Ashburton Museum, here in Mid Canterbury.

What services do you provide?

The Museum recently moved from a rather cramped building that was originally the County Council offices. Storage and research facilities were less than ideal. Now, with our purpose built Heritage Centre, we can provide a comfortable and spacious research area, and an ever-increasing body of material to research. Inquiries are welcomed both in person and remotely.

We provide the usual photocopying and scanning services common



The new Ashburton Art Gallery and Heritage Centre, home to the Ashburton Archive and Museum. *Photographer: Helen Alexander, 2015.*

to most Archives, and a terminal in the research room gives researchers access to our holdings (via our Past Perfect database). We hope, however, that this database will be live on the 'net next year.

What do you hold?

The Museum actively collects material pertaining to the people, places and activities of the Mid Canterbury region, with special emphasis on the social history of this community. Due to the limited space in the old building, our Collection was rather small. But with greater space and greatly improved facilities the Collection is growing in both size and scope.

We have a large collection of photographs, maps and plans as well as archives. Collections of special interest / importance include:

- Subdivision plans from the 1880s–1990s and drawings and specifications from a local architect.
- Indexed negative collections from two local photographers (from the 1950s–1990s) as well as the local newspaper *The Ashburton Guardian*.
- Archives from business and local groups both large (such as Ashburton Electric Power Board and the forerunner of Heartland Bank) and small. We have some school records (including Ashburton's two high schools) as well as a collection of Baptist church material.

Biggest challenge for your Archive?

Due to the relocation process, we were unable to assist researchers for almost a year, so we need to encourage those people to come back, as

well as increase our profile to potential researchers. The services and size of the collection has changed dramatically in the last year, but it will require effort to get that message out to the researching community.

Our goal to increase our users is affected somewhat by the fact that we now share the building with the local family history group. They hold basic family tree material – indices to school and church material etc, so many people visit them instead of us; indeed some members of the public believe they are visiting the Archive when they are in fact going to the Family History Group rooms.

Biggest opportunity for your Archive?

We are embarking on a new chapter in the Museum's story and opportunities abound. Naturally I am focussing on converting our challenges into opportunities – working more closely with the Family History Group to really provide a one stop shop for researchers – so people can leave Ashburton with a comprehensive picture of their ancestor – not just the bare bones.

Another opportunity I am working on is to publicise our holdings to educational facilities – such as schools and universities. Every day, I come across material and themes suitable for thesis and other in-depth studies, we need to get our information about our holdings to those people.

We have the potential to become a 'must go to' facility and making this happen is one of the projects that I am working on, as well as answering inquiries and accessioning van loads of material. While you may not have heard of us before - you soon will!

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

If only for its size, the material from the Ashburton District Council must be one of our most important collections. From the beginning of the settlement in 1864 road boards, County and Borough Councils administered this area. Within the meters of records we have lists of early residents, correspondence and documents pertaining to the establishment of schools, townships and even the local hospital. Far from being boring records about roads and bridges – these records contain quite interesting insights into such diverse topics as health, farming and the provision of unemployment and other relief schemes.

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

While not an accessioned collection item, one of my notable acquisitions is my small but very passionate team of hardworking volunteers. Without their input, the Archive we are now and certainly what I hope will become, could not happen. From assisting in transporting van loads of archives from the council basement, to cleaning years of dust from the neglected volumes and indexing the most useful items, my team greatly enhances the provision of access to the material.

Not only do volunteers assist in the processing of material, they also provide an excellent link to the wider community. Their promoting of the Archives and its holdings has greatly enhanced the interest in the Museum in the community.

Archivist and contact details:

Kathleen Stringer
Ashburton Museum
03 3077890 / DDI03 307 78193
Kathleen.Stringer@adc.govt.nz