



SCA Education Coaching 2018 – Perth & Kinross Archive Case Study

Our Service

Established in November 1978 Perth & Kinross Archive aims to select, preserve, and make available to the highest standards, the records of Perth & Kinross Council and its predecessors, and those of local individuals, estates, businesses and organisations. The Archive service sits within Culture Perth and Kinross, a charitable Trust which officially came into being on April 1, 2016, taking responsibility for the delivery and development of archive, library, museum and gallery services in Perth & Kinross.

The Challenge

In 2018 the Archive applied for, and was successful in receiving, three days of Education Coaching from Douglas Roberts, Education Officer at the Scottish Council on Archives. We made this application based on our long term desire to create an attractive and sustainable learning offer within the Perth & Kinross Archive. We were also aware of Douglas Roberts' reputation for utilising drama techniques in his approach to developing archive based learning programmes and were very keen to work with, and learn from him.

Up until now the Archive's schools engagement programme has traditionally focused upon group visits to the Archive where pupils are given a general introduction to archives, a tour of the strong-room and an opportunity to look at a display of archives in the search-room. These sessions are extremely popular and attract positive feed-back from teachers and pupils, but they involve a lot of staff time and can be disruptive to researchers in the search-room. We have also come to realise that they are not tailored to the school curriculum and therefore may not be making as meaningful a contribution to the pupil's learning as we would like.

We wanted to create an Archive Education Resource with identified historical Topics that could be strongly supported by records in our archive. Each Topic needed to:

- Demonstrate a clear link to the school curriculum and the Curriculum for Excellence
- Be engaging and interactive
- Offer a unique opportunity to use original, primary sources for learning
- Demonstrate the value and relevance of archives in education and society

This Resource would provide teachers with a clear understanding of the resources we could provide and the topics that our collections could support thus allowing us to manage expectations and staff time.

SCA Coaching

Working with Douglas for the three coaching days was our Assistant Archivist, Sarah Wilcock and CPK's Senior Officer for Communities and Learning, Jordan Irvine.

Our first priority was to identify what we wanted to get out of the coaching programme and how to manage the time we had with Douglas to ensure we received the maximum benefit of his time.

We needed to:

1. Create a structure for our Education Resource that all our Topics would conform to which would greatly reduce staff time
2. Identify a collection that would become our first Topic and would be used to pilot the Resource to local schools

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3. Develop an optional programme within the Resource that would provide added value and would focus on a creative interpretation of the archives

We used the first two coaching days to review our existing schools offering and explore what we would like it to become. Douglas explained the key objectives of the Curriculum for Excellence and the principles of lesson planning and learning outcomes, which helped us develop a good understanding of teachers' expectations and needs. In order for our resource to be attractive to teachers and meet several of the key criteria in the Curriculum for Excellence it would need to involve a range of activities that would encourage students to engage with the collections intellectually, emotionally and creatively.

Douglas introduced us to an effective lesson plan template and took us through the process of identifying engaging activities and learning outcomes. Drawing on his knowledge and experience we developed a template for Perth & Kinross Archive Service which is based upon his tried and tested methods. Our new resource is directed at lower secondary school classes and framed around a generic four-unit module which begins with a visit to the archive and is followed up by three school sessions, two of which will be delivered by the teacher. Each module will focus upon a subject in the school curriculum which can be explored through collections in the archive, and will culminate in a creative written, artistic or dramatic output, such as short stories, recordings or a play.



In order to assess the viability of the new resource and encourage schools participation we needed to develop a pilot module and produce an appealing example of a creative output to show to teachers. The First World War was identified as a topical and enduring subject with plenty of supporting material in the archive. After some consideration the personal papers of FWW soldier, Private John Alexander Veitch (MS323) was selected as a suitable archival focus for the module. This collection includes 201 letters describing his army training and life on the front. Using some of these letters pupils will be introduced to 'The Experience of a First World War Soldier' through four structured units:

1. The Experience of John Alex Veitch
2. Trench Life
3. Troop Movement and The Battle of Cambrai
4. The Fate of John Alex Veitch

The letters also lend themselves very well to dramatic interpretation. Douglas had previously worked on a similar project with East Dunbartonshire schools to record the letters and diaries of FWW soldiers and nurses and we decided to use the same process to create an activity that invited young people to re-enact the letters of John Alex through sound recording. This would not only create a unique experience for the young people to engage on a personal level with a FWW soldier's life but would also offer them insight into the techniques and use of equipment required to make sound recordings.

Our third coaching day was used to plan and deliver a recording session, and learn how to use the recording and editing equipment. Sarah selected 15 letters from the collection and created scripts for these. It was determined that five or six actors were required for the recordings and five young people from the Perth Youth Theatre and local schools were recruited to come along to a one off, four hour recording session in October 2018.

The group was introduced to John Alex and his story, and was given the opportunity to read some of his original letters. The scripts were then divided up and they were given the chance to decide who would read which part. Douglas took them through some warm up exercises and after a practice read through of one of the letters the recording began. Impressively, the young actors were able to get through all 15 letters in the four hour period with no rehearsal and only a very brief read through. Although the session was intense and highly focused all of our young actors really enjoyed it and found the experience engaging and valuable.



Emily Turner (19)

'I was interested in learning about the historical element and getting to work with the recording equipment. I'm interested in all forms of performance so this was really exciting to participate in[...] I would love to see more unique opportunities for young people like this in Perth. History is fascinating but sometimes feels inaccessible, and bringing Alex's story to life in this way was amazing to be a part of.'

Charlie Johnson (14)

'Reading the letters to his mum felt very personal [...] really enjoyed it and it was a great project to be part of – thank you'

Doug Yellowley (14)

'I enjoyed getting to know a bit about John Alex Veitch and meeting other people interested in the topic [...] Would like to say thank you for the experience and an insight into John's life.'

After the recording Douglas gave Sarah a crash course in sound editing. She then proceeded to edit the 15 recordings down into a 30 minute sound clip. This clip was then paired with images from the Veitch collection and images taken on the day of recording to produce a 30 minute film.

The film was debuted as part of the Explore Your Archive war themed film screening on 30 November 2018.

Outcome

We are delighted with the outcome of our SCA Education Coaching. Douglas's input has been invaluable to the process of creating a new education offer for Perth & Kinross Archive Service. He was able to bring structure and focus to the sessions while allowing Sarah and Jordan to lead the discussion and ultimately achieve results specific to our service needs. As a result of his assistance our team has developed a greater understanding of the school curriculum and how our collections can be used to create engaging school resources which meet the needs of the curriculum, pupils and teachers. Sarah has learned new pedagogical and technical skills which will support the on-going

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development of the Archive and CPK's learning offer, and contributes to our wider engagement and outreach activities. Pedagogical skills include lesson planning, effective communication with pupils and managing a classroom. Technical skills include using sound recording and editing software, and planning and managing a recording session.

We feel that our new Education Resource is engaging, dynamic and, most importantly for us, sustainable. We would recommend this offer to any other archive wishing to develop a meaningful and focused education programme.

We are now ready to pilot our first Resource to schools as part of our upcoming Perth & Kinross Remembers Project. We have promoted the offer to local schools via their history network and there have been some great responses from teachers:

Kiera Senkel, St John's RC Academy

'We have had a fantastic uptake of S3 History and our study of Scotland and the Great War. Our aim for this academic year is to make the course as interesting and engaging as possible [...] studying the impact of the Great War on Scotland has allowed us to venture in to the big stories of areas such as Glasgow and Edinburgh, however this would be a great opportunity to study the experience of those from 'our neck of the woods' [...] we would love to delve deeper, to appreciate individuals as the sons, brothers, husbands, fathers they were.'

We now have two secondary schools ready to participate in Autumn 2019 and Spring 2020.