

GREATER MANCHESTER COUNTY RECORD OFFICE

Background

The Statutory Joint Authorities in Greater Manchester were given archival powers under the 1985 Local Government Act. The authorities exercise their powers through their contributions to the Greater Manchester County Record Office, which are paid as equal shares of GMCRO's net budget. Each of the participating authorities is invited to send a member to the meetings of the AGMA Statutory Functions Committee.

The services provided by GMCRO include:

- archival storage under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967, the Local Government (Records) Act 1962, and the Local Government Act 1972
- records management of semi-current files
- a public searchroom where members of the public can research the records held at GMCRO
- on-line information about the records available at GMCRO
- education work to support the delivery of the National Curriculum in Greater Manchester schools, particularly in History and Citizenship
- opportunities for lifelong learning, including workshops on family history and using the Internet for family history research
- specialist archive conservation and reprographics services

GMCRO offers participating authorities up to 200 hours of conservation, reprographics and records management per annum. Only the cost of materials is charged for. Any additional time requested is charged at competitive rates, and an inclusive charge is made for storage where appropriate.

Holdings of relevance to the Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority

Records transferred by the Greater Manchester Council and the GM Residuary Body - over 30,000 files in all - are held for the use of successor bodies. Deposited archives relating to all forms of transport remain one of GMCRO's great strengths. Significant archives include those held for SELNEC, the Manchester Ship Canal and the Rochdale Canal, vehicle licensing records, and extensive holdings of railway plans from a variety of companies, including Lancashire & Yorkshire, Cheshire Lines Committee, London & North Western, and Great Central. Other holdings include the records of the Rail Users' Consultative Committee, the North West Traffic Authority, the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Society, the British Railways Board, and the records of Gorton and Horwich Railway Works.

The Work of GMCRO 2008/2009

3311 people visited the Record Office in person in 2008/2009, while in the same period there were 496,227 visits to GMCRO's web pages. These figures represent a drop in on-site visitors on the previous year, but this was due to a six week service closure in February and March 2009 for essential Health & Safety building works. The service also responded to 2016 enquiries (e-mail, letter, fax) from around the world.

As part of our commitment to promoting access to archives, including transport related collections, GMCRO delivered a range of lectures, seminars and workshops both at the Record Office and at community venues. The service also produced and launched a major education resource ('Safety In Numbers', available at www.gmcro.co.uk/education/education4.htm) to support the teaching of History and Citizenship in Greater Manchester's secondary schools, using archives from the Record Office holdings.

July 2008 saw the third self-assessment exercise for local authority archive services in England and Wales, administered by The National Archives. Services must complete a rigorous and detailed

questionnaire covering all aspects of the service, and services can be scored from one star to four stars. GMCRO achieved an overall score of 62.5% (against a North West regional average of 59.5% and a national average of 61%) and was awarded a three star rating.

The Work of GMCRO 2009/2010

So far in this financial year, the service has welcomed over 2,600 visitors, received over 231,000 visits to our web-site, and replied to over 1200 enquiries from members of the public.

A national survey of customer satisfaction with archive services carried out in June 2009 reported that 97% of GMCRO's customers rated our overall service as either good or very good, placing the service considerably above national and regional averages.

While expansion space for new deposits at our current premises is now extremely limited, we continue to prioritise records offered for deposit from the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Society, which have been added to an already extensive collection. Another priority in the current year is the cataloguing of the Greater Manchester Council archive (including material relating to public transport), to enable and encourage use of this material.

Work to secure a long-term solution to the Record Office's premises problems (the current premises do not provide sufficient expansion space to accept new deposits) is progressing. The Record Office is one of a range of potential partners in a new archive partnership which could be based at Manchester Central Library, which will shortly be subject to a major capital refurbishment programme. This scheme offers the opportunity to address many of the Record Office's long term difficulties and bring together complementary collections from a wide range of partners under one roof for the benefit of customers and Greater Manchester residents.

Katharine Carter
County Archivist
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