

LINCOLNSHIRE LIBRARY SERVICE

Introduction to local history resources

In a few words...

Short workshops to introduce participants to the wide range of local studies resources available through Lincolnshire County Council's Library Service and to demonstrate how these resources can be used and interpreted to gain an insight into the history of the locality.

The situation

All Lincolnshire County Council's public libraries have local studies collections, comprising books, pamphlets, news cuttings, journals and illustrations. There is an interest in the wider community to learn about local history but not always the knowledge of the libraries' holdings or skills to make best use of what there is.



Sleaford Library

(photo François Matarasso)

The idea

The purpose is to raise awareness of the wealth of resources held by the library service, to stimulate and direct the interest of participants, and to offer a level of expertise in using these resources that local library staff sometimes lacks.

Community Librarian Ruth Neller, who has a degree in Local and Regional History, bridges the gap by running free 90-120 minute workshops where she introduces participants to the range of materials available in their local library and shows how they can be used to explore a variety of local history themes.

"Ruth certainly researches her subject thoroughly. Her workshops are always interesting, informative and most importantly entertaining"

She also draws the attention of participants to the collections of larger libraries and to the Lincolnshire Archives Office and various museums. Where there is sufficient interest, additional sessions can be arranged to deal in more depth with particular subjects or sources.

Making it happen

The workshops usually take place in library buildings, but they have also been delivered in a mobile library, in schools and in various community venues. As the workshops work best with a limited number of participants (usually no more than 12), they

adapt well to the smallest of libraries, where it is sometimes difficult to run other events through lack of space.

The taster sessions are usually organised to coincide with a local or national event, such as Local History Month, Market Towns Week, Adult learners' Week or Family Learning Week. If demand for places outstrips places available, it is relatively easy to offer a second session.

How it was done

Local Library staff strongly support these taster sessions and their part in promoting them is invaluable. A knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader is essential to get participants to see past the exteriors of some rather dull looking sources and to unlock the treasures inside.

An informal atmosphere is created so that participants feel able to ask questions, to comment or to share their own knowledge – some fascinating stories have been shared this way.



Crowland Library
(photo François Matarasso)

Participants are recruited through posters in the library and in community venues, flyers and word of mouth in the library, and through press releases. If the event is being run as part of a community festival, then it will be advertised in the brochure.

Costs are minimal: the Community Librarian's time, travel to and from the venue and stationery. Having run many of these taster sessions, Ruth now needs very little pre-event preparation time.

"I was very pleased to be able to offer something out of the ordinary to the customers. The event attracted several customers that did not use the library for anything else. What was particularly satisfying was that they turned up a second time."

The result

These taster sessions have been successful in a number of respects:

- Participants leave with a much better knowledge of the local history resources available in Lincolnshire County Council's Library Service and how to exploit them;
- Most also leave with a better knowledge of the history of their own area;
- The library service benefits by having customers who have a better idea of what their local library can offer and know what to ask for - use of the local studies collections rises after a taster session;
- As these sessions are often held when the library is open, library staff pick up information by overhearing;
- Requests for talks to local clubs and societies often result from taster sessions, enabling the message to be spread wider;

- One library has had an informal local history group meeting monthly in the library as a result;
- Several large donations of books, cuttings and illustrations have been received from participants who perceive the library service as a safe place to deposit such items, and a place where they will be made available to the community.
- Ruth has been running these taster workshops for several years. Follow up workshops have been held in three libraries; approximately 100 people have attended taster sessions in the past 18 months.

The reasons for its success

The project has been successful for a number of reasons:

- It is inexpensive;
- It uses existing resources and expertise;
- It responds to an existing need in the community for local history information;
- It is flexible, and can be run in almost any venue, in or out of a library.
- It has the support of local library staff to promote and host the sessions



Sleaford Library
(photo François Matarasso)

Further information

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