The Lymm Digital Image Archive

1. What is a digital archive?

An on-line digitised collection; catalogued and easily searchable of high quality, scanned images mainly of photographs but also including possibly documents or images of artefacts. It could also extend to including video and oral material. The images themselves would be supported where possible by metadata i.e. supporting text that effectively becomes part of the image file. This would include, where known, date, photographer, source, copyright owner if applicable, location, occasion and as much descriptive text and reminiscence as we can gather associated with that image

2. Why a Digital archive ?

Reading about other image archives such as the Pennine Horizons Digital Archive there are a number of clear reasons for promoting the idea of a digital archive for Lymm.

- **Security.** – These images are a precious part of our heritage. We all have family photographs that over the years have become damaged, discoloured or sometimes simply lost. The aim of a digital archive would be to provide a rigorous and robust framework that ensures that digital versions of images together with their supporting story are held securely in a format that will not deteriorate or suffer any degradation. This would extend to holding multiple back-up copies in more than one site in order to be fully insured against the possibility of fire, flood, theft or other disaster.
- **Community Responsibility & Benefit** – The Heritage Centre has already been presented with a number of images from various sources (mainly digitally but of variable quality). These have been given in good faith but with the clear intent that they should be shared and enjoyed by others. The act of sharing and the understanding of village heritage that this enables also contributes to a sense of strengthened community.
- **Learning** – "A picture is worth a thousand words" – a cliché maybe but it is certainly true that a single image can be more evocative, engaging and revealing than paragraphs of text. By keyword cataloguing we also create the opportunity to bring together images on similar subjects and sometimes even tell a story over time – perhaps of a location, a workplace or even an individual. Learning opportunities would be available to all from reception class children through to academic researchers.
- **Enjoyment** – Many people take great pleasure in looking into the past and getting a glimpse of how a place used to be without feeling driven by any great desire to learn – even if that is a natural by-product.

3. How would it work ?

We would clearly need to create a set of operating guidelines to cover a range of issues including

1. **Criteria** for what items should be accepted into the archive. We may wish to include modern day images for example but would probably have to find a way to be far more selective of these given the proliferation of images.
2. **Clear procedures for recognising ownership**, rights and copyright, freedom for others to use. These may vary from group to group. We are likely to need some professional guidance

on this from the outset. There is no wish or intention to take ownership of images away from donors who would retain full access and recognition of their contribution and rights.

3. **Procedures and standards for actual digitisation process**, recording, adding metadata, display, back-up etc. Fortunately we are not pioneers in this area and we can look for advice to any number of other organisations including some with whom we already have a good working relationship including Pennine Horizons Digital Archive and Warrington Museum.

4. **How we share the archive**. Again it is for us a team to decide exactly how we manage this but the opportunities for sharing include - screen based display in the centre itself, exhibitions of physical versions of the images, projected displays for talks to groups, school packs on particular topic either in hard copy or disk. On-line display on the Heritage Centre website. Display on other websites. Some groups for example may like to be able to link directly to their collection for their own website.   Not all images may be accessible via all the above. Some groups may like to see images watermarked protected to discourage commercial exploitation. In all cases we need to work closely with donors to respect their wishes as far as possible. This could extend to their direct involvement in the digitisation process.

One key aspect of the sharing should be the opportunity for the general public to add their own memories and observations to the images.

4. How the archive will build over time.

The mere act of starting to build and publicise the archive will believe be the most important stimulus toward building the archive. This has already become clear through our facebook page and website. The facebook page has gone from nothing to almost 1,700 followers in 20 months and engaging posts with images regularly attract over 10,000 + viewers. Via the facebook page we have collected hundreds of individual memories and reminiscences as well as unsolicited donations of further images, some single, some collections from over twenty individuals and groups amounting to many hundreds of images.

We also hope that by demonstrating that we can provide a secure but accessible home for images we will encourage other groups to take advantage of and contribute to the archive.

Lymm & District History Society who almost certainly have the largest local collection of images have expressed a wish to participate in the digitisation project.   We also already have pledges from at least 25 other groups and individuals to offer their collections to the archive.

Alan Williams 1st Nov 2016.