Opening up access to the Archives

In the past, the only way to access archival material in the university collections was through the knowledge of the archivists, and a few paper lists. The HLF project is helping us to fulfil our ambition to move away from the archivists as ‘gatekeepers’, and move towards users being able to access collections directly through our online catalogue, which can be searched through our website www.heritagequay.org in the same way students use Summon.

When the project began, we estimated that only 8% (by volume) of our collections were catalogued. Now in Year 2, that figure has jumped to 52%! We’re well on the way to having all of our current collections in store at the time of the move catalogued by the end of the project in 2017. Some major milestones this year include completion of the initial Rugby League and British Music Collection catalogues, and major moves forward in listing and arranging the very large collection of University material.

We’re not just thinking about listing past collections though; part of our move to better facilities allows us to take in new material. Our first major acquisition this year is the Mikron Theatre Company Archive. Based in Marsden, they travel by narrow boat, and have been performing at pubs and venues along Britain’s canals and waterways for over forty years. Apart from the usual theatre publicity material and production files, a treasure of this collection is its oral histories of the bargee community, who lived and worked on the canals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Our cataloguing progress over the past eighteen months. Cataloguing has reduced to concentrate on outreach and events in other parts of the activity plan.