

## **Local Interest Group Visit to Powys Archives 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

Mo Lloyd kindly arranged for us to visit the "new" Powys Archives. We had visited before, but this was in 2014, before the facility was moved to its new premises – Unit 29 on the Ddole Road Enterprise Park, Llandrindod Wells.

We were shown around by Julie Ryan, the archivist. She told us that the new facility had cost £1.2 million to set up and that it had been funded by Powys County Council. The building had already been owned by the Council and had been used as a warehouse for all of the documents for which there had been no space in the old premises. A lot of work had been necessary because the building had a leaky roof. It also had to be fitted out with movable storage shelving and fire safety facilities. In order to reduce the risk of fire, the walls are "four-hour protection walls" and there is an extremely sensitive fire detection system. There are obviously no sprinklers as these would cause irreparable damage to all of the paper documents that are stored there, so the intention is to prevent a fire from igniting within the store rooms.

There are two large main store rooms, a work/meeting room and a search room where documents can be viewed by visitors and the database investigated.

The first of the main store rooms is for Information Management. The archive here is not yet digitised because it would simply be too large a job and far too expensive to accomplish. It is here where all of the Council Records are housed and so this is a semi-permanent archive. Documents can be kept for anything between 7 and 100 years, depending on their type, but all will eventually be destroyed. There are over 230 000 paper files and around 9000 plans stored in this room. Destruction of documents takes place once a year and the documents are shredded for security.

The second large store houses all of the County archive material, ie all useful historic records from the county. All of these items will be kept permanently and they come from many different sources. Many of the items in this room are old and so the room is climate-controlled; it is kept at 18°C and at 55% humidity. Everything is boxed in order to protect the documents, and the room is sealed in order to prevent insects and pests from getting in. The shelves are organised in collections, eg. school records, local council minutes, etc. Everything has been recorded on a database and so staff can find items and visitors can see what is available.

We were given the opportunity to look at some resources relating to Painscastle in the search room, where there is also a useful small library of books relating to a variety of subjects relating to Powys, as well as the whole of Wales. Julie had put out a record book for Painscastle Village School dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century for us to look at, and this made extremely interesting reading.

A most enjoyable morning was had by us all. This is a resource which is well worth using if you want to investigate some aspect of local history. Julie also told us that there are soon to be opportunities for volunteers to get involved. A Community Support Officer has recently been appointed and he will be organising a volunteer day some time in January which people might be interested in.