

Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service Annual Report 2025-26



Explore the Past

Welcome

Welcome to the 2025-26 annual report of Worcestershire County Council Archive and Archaeology Service. This report is for everyone who shares an interest in the work, and wider impact, of the Service. It provides a transparent overview of key activities and achievements over the past year, from our statutory services, e.g. holding and making publicly accessible the county's original archive collections, to our varied programme of outreach and educational activities, much of which is funded through external sources.

About our services

County Archives

Statutory service, enhanced with grant funded projects

We care for and provide access to over 12 miles of records relating to Worcestershire's past, including material that the local authority has a statutory duty to hold. Conservation and digitisation work is also undertaken for external organisations at commercial rates.

Historic Environment Record

Statutory service, enhanced with grant funded projects

Worcestershire's primary public resource for archaeological and historic environment information, the HER hold approximately 85,000 records.

We support the councils' statutory planning function by delivering specialist advice and information for strategic and policy planning, development and land management.

Worcestershire Archaeology

Commercial service

An accredited provider of professional archaeology and heritage services to commercial clients in the construction, civil engineering and minerals extraction industries in Worcestershire, the West Midlands and beyond. The service also works as consultant and contractor on County Council-led infrastructure projects.

Community engagement

Council, commercial and grant funded service

We connect local communities with Worcestershire's past and present, with the aims of fostering a stronger sense of place, community cohesion, belonging and exploration of identities. We run school workshops, public events, talks, exhibitions and workshops, as well as developing and delivering community heritage projects.



Service strategy 2023-26

Our Strategy defines our goals, providing direction, focus, and a framework for decision-making. We aim to:

1. Create a heritage hub for Worcestershire

Engage and collaborate with heritage partners countywide to establish a Heritage Hub for Worcestershire at The Hive, where the service is based, and online.

2. Provide heritage for all

Grow the audience and reach of our services to increase service participation, improve representation and build a stronger sense of place across Worcestershire.

3. Educate, connect and enrich Worcestershire's communities

Develop new services that provide opportunities for residents of all ages to learn, develop new skills, connect with others and grow their understanding of local heritage.

4. Preserve, protect and enhance Worcestershire's environment

Deliver new archaeological services that support the County Council's environmental and open for business priorities, ensure more sustainable development in the county, and protect and enhance Worcestershire's environment for future generations.

5. Sustain heritage services for Worcestershire

Secure more commercial income and streamline service structures and delivery models to secure the future of Worcestershire's heritage services.

Overview

2025/26 was a busy year with Worcestershire Archaeology topping £2.6 million in turnover and the core areas of the service bringing in over £300,000 in grants, fees and commercial work to enhance our statutory duties.

3,556 people attended events with us, which ranged from curriculum-linked primary school visits, to work experience, art workshops, skills training and online talks.

In the County Archives, priority projects in cataloguing collections and digitalising older, paper catalogues, together with our partnership work with Ancestry are bringing significant changes to improve user access and experience, both online and in The Hive.

The Historic Environment team led a project to investigate the site of a rare Anglo-Saxon coin hoard uncovered by metal-detectorists on the Worcestershire/Warwickshire border. The Bickmarsh Hoard is providing valuable new evidence that will help update the Worcestershire Research Framework, part of a national strategy to create a series of self-sustaining research frameworks for England, managed by Historic England.



Worcestershire Archaeology
£2.6 million income
generated

£185,000 reinvested in WCC



300 first-time Searchroom
Users

2393 Archive enquiries
Busiest year since 2014/15



3556 Event attendees and
project participants

Including 315 visitors to
Broadway village hall event to
see archaeological finds



Historic Environment Record

Public search enquiries up by
155% on 2024-25

Archive services



Search room open hours

~ 33.5 hours per week



2393 archive enquiries

Busiest year since 2014/15



Over 4 million views of
Worcestershire records
on Ancestry.co.uk



97 digitisation jobs
completed

Increased commercial projects
compared to 2024/25

“Your enquiry staff are great and anticipated what I was really after” **Distance Survey comment**

“A first class service, best I have received from any archive service” **Distance Survey comment**

Distance Survey statistics:

100% were happy with the promptness of our reply

100% were happy with the relevance of the content of our reply

100% were happy with the quality of the content of our reply

Access to the Archives

- Due to popular demand, we have added an extra microfilm reader printer device in the Self-Service area on Level 2 in the Hive.
- Worcestershire newspapers are now available through [Newspapers.com](#). These are available free in The Hive.
- Archive events continue to be well-attended and we have added some additional drop-ins in local libraries across the county.
- We have launched a monthly Local Studies Book Club meeting in the Self-Service area on Level 2. See our website for details.

Archive Collections

- **Retro-conversion Project:** We have completed 90% of the scanning of old legacy catalogues, being Step 1 in making all our catalogues searchable online
- **New deposits of archives** have included a 1632 charter relating to Feckenham Forest, an album of early 20th century watercolours, and the records of the Lea & Perrins factory, Worcester
- **Conservation:** Another tranche of 18th century wills, which we were not able to let people use, have been repaired and are now available researchers, thanks to a grant from the Friends of the National Libraries

Measure	Total for 2025/26
Archive search room open hours	1573
Sign-ins to Original Archive area	1212
First time visitors to Original Archive area	303
Documents issued	4016
Archive enquiries	2393
Worcestershire record page views on Ancestry.co.uk	4.1 million

Measure	Total for 2025/26
Quantity of archive material deposited (m3)	12.6
Quantity of archive material catalogued (m3)	2.3
Quantity of digital material deposited (gigabytes)	155
Number of archive deposits retro-converted	205

- **Digitisation Service** has recently invested in new equipment, including LED darkroom lights to replace the traditional bulbs. The LEDs have 50,000 hours of durability in them which, based on a standard week of operation, means they should have approximately 28 years of life.

Historic Environment Team



HER research enquiries up by
155% on 2024/25



5,556 new or enhanced HER
records



1,797 planning applications
checked



Bickmarsh coin hoard project
completed



It has been another busy year in the Historic Environment Team, with fascinating new archaeological sites and historic buildings added into the HER, and many more records enhanced with new information.

A highlight of the year was the national designation by Historic England of the **Paolozzi Murals, in the Kingfisher Centre in Redditch**. The murals were added to the HER in 2019 as part of a project to record innovative 20th century heritage. However, 2026 saw the mosaics by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi given national recognition. Funded by the Redditch Development Corporation, the Needles Industry Group and the Arts Council 'Arts in Public Places' Scheme, the mosaics were unveiled in 1983 and pay tribute to Redditch's industrial heritage as a centre for the manufacture of needles.

The team also had the privilege to manage a project that resulted after a group of metal detectorists revealed a remarkable ninth-century coin hoard in the Worcestershire countryside. Discover the full story of the Bickmarsh Hoard and how it was uncovered and analysed in our **blog** mini-series. A project funded by Historic England and the UK Government.

The council has combined various historic mapping webpages into a single, more dynamic, **GIS website**. This provides customers with just one location to access all our historic maps and layers. Explore our historic maps and see how your village or area looked in the past

"We order searches from several local authorities and Worcestershire's is the most efficient county and also contains the most information." **Archaeological consultant**

"Excellent, prompt and comprehensive response!"
Archaeological contractor

"Incredibly quick turnaround and the amount of information provided is amazing - the tithe maps are especially gratefully received. Thank you so much, if only all HERs could be as good as Worcestershire!!!" **Recipient of a HER search**



Above, a gold imitation of a Louis the Pious coin. Right, a ninth century silver penny, minted for Burgred, King of Mercia, and buried around AD871-874



Worcestershire Archaeology



**£2.6 million income
generated**

£185,000 reinvested in WCC



**118 external client projects
won with a value in excess of
£3.4 million**



Major reports completed

Excavations at Hereford
Cathedral and Alderton



Investment

2 new Four-Wheel Drive
vehicles purchased for
fieldwork

Comments from our clients and visitors

"A very clearly written and well-illustrated (always good to see some photos including site staff)" summary

"Fascinating! I've watched the excavation with great interest. Thank you all that you do, keep up the good work"

*"Thanks so much for all the hard work you do for us throughout the year: **always with such good spirit, professionalism and friendliness.**"*

"Thank you for going above and beyond on this project, particularly giving up time on your day off.

I never doubted your ability to be dynamic on what proved to be a rather tricky site, for several reasons.

You and the field team offered up solutions and carried out the work swiftly and pragmatically – that's key for us consultants.

"I love Explore the Past as a resource and proud to have had some sites I have been involved with published there..."

Yourself, the field team and Worcestershire Archaeology as a whole continue to demonstrate what a knowledgeable, pragmatic and trustworthy unit you are."

"The level of interest shows how important it is to draw people into the whole business of archaeology."

Community engagement



3556 event attendees and participants

42 out of 101 events were outside Worcester



Over 1500 volunteer hours

With a financial value of £19,737.38



Digging for Britain

National and international coverage of the Broadway excavation



LinkedIn pages launched

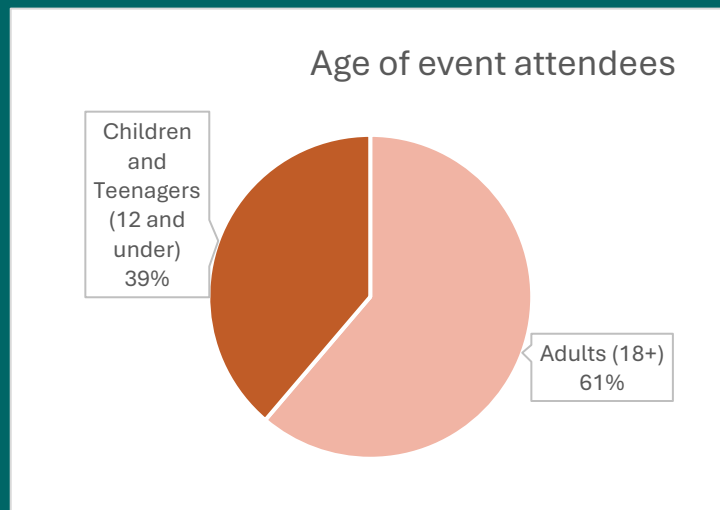
Helping us to connect with a wider audience

Events, Learning & Community Impact 2025–2026

Event type	Number of events	Total attendees
School workshop	22	1130
Further/ Higher Education session	4	69
Children's event	6	202
Workshop	9	78
Open day	1	315
Talks	19	964
Tours	13	121
Walk	1	29
Drop-in event	19	611
Other events	7	37

We delivered **101** events and activities across Worcestershire and beyond, engaging audiences of all ages through workshops, talks, school sessions and family activities. Activities took place at The Hive, local libraries and community venues, often in partnership with schools and the University of Worcester.

*"Thanks for organising a really great day. The talks were **lively and informative**, and I am looking forward to next year. Very pleased that you've already set a date so I can get it in my diary before anything else comes along to conflict with it."* - Archaeology Day attendee



Audience Feedback

Following advice received through our National Lottery Heritage Fund resilience project, we simplified our evaluation forms to encourage greater participation.

Previous Evaluation System

79% rated event quality as Very Good
79% rated customer service as Very Good
92% said they felt engaged
71% said they learned more about Worcestershire heritage

New Evaluation System

92% said they learned “a lot”
83% said they enjoyed the event “a lot”
50% were first-time attendees

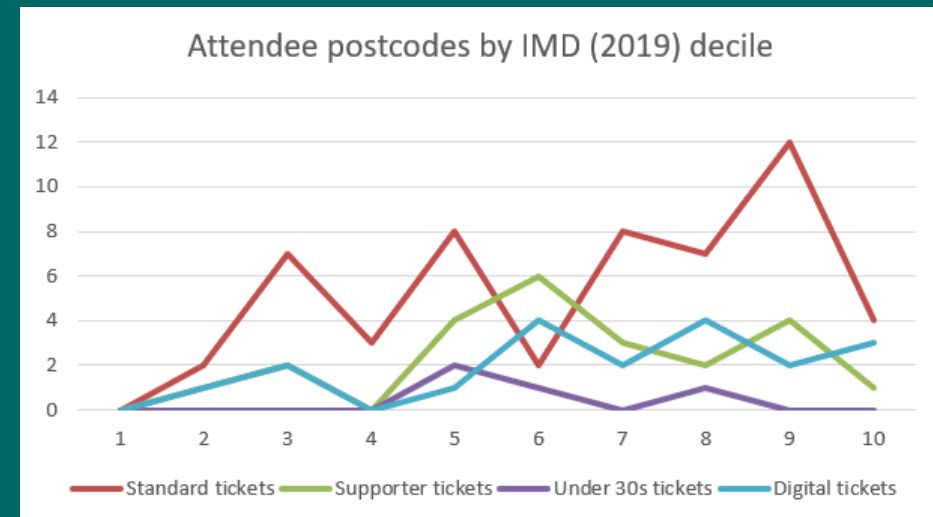
*“I’m happy with what you have provided –
reinvigorated, educated and inspired.”*

Schools & Young People

Our school workshops received exceptionally positive feedback from teachers and pupils alike.

88% rated workshops as Great
88% said pupils learned “a lot”
88% said pupils enjoyed sessions “a lot”
75% said pupils were highly engaged

“I really wanted to introduce them to how archaeology works and this hands-on activity was ideal for this.”- Class Teacher



Above: Graph showing the distribution of attendee postcodes by IMD 2019 score from Archaeology Day 2025

Broadway and Digging for Britain

The Worcestershire Archaeology team carried out a major excavation at Milestone Ground in Broadway, working closely with the Community Engagement team to share discoveries with local people throughout the project.

The excavation captured significant public interest through regular updates in the Broadway magazine, social media posts, public talks and a community event with **over 300 attendees** where visitors could meet archaeologists and see finds from the site first-hand.

“An excellent idea to let everyone know what a rich history Broadway has. Seeing the actual artefacts found makes it so much more real.”



In January 2026, the project featured on Digging for Britain, highlighting the discovery of a rare Roman bone box with no known parallel. The programme brought national and international attention to the excavation and helped introduce new audiences to Worcestershire's archaeology and heritage.

The response was extremely positive. The excavation blog became one of the most visited pages on our website during the year, while social media coverage reached hundreds of thousands of people. Features and stories about the discovery were shared widely, including internationally in New Zealand and the USA, helping to raise the profile of Worcestershire Archaeology and the county's rich heritage.

Coverage by BBC Hereford & Worcester also generated exceptional engagement, with one social media reel reaching more than 441,000 views. Overall, content linked to Digging for Britain accounted for almost 20% of all Facebook views this financial year, demonstrating the strong public interest in the project and its discoveries.

Volunteering at WAAS

WAAS is aware of the wellbeing benefits of participating in volunteering as well as the wealth of knowledge and experience volunteers can bring. Currently, we have 22 volunteers assisting with tasks across the service. **National Lottery Heritage Fund** support has been awarded to update and improve our volunteer offer. When surveyed, **100%** of volunteers strongly agreed that they were happy in their volunteering role and **100%** of volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that they felt valued in their roles.

"It's so nice now to be given lots of support in our volunteering roll [sic], I feel much more valued as a member of the team."



Commercially funded programmes

Worcestershire Archaeology undertake fieldwork in advance of sites being developed. There is a growing shift towards commercial clients supporting engagement with this archaeology. Highlights:

- **Milestone Ground, Broadway** excavation: Using social media and local magazine to share the work been undertaken in the village. An off-site open day in October 2025 with 315 attendees.
- **Pilning, South Gloucestershire**: a wide range of community engagement activities, directly reaching over 469 people, including 198 children through school workshops and youth sessions. Public talks and participation in Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Day helped raise awareness of the site's archaeological significance. Digital outreach, including a permanent online exhibition and social media, further extended public access to the project's findings.
- **South Worcestershire excavation**: primary school sessions working with classes from reception to yr6.



‘You Said, We Did’

In February and March 2025, we carried out our 2024/25 Customer Voice Survey, supported by funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Analysis was undertaken by Fresh Nous and Engaging Heritage, helping us better understand how people use our services and where improvements could be made. Throughout 2025/26, we have used this feedback to shape and improve our work.

You said: ***Improve digital access to the archives***

We did: The Archive team began a major retro-conversion project to make existing paper catalogues available online. Once completed, this will allow users to search and explore archive collections digitally, making access easier and more convenient.

You said: ***Improve brand clarity and awareness of services***

We did: We worked with Fresh Nous to strengthen our branding and improve how we communicate our services. We have also reviewed our social media performance to better understand how audiences engage with our content.

You said: ***Make guidance and information easier to find***

We did: We improved website navigation and used social media more actively to signpost users to helpful guidance, resources and information.

You said: ***Offer events in a wider range of locations***

We did: Our Community Engagement team delivered activities in libraries across the county, including children’s sessions during school holidays. The Archive team also visited local libraries to help people begin exploring their family history.

You said: ***Use preferred communication channels***

We did: We increased our use of preferred social media and launched an updated newsletter through Mailchimp to help audiences stay informed about events, projects and service

Funders 2025-26

Worcestershire Archives, the Historic Environment Record and community engagement services are enhanced through external grant funding. We are very grateful to the following for funding received during 2025-26:

- Arts Council England
- Friends of the National Libraries
- Friends of Worcestershire Archives
- Historic England and the UK Government
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- National Manuscripts Conservation Trust
- Ombersley Conservation Trust
- The Elmley Foundation
- The National Archives
- Wellcome Trust
- Wychavon District Council