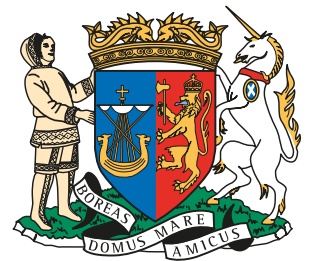


2025



ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Active Communities Orkney Libraries & Archive Annual Impact Report





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Manager's Statement

Vikki Kerr, Team Manager (Libraries & Archive)

2025 has seen a whole host of activities and initiatives taking place in the Libraries and Archive, with all staff working incredibly hard to continue providing excellent services to customers across Orkney and beyond.

Libraries are safe, welcoming spaces for all community members, and offer free access to a wealth of trusted information and different resources in various formats, helping to break down economic, digital and physical barriers, as well as offering opportunities to upskill and support peoples' health and wellbeing.

The Libraries provide access to books and learning resources for all ages, at the branches in Kirkwall and Stromness, and also via the essential Home Library and Mobile Library services. They offer access to public PCs, printing facilities and free WiFi, along with games, jigsaws, a hot drinks station, meeting rooms and dedicated sensory and crafting areas.

Orkney Archive continues to add to its collections, both in physical and digital formats, and the online archive catalogue is making the records more accessible to researchers here in Orkney as well as across the globe.

This past year saw the retirement of the library's long serving Mobile Library driver, with a new driver starting in November of 2025. It takes a dedication to the service to get the Mobile Library to customers living on the isles, as well as on the rural mainland routes, and everyone is grateful for this hard work.

Over the course of 2025, both the library and archive brought in £26,369 of generated income, arising from meeting room hires, book and archive print sales, donations and merchandise sales.

2025 was an incredibly busy year for all staff, with lots of projects and initiatives being delivered. The teams, as ever, go above and beyond to continue delivering the best services possible for all customers, and this is recognised and appreciated greatly.

Looking forward to 2026, another busy year is in the making, and priorities will seek to focus on the National Year of Reading and feeding into the community's literacy, health and wellbeing; ensuring equality, inclusion and sustainability.



Library Facts and Figures

Statistics are gathered from Orkney Library in Kirkwall, Stromness Library in the Warehouse Buildings and from the Mobile Library and Home Library services. The library service offers a huge range of resources for customers to borrow, including books (with audio and large print options), digital e-resources, CDs, DVDs, puzzles, games, project and activity kits. Stock is constantly being updated and appraised to ensure the library has something that is suitable and accessible to everyone.

Totals given below are combined figures from Orkney Library, Stromness Library, and the Mobile Library.



Breakdown of totals

	Kirkwall	Stromness	Mobile/Home Library
Members	9,357	1,292	1,023
Issues	49,822	5,865	7,131
Visitors	72,243	36,352	3,831

Love Libraries Campaign



The national Love Libraries campaign was launched in February 2025 to encourage people to join their public libraries and to realise the range of services they offer and show the impact they can have on individuals.

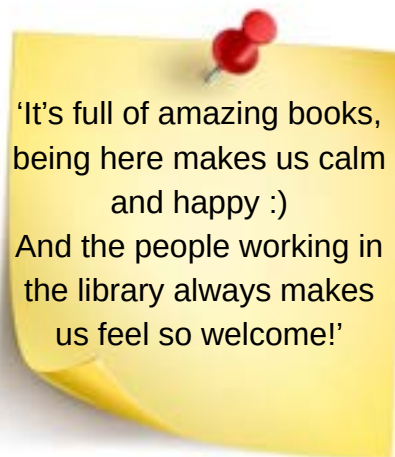
The campaign was organised by the National Library of Scotland to celebrate their centenary year, with other national partners getting involved, like the Scottish Library and Information Council and the Chartered Institute of Libraries and Information Council of Scotland.

In Orkney, the library service used social media to highlight the campaign and to showcase the facilities and services that are available to customers in Orkney, as well as visitors to the libraries. Customers were asked to provide direct feedback as to why they love their local library services and to share why the services are important to them. The library received 32 responses. Comments included:

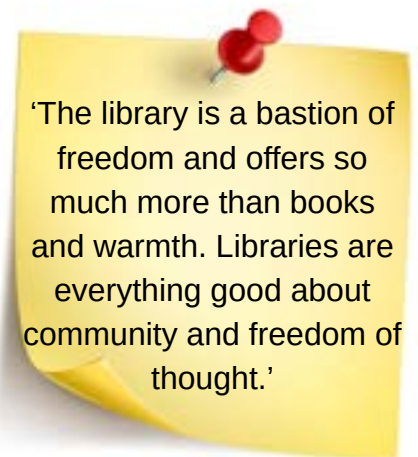
I LOVE MY LIBRARY BECAUSE...



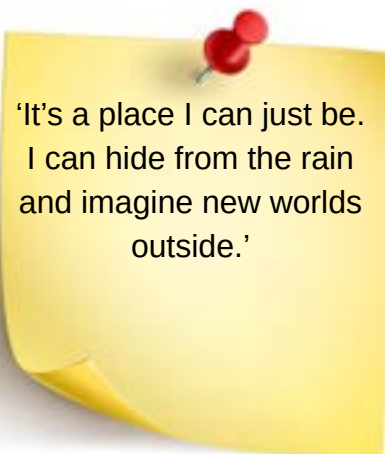
'The staff are friendly and helpful. The displays are interesting and we always find a good one. Sensory room is fantastic. A lovely place to spend time.'



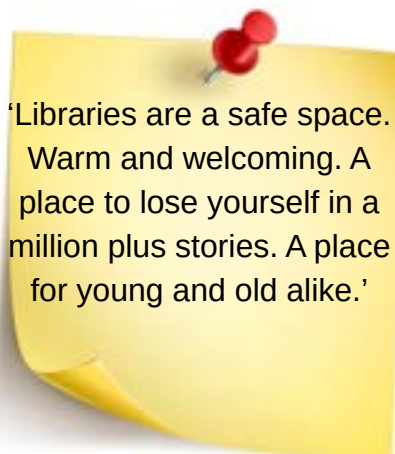
'It's full of amazing books, being here makes us calm and happy :)
And the people working in the library always makes us feel so welcome!'



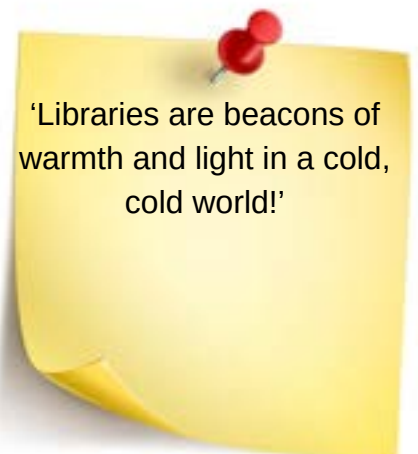
'The library is a bastion of freedom and offers so much more than books and warmth. Libraries are everything good about community and freedom of thought.'



'It's a place I can just be. I can hide from the rain and imagine new worlds outside.'



'Libraries are a safe space. Warm and welcoming. A place to lose yourself in a million plus stories. A place for young and old alike.'



'Libraries are beacons of warmth and light in a cold, cold world!'

Library Events 2025

There have been a total of 145 events during 2025 across the public library service. These have ranged from author events, partnership workshops, sensory room sessions, digital learning (in conjunction with the Learning Link), Lend & Mend Hub sessions as well as knitting and sewing groups, Dungeons and Dragons sessions, and nature events with the RSPB to name a few. A total of 1,572 people attended these events across the year, and we are already looking ahead to more events in 2026.

There have also been 102 Bookbug sessions throughout the year at both Kirkwall and Stromness branches, with 2,479 children/parents/carers benefiting from this fun and interactive introduction to books and reading.

Other highlight events over the year include:

AUTHOR EVENTS

We hosted 6 author events during 2025, 5 of which were book launches, and 1 whose book was only available in Orkney on the day of the event.

Both Kirkwall and Stromness Libraries hosted author events which saw a total of 179 people attend with an average of 30 people at each event.

In August Lin Anderson launched her book *Whispers of the Dead* which is set in Orkney and is the latest in her Rhona MacLeod series. The book is also dedicated to 'All at Orkney Library & Archive.'

Daniel Aubrey launched *The Dying Light* which is the follow up to 2024's *Dark Island* and is also set in Orkney. Both Lin and Daniel have been longlisted for the McIllvanney Prize which is awarded to the best Scottish crime book of the year.

Philip Paris launched his new novel *A Fire in their Hearts*, and has launched several of his previous books at Orkney Library.

In June local author Miriam Landor launched her memoir *Stumbling Stones: The Holocaust, My Family and Me*.

Long distance rambler and author Ursula Martin ended a promotional tour at Orkney Library having walked all the way to John O'Groats from Cornwall. She was also the 2025 winner of the Ilse Schwegcke Prize for women's travel writing.

In November well-known broadcaster and writer Sally Magnusson visited Stromness Library to launch her novel *The Shapeshifter's Daughter*. This was a particularly fitting location for the book launch as both the old and new Stromness libraries feature in the novel which is based on an old Norse myth set against the landscape of Orkney.



Lin Anderson at Orkney Library



Sally Magnusson at Stromness Library

Library Events 2025

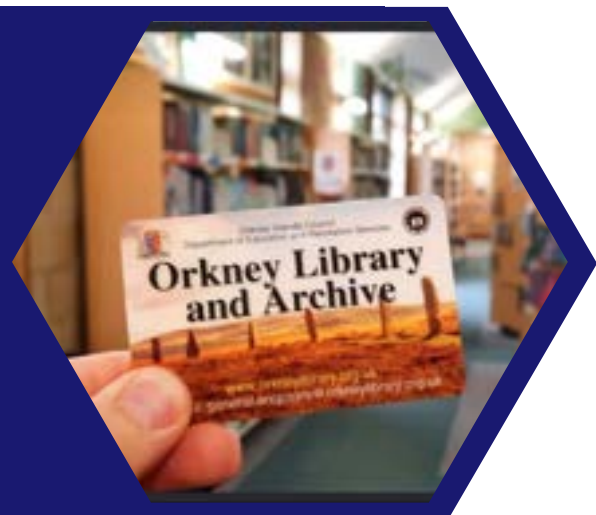
BOOK CLUBS

We have three physical book clubs that people can attend at the library in Kirkwall. They all meet monthly, with the Saturday Book Club focusing on a wide range of titles – usually fiction, but occasionally non-fiction. The other weekend book club is the Saturday Slaughters group, which focuses on crime fiction.

In 2025 a Women's Aid Book Club was created, called Sisterhood and Stories. This club is a safe space for women to attend in the library, encouraging reading and the sharing of books.

It was also in 2025 that the library created the Audio Waves Book Club which is an audio book group designed to offer a book club experience to readers who prefer or require audiobooks. There are no physical meetings which means it is inclusive of people with sight or mobility issues, or for people who live in more remote parts of Orkney, or elsewhere across the world.

Over the course of the year, we had 126 people attend the physical book clubs, as well as an encouraging number of people taking part in the Audio Waves Book Club online.



Orkney Library Card

ISLAND GAMES

Orkney hosted the Island Games for the first time in 2025. 24 island groups from around the world arrived in Orkney for the sporting competition beginning in July. The library and archive put up sporting related displays as well as flying some official bunting.

The foyer in Kirkwall had a host of useful information displayed for visiting tourists and competitors to help them navigate their way around.

The Summer Reading challenge for 2025 was run in-house by the library team for the first time, and the theme was based around sport to help support the Games. There were 89 participants who took part in the reading challenge, ranging in ages from toddlers through to adults.

With events such as cycling going on right outside the library, staff and customers were treated to some fun and fast sporting action too!



Island Games 2025

Library Events 2025

RSPB PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

With the launch of the nature trail in the forecourt of the Kirkwall library, staff were thrilled to offer some partnership events with the local RSPB team. In August there was a Species on the Edge drop in event where people could come and chat to Sam from RSPB and find out about species in Orkney that are in danger, and learn about wildlife habitats. There was interactive activities, information boards and the opportunity to take away plants that Sam had brought along. The library also used this event as an opportunity to explore setting up a seed library. 20 people interacted with this event.

During the October school holidays, the library also hosted RSPB team members and volunteers to give children the opportunity to make insect hotels, insect feeders and colour in. There were 4 bookable sessions across the holidays with all of them fully booked. A total of 32 children enjoyed this event, and it is something the library is looking to run again in 2026.



RSPB Crafts

CLAN CANCER BOOK BENCH TRAIL

Two very special book benches came to the libraries over the summer of 2025 when we became part of the Clan Cancer Support Book Bench Trail. The public art trail was set up across the North East of Scotland, Moray, Orkney and Shetland to help raise funds for those impacted by cancer.

In the library forecourt in Kirkwall there was a large book bench inspired by the novel *The Silver Darlings* by Neil Gunn. The bench was covered in shoals of fish using recycled mirrors and fused glass and was designed by the very talented Shelagh Swanson (who came to visit the library in August to see her bench in situ). The bench was kindly sponsored by Pentland Ferries, and it attracted lots of attention from library customers and visitors to the town.

In Stromness library a smaller Book Bench was installed which had been designed by the children of Hope Community School in Orkney.

Both benches were beautiful and very welcome additions throughout the summer.



Clan Book Bench

Library Projects 2025

There have been plenty of projects on the go for the library team this past year, but here are a few that are worth focusing on in more detail.

INTERACTIVE FLORA TRAIL

The library was successful in applying for external funding under the Public Library Improvement Fund to establish an Interactive Orcadian Nature Trail project in the main library forecourt in Kirkwall.

The idea behind this project was to work in partnership with local groups and organisations to create an interactive planted environment outside the library, alongside sensory equipment to encourage accessibility, and to bring part of the library outside the building.

The initial project saw the construction of 5 large, wheelchair accessible planters, built by patrons at the local St Colm's Centre. By working with a local plant expert, native plants representing 5 flora habitats found in Orkney were planted and a local designer and artist got to work illustrating and creating information panels to attach to the planters.

A bee themed finger maze panel and a wall mounted xylophone were installed to encourage people to spend more time in the library forecourt, and this sensory equipment has proved as popular as the sensory equipment found inside the building.

Another key aspect of the project was to encourage people to listen and interact with the Orcadian dialect. QR codes were also put on the planter panels which take people to a dedicated webpage on the library & archive website, (<https://orkneylibrary.org.uk/interactive-orcadian-flora-trail/>) where people can hear poems specially created by the Orkney Voices group, as well as listen to a lovely folk song about the Seasons.

There are library and archive resources listed on the flora trail webpage to direct people to information found in both the library and the archive, encouraging people to find out more about native Orcadian plant life and the the local environment.

So far there has been 256 visits to the dedicated webpage. The plant trail will continue to evolve, and 5 smaller raised planters have been produced by St Colm's, with designs from local school children to be displayed on panels during 2026. The creation of a seed library is also planned for 2026, further harnessing sustainability and locally grown produce.



Interactive Flora Trail



Scan to access
the Interactive Orcadian
Flora Trail Webpage



Flora Trail Raised Bed

Library Projects 2025

LIBRARY OF THINGS

The second phase of the Lend & Mend Hub also came into being in 2025, with external funding being supplied from the Scottish Library and Information Council to be able to loan out non-traditional items to library customers.

For many years, the library service in Orkney has loaned out items which are not books; birdwatching kits, activity/games bags and jigsaws for example.

The Lend & Mend project saw an opportunity for libraries to expand on these offerings, with a range of useful household items that could be borrowed as and when required, instead of having to buy them.

Orkney Libraries can now loan out various tools like drills, sanders, toolbox kits, a wallpaper stripper, and extension cables, as well as kitchenware, like baking tins, dishes and cookie cutters. There are also two loanable sewing machines that are available to library members.

Library customers can find the available collections on the Library of Things section of the Orkney Library website at: <https://orkneylibrary.org.uk/library-of-things/>

Having these items available to loan for free helps to take away any financial barrier that people may face, as well as encouraging sustainability and reducing product waste.

Over time, the Library of Things lending collections will be expanded, and the Library will welcome suggestions from customers as to what they would like to see available in future.



Lend & Mend Loanable Toolkit



Lend & Mend Hub

WINTERING WELL KITS

Following on from the idea that the library doesn't just lend books, there was great success in 2025 with the introduction of our new Wintering Well boxes. These neat kits contain a daylight lamp, a frame to help people focus on observing what light is available, and a book of practical and creative resources.

The kits have been developed by researchers Hester Parr (Glasgow University) and Hayden Lorimer (Edinburgh University) and include a link to a free online course which offers detailed support for those affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder. Working in partnership with the researchers, and East Dunbartonshire Libraries who shared some of their kits with us, this project has benefitted the Orkney community by providing high quality and practical health information which is also being promoted by local NHS Orkney Community Link Practitioners.

The kits are now part of our regular library stock and can be reserved just like a book. They have proved very popular and have been in high demand since they launched. They can be collected from Kirkwall or Stromness and are going out to all areas including the outer Isles, via the Mobile Library and Home Library Service. Feedback has been positive with some people joining the library service for the first time or coming back after time away and discovering a warm and welcoming community space which helps people to combat the isolation of the dark winter months.



Wintering Well Kit

WINTER COAT RAIL

Given the success of the children's dressing up swap rails and the welly boot swap, it was decided to launch a winter coat rail in both branch libraries so that people of any age who need a warm coat can access one without any barriers.

The call for coat donations put out on social media was very well received, and the year ended with both locations having full rails of coats to suit all different age ranges and sizes for people to choose from. Initiatives like this go some way to helping during a cost-of-living crisis, as well as helping promote re-use and the circular economy.

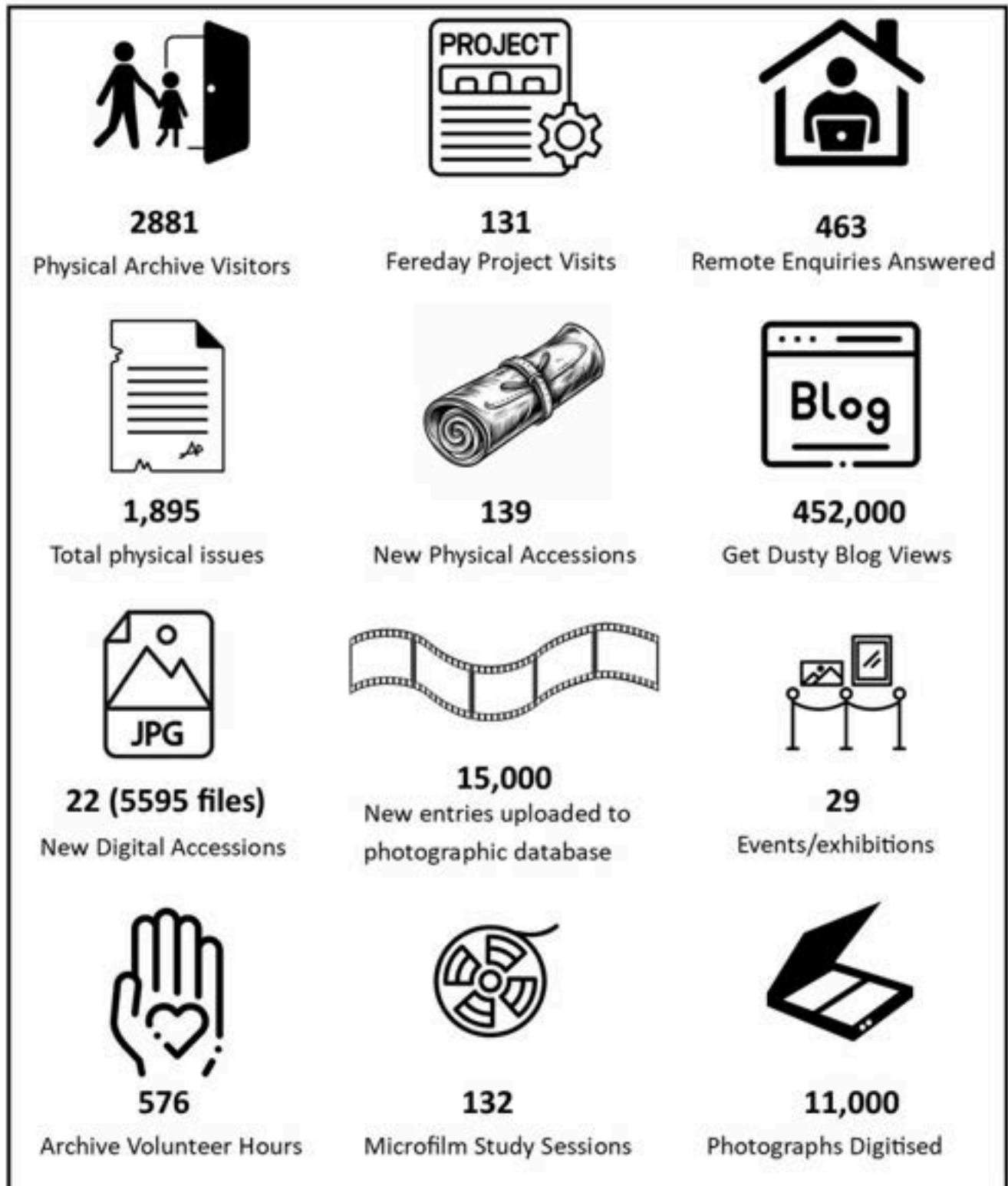


Winter Coat Rail

Archive Facts and Figures



Statistics are regularly gathered in the Archive to reflect things like the number of researchers visiting the public searchroom, the number of enquiries received, which collections have been accessed and which research facilities have been used. Staff also collate figures relating to new accessions to the collection.



Accession Highlights

Physical accessions

A3407 – Documents, letters, photos and original plans relating to the Broch of Gurness and Crantit Excavations.

A3417 – McNeill Photograph Album, believed to contain photographs relating to the McNeills of Holm, including F Marion McNeill.



A3448 – The papers of Sue Flint, former teacher at KGS, activist, archaeologist and secretary of the Orkney Heritage Society. This collection includes information on campaigns against oil development in Flotta, uranium mining, seal culling and the proposal to build an oil platform construction base at Houton.

A3489 – A small collection of 21 original letters written by George Mackay Brown to Nora Kennedy and specifically to her cat, Gypsy, from 1978-1991.



Accession Highlights

Digital Accessions



A3478 – The Orkney 2025 Island Games collection, containing digital files created whilst planning and running the event.

A3470- Digital photographs showing family, church and school groups in Graemsay over the years.



Orkney

... a Scottish Book Trust Reader in Residence for a few months. As
... views of readers and charts the progress of the residency.

A3445- Alison Miller, Orkney Library and Archive Reader in Residence, archived blog of Alison's time in this role, 2012.

Archive Events 2025



There was a total of 14 outreach and learning events within the archive over the course of 2025. There was also a total of 6 events which took place outwith the archives that staff were involved in, and 5 exhibitions across the country which featured archive material from Orkney Archive.

There were 6 exhibitions held within the archive searchroom this past year, on a range of themes including sport, nature and female doctors to tie in with other local projects and events.

LIFE OF LETTERS PODCAST

A first for the Archivist this year was talking on a Podcast. Lucy was interviewed by Laura Edralin about the Palaeography Group for the first series of The Life of Letters programme. This series of programmes interviews many people across the UK on their work that connects them with the design or reading of different forms of handwriting. The Palaeography Group in Orkney Archive meets fortnightly on Monday nights to study and transcribe Orkney documents mainly from the 17th century written in secretary hand. In the podcast Lucy described the process and highlighted some interesting discoveries. The Life of Letters podcast can be heard on many podcast outlets such as YouTube Music or Spotify. There is also an Instagram account which shows selected filmed sections of the interviews.



The Life of Letters Podcast

SCHOOL VISITS

In January P6s from Glaitness school visited the archive to research their tour of the Bishop's and Earl's palaces. They looked at photographs, maps and documents and then invited the archive staff to one of their tour dates in May. It was a fantastic day!

In March, a P5 class from Glaitness came in to research their farming topic. The pupils looked at archives and photographs relating to Horrie, Houton, Cleat, Lingro and Garth farms. The class were divided into groups and were each assigned a particular farm to research and write notes on.

Having schools visit the archive helps show that archive collections are accessible to all, and to show people where information comes from when doing primary research. This is also helpful when S2 school children are doing Fereday projects and use the archive collections to inform their findings and produce their final submission. With over 130 pupils using the archive searchroom for researching Fereday projects in 2025, hopefully they will all have a better understanding of how to go about looking for information and using original materials rather than relying on secondary sources.



P6 School Visit to the Archive

Archive Events 2025

KGS HERITAGE CAREERS DAY

In November two archive staff attended a successful Heritage Careers Day at Kirkwall Grammar School, organised by Leah Rendall. The Orkney Archive joined the Orkney Museum, the Orkney Historic Rangers, members of the Ba Committee, and many other heritage related organisations to show school pupils, mainly from 3rd year, about what each job entails and how they could pursue that career.

A variety of archives were selected to show the pupils, such as photos, sound recordings, and copies of old documents with different handwriting. The team talked about cataloguing and took information on the Archive courses available and the Archive and Records Association. As usual, the photographs were very popular, but this time around a few of the pupils tried to decipher the old handwriting too.



Heritage Careers Day

VINTAGE RALLY

In August, archive staff provided both a display of photographs and a powerpoint presentation for the Vintage Rally.

The theme was WW2 as 2025 was the 80th anniversary of the ending of hostilities. The presentation was a series of images from the photographic archive set to a Radio Orkney recording of Kirkwall resident Joey Norn talking about the realities of running a home during World War two. The presentation was shown within a reconstructed 1940s living room which included examples of the rations discussed in the recording.



Orkney Archive Searchroom

Archive Events 2025

WITCHES IN WORD, NOT DEED

In April there was a very busy event at Orkney Library & Archive when Carolyn Sutton, creator of the 'Witches in Word, Not Deed' exhibition unveiled a dress dedicated to Orkney woman Marabel Couper who was condemned for witchcraft in 1624.

The 'Witches in Word, Not Deed' exhibition commemorates thirteen Scottish women accused and persecuted for witchcraft during the 16th-18th centuries. Marabel's dress was on display in the library and archive for a few weeks before moving permanently to Orkney Museum.

While the dress was displayed in the archive there was also had a small exhibition in the searchroom display cases about sources relating to witchcraft in Orkney. This was put together by Archive Assistant, Yvonne Nicoll.



EARLY WOMEN DOCTORS IN ORKNEY

Over the past couple of years, a small group of volunteers (including Archive Assistant Andrea Massey) have been researching early women doctors in Orkney. More than 50 women who worked, or had close connections with Orkney (prior to the NHS in 1948) have so far been identified.

An exhibition was put together in the archive searchroom by Andrea in November 2025, showing a few examples of what the project has found, from records preserved within the archive and beyond. The display focussed on individuals such as Beatrice Garvie, Mary McNeill, Robina Marwick (Lady Birsay) and Margaret Tait. Archive records include Parish Council Minutes, gifts and deposits (including the Margaret Tait and Beatrice Garvie collections), photographs and newspaper articles. There was also information for people to find out more about the overall project and how to find out more.



Orkney Archive Searchroom

Archive Projects 2025

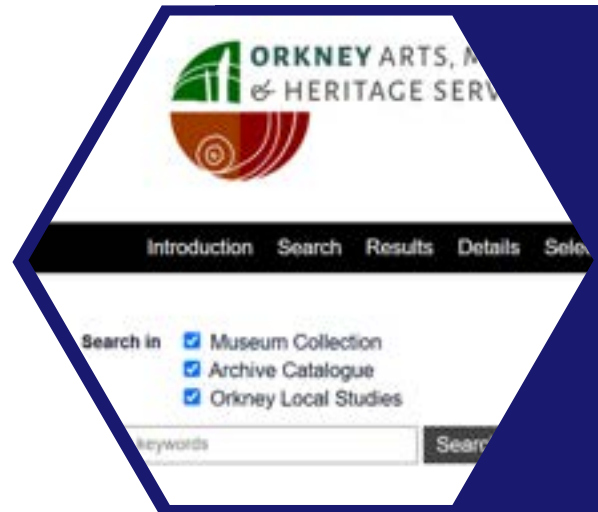
ONLINE CATALOGUE

After the release of the joint Orkney Archive and Orkney Museum online catalogue in 2024, work has been ongoing to add more archival entries, images and Orkney Room books to the catalogue.

5,053 archive entries have been added in 2025, giving a total of 71,705 archival descriptions held within the online archive catalogue.

1,018 photo image uploads have been added, with many of these images depicting Orkney in both world wars and includes the sinking of the German High Seas Fleet in June 1919, the subsequent salvage operations by companies such as Cox & Danks and Metal Industries, the construction of the Churchill Barriers and the Italian POWs.

58 entries were created to add titles to the the Orkney Room reference collection, giving a total of 7,167 altogether. These are books written by Orcadians or books written about Orkney and are added to the invaluable Local studies catalogue.



Archive Online Catalogue

PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVE DARKROOM

In 2025, the Archive continued to forge links with colleagues in the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) by allowing students and tutors access to the photographic darkrooms.

The students were able to get practical knowledge of photographic developing processes as well as studying former Orkney photographers work (such as Tom Kent and Wilfred Marr), by researching the various photographic collections held in the archive.

It is hoped this partnership will continue into 2026.



Tom Kent photograph from 1900

PHOTO INFORMATION AND DIGITISATION

The Volunteer's Photo Information Project aims to transfer the information on the back of the printed photos in the Orkney Photographic Archive to a database and eventually onto the archive's online catalogue. This project has now been running for a few years.

In 2025, volunteers finished inputting data from the 'miscellaneous' copies collection and moved on to the individual photographer's collections, such as Robert H. Robertson, Wilfred Marr and the Phoenix Photos collection.

Colin Rendall, Archive Technician, has continued the task of digitising all the prints, so that they can be uploaded onto the online catalogue to pair with the descriptive entries from the database.

Currently, there are around 11,000 images ready to be uploaded. This ongoing project will benefit all researchers, but particularly book authors and documentary film makers, who would be able to browse the images online before ordering prints or high resolution digital images.

MAP CATALOGUING

Archive Assistant, Andrea Massey, has been very busy cataloguing various map collections over the course of 2025.

The archive holds a large collection of rolled estate plans gifted to the Archive from solicitors and private individuals which needs to be sorted, listed, preserved and stored in such a way that they can be easily found in our catalogue descriptions, while also being kept physically safe within the strongrooms.

This project will be ongoing throughout 2026 and will make the maps far more accessible to researchers in the future.



Library and Archive Partnerships and Volunteers



Working in partnership with local bodies and groups remains a key objective for the library and archive services.

Once again, successful partnership working has taken place with colleagues in the Learning Link, ensuring that Orkney residents are receiving free help to learn key digital skills. The benefits of this have seen a reduction in the digital divide, helping people to be safe online and how to access key online information. It has also helped reduce social isolation and allowed members to better keep in touch with family and friends who stay further afield.

Other key partnerships include the invaluable work done by the Orkney Talking Newspaper and the Orkney Family History Society who are both based within the library and archive building in Kirkwall.

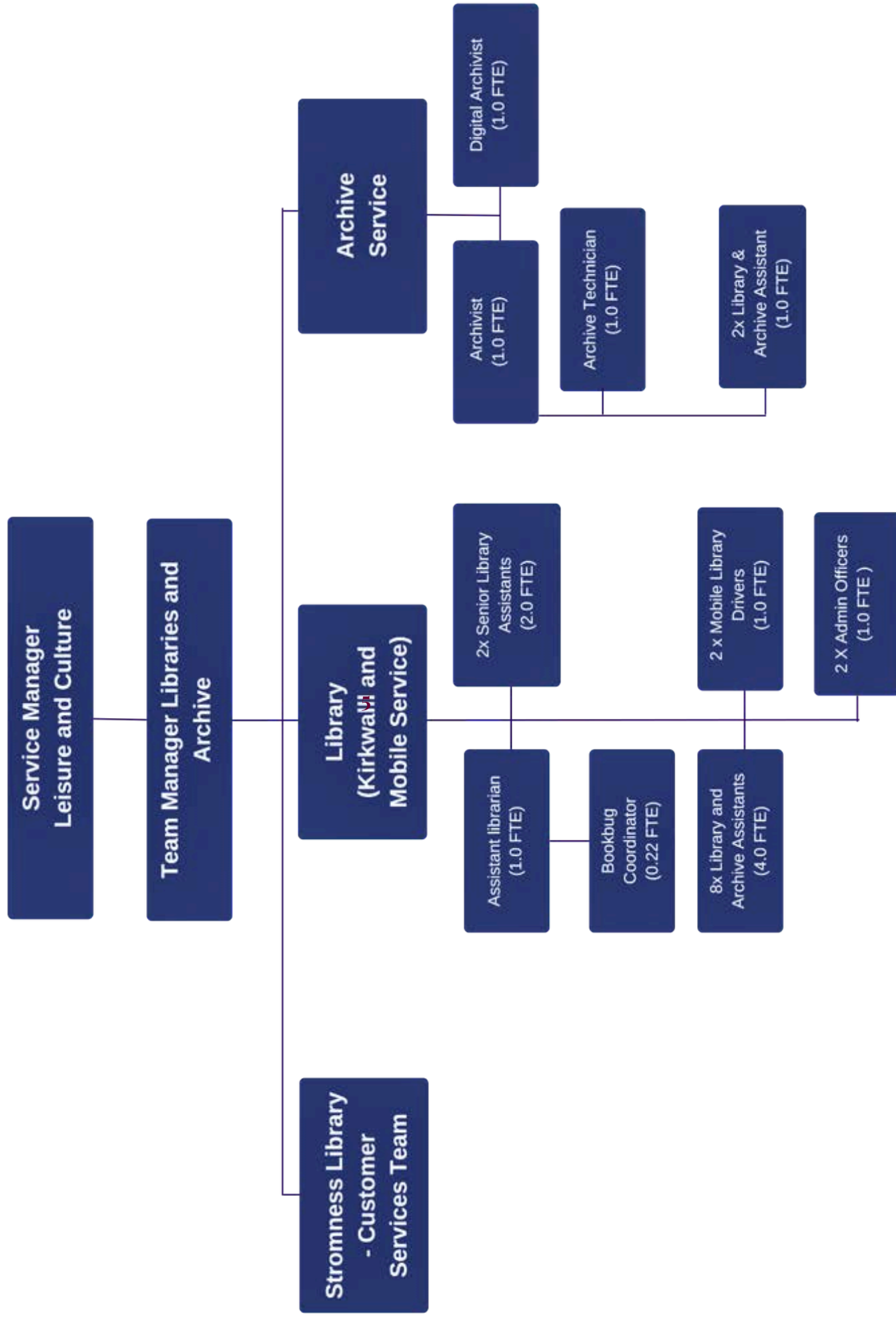
In 2025 there were new joint working initiatives with Sporting Memories in the lead up to the Island Games, and this association is continuing into 2026.

Close working relations with the University of the Highlands & Islands, Voluntary Action Orkney, the Blide Trust, the Orkney Japan Association and the Islands Centre for Net Zero also lead to far reaching benefits for the whole of Orkney which the team are very grateful for.

A huge thank you also goes out to the fabulous volunteers who commit time out of their own busy lives to helping in the libraries and archives every week. Their help in keeping the library looking clean and tidy, helping run events like the Yap and Yarn sessions, or creating indexes and archival finding aids is invaluable to the service areas.



Libraries and Archive Staffing Structure 2025



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