

Sample Grant Application:
Merton Heritage & Local Studies Centre

1. Organisation information

Name of applicant organisation/institution: Merton Heritage & Local Studies Centre
Website: www.merton.gov.uk/heritage and www.merton.gov.uk/memories
Project title: Picturing Modern Merton

2. Contact information of lead contact

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3. Project summary (100-150 words)

Please provide a brief overview of:

- *Your project and its goals/aims*
- *How you plan to use the funding if successful*
- *Whether the project will include publishing the digitised collection(s) online, transcribing of metadata, or metadata capture via optical character recognition (OCR).*

This project is intended to raise awareness of Merton's postwar history, providing researchers and the general public with access to a unique and previously unseen photographic collection. Documenting life in Merton from 1945 to 2000, this is a key resource for understanding the development of the modern borough and its diverse population.

If successful, we will seek advice from Townsweb regarding the best digitisation approach for our collection. We plan to digitise as much of our postwar Merton imagery as possible, in order to expand the range of material accessible via the Merton Memories website. Heritage volunteers will work with local historians and Merton residents, cataloguing and researching images to create metadata via the TWA Pastview system. The digitised images will be used to create a variety of resources (displays, heritage trails, Youtube films, talks, school packs and reminiscence material) to enable wide-ranging public engagement with Merton's heritage.

4. Collection information (100-150 words)

Please provide a summary of the collection(s) you plan to digitise and its contents.

Please include the number of items to be digitised broken down by format (i.e. 89 bound books, 200 print photographs), the average size/number of pages of the items, and any relevant information about their condition:

- Approximately 5000 prints (40% B & W; 60% colour) ranging from small Box Brownie snaps 3 x 3", to card mounted 10 x 8" photos and wide class photos 8 x 40"
- The vast majority of prints are 7 x 5"
- Approximately 2000 colour 35mm slides and negatives

Content includes:

- family and school photographs
- images of local industry and retail
- images of the local landscape, neighbourhoods and green spaces
- corporate images of property developments, council employees and services
- pictures of community-staged activities
- photographs documenting local events and incidents
- aerial borough survey (375 images)

The more recent print collection is in a fair condition. However environmental variation, poor storage and regular handling has resulted in fading, creasing, splits, foxing and tears to some of the larger, older and card mounted photos. Unstable colour prints from the 1970s also show evidence of fading and film deterioration.

Please note: Applications will primarily be judged based on the following four criteria (sections 5, 6, 7 and 8) – which are all equally weighted.

5. Heritage need (150-250 words)

Please outline the heritage value, uniqueness, and importance of the collection(s) you plan to digitise.

Is the collection at risk? If so, how/why?

The majority of digital imagery currently available from Merton archives and museums dates from 1860 to 1965. Researchers have limited access to modern material, yet recent decades have seen dramatic changes in all aspects of local life. These should feature in the borough's photographic record, if it is to accurately represent Merton's history.

The material chosen for digitisation is a unique collection illustrating the evolution of Merton from three separate authorities into a modern London borough. Photos taken by individuals, schools, companies and corporate representatives capture key aspects of social, economic,

technological, environmental and cultural change including: postwar immigration, urbanisation, the shift from manufacturing to new technologies, educational reform and trends in leisure and fashion. The images also highlight the contribution of women and BAME communities to the borough's history and changes to the built environment, including housing and retail developments, the loss of period properties and the impact on nature.

Pressures on local authority budgets, particularly in the current pandemic where on-site work is limited, mean that conservation and specialist digitisation of this material cannot take place without external funding.

Currently uncatalogued, the collection is inaccessible – previous ad hoc storage has already affected the condition of older, more fragile photographs and without action, further deterioration is likely. We cannot develop the collection or identify gaps, without a clear assessment of what we have. Important historical information may also be lost, if the material is not made available whilst contemporary individuals are still around to provide background detail.

6. Social/community impact (150-250 words)

Please describe how local people and communities will benefit from your digitisation project.

The project will:

- Enable 15 local people (of varying age, ethnicity and background), to work as heritage volunteers and receive training in research, cataloguing, display work, and collections care.
- By offering unprecedented public access to images charting the development of modern Merton, including previously unseen images of BAME residents, we will be responding to public feedback regarding Black Lives Matter and the draft 2020-25 Merton Heritage Strategy. Our modern collection will better represent the contribution and life experiences of the borough's diverse communities, in addition to highlighting the unique character of local neighbourhoods. By increasing awareness of local history and achievements, we hope to promote cultural exchange and encourage residents to add their own life stories and memorabilia to our collections.
- Promote physical/mental wellbeing by using digitised images to create 5 downloadable heritage trails. These will encourage local residents to combine healthy walks with learning about Merton's 20th century history. Images will also be used to create online reminiscence sessions and themed resources to promote the sharing of memories, boost recall and support mental wellbeing amongst elderly residents and people living with dementia.

- Project material will be made available to local community groups, museums and heritage sites to support their own work (e.g. exhibition research, publications and as inspiration for artwork and creative writing.)
- Use visual material to break down barriers and engage a wider audience with local heritage, including people for whom English is a second language, those with learning difficulties and additional needs.

7. Research impact (150-250 words)

How will digitising your collection(s) benefit researchers? Whether academic, social historians, genealogists, or other researchers.

- Researchers (adult learners, social historians, schools) will have access to a collection of unique and previously unseen images. Digitisation will also prevent unnecessary handling of original photographs, so ensuring their preservation and availability for future generations.
- Digitisation will literally enable researchers and the wider public to “see” aspects of local history, as opposed to just reading about them. It will also enable us to make the collection accessible in a variety of formats (online, school resource packs, exhibitions, talks, plus digital images and associated research material available as part of our Local Studies collection.)
- The collection includes a comprehensive 1980s aerial survey of the borough – this will allow landscape historians, geographers and archaeologists to research changes in Merton’s built environment, including industrial development and shifting transport networks.
- Architectural historians will benefit from access to photographic records of districts, from Wimbledon Village, to Merton Park and detailed internal images documenting the fabric of local listed buildings.
- The collection offers social historians a wealth of material to research social change in postwar Merton, from housing and educational reform, to political representation, technological developments, the role of women and demographic change.
- The collection also includes school year photographs, street scenes and images of memorials of potential interest to genealogists.
- The images will also support history and geography curriculum work in local schools and colleges; enabling students to chart the development of the modern borough, show change over time and research key events and personalities from the Merton area.

8. Improved Accessibility (150-250 words)

What platform is the digitised collection going to be accessible from to wider communities.

Once digitised, our collection will be added to the Merton Memories website, making it readily accessible to people, both in Merton and beyond. This system will enable researchers and the general public to search for images by keyword, topic and location, in addition to a range of advanced search options including date, format and photographer.

We will also be using the material to create films and pre-recorded talks for addition to the Heritage Service and Merton council Youtube channels. Themed district histories will be added to the Merton schools extranet to support school curriculum work and regular image postings on the Libraries and council Twitter feed will raise awareness of events and individuals from Merton's past. Public computers at all Merton Libraries will provide free access to the collection for local residents who do not have home internet.

Heritage staff will also work to extend access as widely as possible to Merton's care sector, including the local dementia hub, day centres and care homes through a combination of online use and printable resources to support therapeutic reminiscence.

(Subject to Covid safety approval, the digitised collection and wider Merton Memories resources will also be accessible via touchscreen units in the exhibition area and designated reminiscence zone at Merton Heritage Centre.)

The borough's local museums, historical societies and community groups will be encouraged to promote and link the digitised collection to their respective websites and use the material for their own research and public resources.

9. Match funding

How much funding do you have available from other sources? (Trusts, charities, foundations etc)

Note - Match funding is NOT a prerequisite for applying for the TWA Digitisation Grant.

Please include sources and amounts. If you have applied for HLF funding please indicate if you have a Stage 1 pass or Stage 2 pass.

We do not currently have match/external funding to support the digitisation and preservation of this material. Should this grant application be successful, the local authority will contribute in-house support, goods and services to ensure the success of this project including:

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10. Additional notes (150-200 words)

Please include any additional information about your project/collection that you would like to be considered with your application here. This can include information about:

- Image collections that you currently own (or have previously been digitised)
- Any digital image management systems that you currently use, links to websites where some of your digitized material might already be displayed.
- Any long term aspirations for your organization/initiative.

Covid19 has/will place major limitations on physical access to our Local Studies collections. Digitisation is key to increasing the material available online and enabling ongoing public engagement with Merton's heritage. This will not only ensure continuing service provision for schools, academic and private researchers, but assist the development of educational and therapeutic services for elderly, vulnerable and underrepresented members of our community.

15,000 images digitised by Townsweb and local volunteers are already available via www.merton.gov.uk/memories, together with 1976 First World War photographs and documents on www.merton.gov.uk/carvedinstone. However postwar, particularly 1960s+ material is limited - this needs to increase if we are to make our collection more representative of the modern borough and its diverse population.

We aspire to dramatically expand collections access, digitising core components to balance on-site research and learning, with online access to support global uptake and provide heritage engagement opportunities for people with disabilities and additional needs. Through visible storage we hope to make the majority of our object collection publicly accessible; supported by wide-ranging digital access to ensure awareness/regular use of documentary collections. Using this approach, we hope to have a truly "functioning" collection, achieving its full potential, rather than sitting unseen in closed storage.