

Soutron Facilitates Protection and Discovery of Special Historical Collections



ST ALBANS & HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHITECTURAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY USE SOUTRON FOR THEIR LIBRARY / ARCHIVE

INTRODUCTION

The St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archaeological Society (SAHAAS) Library has one of the largest collections on local history in Hertfordshire, focusing on the history, archaeology, architecture and the people of St Albans, Hertfordshire, and the surrounding area.

Their special collections consist of thousands of books and pamphlets, including early antiquarian county histories; journals and periodicals; town, tithe, parish, manorial and estate maps, and other large format materials dating back to the early 1600s; over 15,000 photo and pictures; miscellaneous papers on a wide range of topics; and special architectural collections.

The SAHAAS Library is managed by volunteer Heather Jardine. When she began volunteering for the society after a career as a public librarian, the catalogue consisted of primarily books and pamphlets.



Heather and the other volunteers have worked to expand its catalogue database, exposing to the public photos, maps, architectural plans, and other primary and secondary research materials. Today, the majority of the collection is non-book related, and their catalogue offers online search facilities providing access to books and pamphlets, with links to other resources, journal articles, maps, and research documents.

OVERVIEW

Heather oversees a dedicated team of 12 volunteers who generously donate their time and expertise, playing a vital role in organising and cataloguing a diverse array of materials. These volunteers come from varied backgrounds, some have had training in cataloguing, some have not, and are always questioning why they must catalogue “that way”.



“A lot of our visitors tend to be tourists, not explorers, and it is our job to help them find what they are looking for. People want to find items in different ways.”

Heather Jardine
Library Director



Under Heather's guidance, the volunteers use Soutron's thesauri to find and use the right metadata tags to properly catalogue the items into the Soutron database, keeping it nicely organised. This consistency makes the library's collections easily discoverable and accessible to all.

Soutron Thesauri metadata management practices enhance the user search experience by:

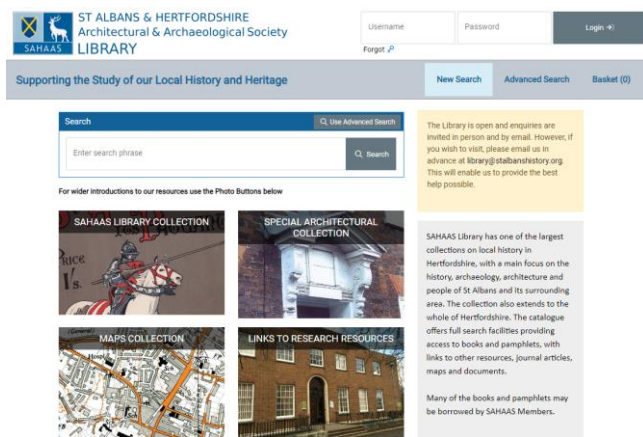
- Ensuring Consistency
- Improving Searchability
- Providing Context
- Protecting Resources
- Efficiently Managing Collections

These practices significantly contribute to the organisation, and discovery of information within the library and archival resources.

SOLUTION

At the core of Soutron is a very flexible, secure, and customisable database that enables organisations to catalogue both library and archival collections in the cloud, in a single database, unlike other library and archive solutions that require two separate databases.

At SAHAAS, they have integrated the Soutron Search Portal directly into the Society's website, giving the Society's members, and researchers anywhere in the world, the opportunity to search their special collections.



With the expansion of materials catalogued, Heather has discovered that the Soutron thesaurus and its metadata keyword management system are extremely helpful in maintaining an organised database.

The volunteers use this functionality, ensuring that the metadata aligns with standard library practices. This consistency is important because library users often visit multiple libraries for research. Using standard terms and descriptions across libraries makes it easier for the public and researchers to locate materials.

“The way I explain it to my volunteers is that you can think of a library like a supermarket - you expect to be able to find certain things like produce, tins, meats, etc. arranged in similar ways whichever supermarket you are using. The way our library is organised needs to be familiar to our visitors in the same way,” states Heather. “A lot of our visitors tend to be tourists, not explorers, and it is our job to help them find what they are looking for.”

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“The ability to attach documents, such as a list, to a record has been of great value.

Sometimes a donation will consist of boxes of a variety of materials such as published pamphlets, manuscript diaries, research notes, photographs, plans, etc., and we do not have the resources to catalogue every item in the box fully and separately. Instead, we catalogue the items as a collection and attach a list of what is in the box to the record.”

Heather Jardine
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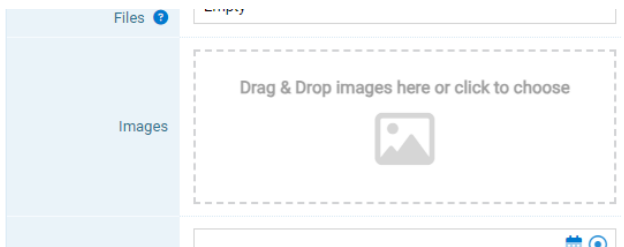
She likes the Thesauri because it enables the consistency in the database records needed for findability and appreciates that the Society can catalogue diverse objects using full names with added metadata. “People want to find items in different ways,” states Heather. The volunteers can add additional metadata keywords and content descriptions, links to additional documents, and thumbnail images to records to make the materials easier to search and find.

For instance, the library may catalogue a family photo that was taken outside with not just the names of the people pictured, but also the locale, such as street name and area. That way if someone searches a street name, that family photo will turn up with the street in the background providing added context.



Additionally, if an item is about farming for example, the thesauri will suggest adding agriculture and other terms, helping with the selection of the right metadata keywords. The thesauri can also be set up to prompt to NOT use a certain term for certain keywords. For an example, use "World War 2" and not "World War II" or "Second World War", keeping the term 'World War 2' usage uniform, distinct, and consistent. These Soutron capabilities help to maintain a nicely organised database that facilitates discovery.

Another Soutron helpful functionality that is appreciated is the ability to attach thumbnails of images to database records. Now visitors can see a thumbnail of the image to determine if that is what they are looking for. Plus, being able to attach documents, such as a list, to a record has also been of great value.



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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Future plans include taking advantage of the archival cataloguing functionality of Soutron, doing mass imports from collection materials catalogued in spreadsheets into the Soutron database to get more items into the Society's shop window to help increase visitors, and perhaps use Soutron's ability to integrate with Google search so people worldwide can see the unique items the Society has in the collection and come in to explore.

To find out more about St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural & Archaeological Society (SAHAAS) Library and the unique collection materials available, visit their website for details:

www.stalbanshistory.org

To find out how you can migrate to a fast, secure, cloud based library management system to support your local society and organisation, start a conversation with Soutron Global today:

www.soutron.com



**ST ALBANS & HERTFORDSHIRE
ARCHITECTURAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

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