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# Successfully Managing Archives in Museums

Written by Janice Tullock, National Archives  
Image courtesy of The Devil's Porridge Museum

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*Written by Janice Tullock for The National Archives*

*Front cover image courtesy of The Devil's Porridge Museum*

## **What is an archive? – The terms used in this guide.**

The term 'archive' can refer to a collection, a place where archives are kept or an organisation caring for and providing access to an archive ('Archive Service'). Within museums the term 'archive' is used in a range of ways:

- To describe 'Structured Archives' which are part of the museum's collections and which conform to the archive sector definition of an archive.
- To describe individual items or small groups of items in their collection which are on paper or other archival formats. The museum may choose to define these items in their collection as an 'archive collection' but they do not have the set-up of a structured archive

## **Introduction**

This Success Guide aims to provide an introduction to managing archives in museums. It will help you to assess which aspects of your collection could be managed as an archive and support you in your work to meet any legal requirements. It is an introductory, rather than in-depth guide to managing archives in museums.

This guide is for museums with a varied archive collection. It will help your museum to identify which parts of your collection meet the definition of 'archives' and work out when it is important and useful to take a specialist approach to these collections. Archives, like museum collections, have particular collection care needs and we will outline these, alongside suggestions for developing access to archives.

Finally, this guide will identify and link to other sources of information, guidance and good practice.

## **Why is this important?**

Archives can be an incredibly rich and enlightening part of your museum collection. They can tell a whole range of stories and help bring your whole museum and the rest of the collections to life. On a practical level there are these things to consider:

- Legal requirements
- Ensuring you are making the most of your collections
- Enabling access and research.

## **What are archives?**

When the archive sector refers to 'Archives' it is referring to records created by an individual, family or organisation during their day-to-day activities, which have been selected for permanent preservation. Examples include selected records of a theatre company; of the museum; of key people involved with the museum; of businesses, individuals and families whose records have been deposited with the museum. Their most important characteristic is the provenance (the origin) that they share as a group. They are not a haphazard, unrelated, or created group of paper items: they belong together. In this

guide we refer to this as ‘structured archives’ to distinguish these archives from other uses of the word ‘archive’ that are common in museums.

All museum collections contain “works on paper”. These might be single drawings, photographs, files or a series of correspondence or ledgers, but when do these become classed as archives?

Some archives in museums can be treated as part of the museum collection but there are times when it is best to consider them separately. The decision about which route to take is up to each individual museum and should be based on what works best within the existing capacity, resources and approach of the museum.

In museums, archives are generally found either as part of object collections or managed as stand-alone collections. Museums often describe parts of their collections as ‘archives’ and use this to cover items on paper, photographs, maps or, increasingly, digital files, even if they are not a structured archive.

Some archives in museums can be treated as part of the museum collection but there are times when it is best to consider them separately as a ‘structured archive’. The decision about which route to take is up to each individual museum and should be based on what works best within the existing capacity, resources and approach of the museum.

Factors influencing whether or not to treat a museum’s archive collections as a ‘structured archive’ include whether some or all of the following points apply:

- **Size:** if a museum’s archive holdings meet the eligibility criteria for Archive Service Accreditation (4000 items, 4.2 cu m or 50 linear metres) then they have a substantial quantity of material whose management probably needs to be considered as a whole.
- **Complexity:** a key element in deciding whether archive holdings need to be managed differently is whether they are a run of single objects or a complex, hierarchical collection of records whose interrelationships need to be retained in order for their research and cultural value to be preserved. Examples might include a set of correspondence where you can see the interrelationships of the letters of a business with multiple departments represented in the archive.
- **Content:** includes any material likely to fall within legislation, especially UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018: personal data less than 100 years old (see: legislation).
- **Format:** relates to complexity, in that it is harder to offer access to archives if they are large numbers of similar-looking files. Managing access to archives also needs specific consideration when they are in electronic format.
- **Significance:** This is harder to define but if a museum holds an important archive on a subject which is regularly consulted then they this will need to consider how to manage frequent research access to archives (see: access).

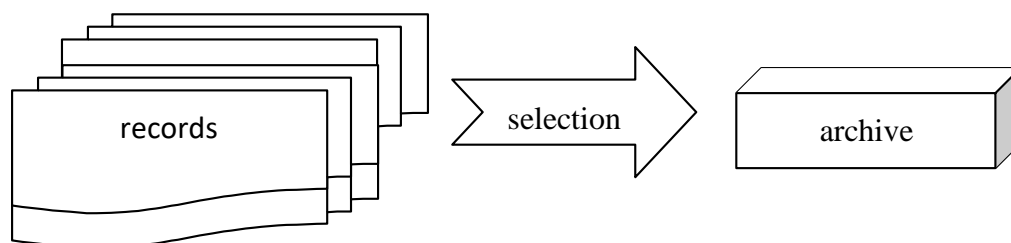
It is not always necessary to have separate collection policies and plans for your structured archive. Your approach to managing your archive may be incorporated within your existing policies and plans. It may be helpful to state archive-specific aspects within your policies, for example how cataloguing will support work across collections while

maintaining standards, or how collection development is managed to avoid competing for or splitting structured archive collections.

### **More about structured archives**

Structured archives are permanently preserved as the record of the activities of the individual, family or organisation. They are selected and preserved because they provide evidence of how these activities were carried out and because they will be useful for future research.

These records have a life span with a number of stages before they even reach an archive or museum. This starts with the creation of the record, through to a phase where they are an active record, used regularly for administrative purposes and finally to the appraisal stage. The appraisal stage in the lifecycle covers a number of options, including the selection of the records for permanent preservation, as archives, or disposal as part of a carefully planned schedule and in line with your collections development policy.



Archives are also unique items: they contain unique information which cannot usually be found anywhere else. Because of this, published books and other works rarely meet the definition of archives. However, though there are four copies of the 1215 Magna Carta, they are all archival because they are unique manuscripts created for different areas of the country. For more information on this see [here](#).

Conversely, if you have mass produced items, such as programmes, they are not classed as archives, unless they are retained by an organisation or person as part of their administrative activities, for example a dance company which retains one copy of a programme for each of its productions.

It is also important to recognise that archives may be in many formats, e-mail, paper, film, video and sound recordings, photographs, parchment, rolls, maps, ledgers and digital records such as spreadsheets or databases.

Museums should also remember to manage the records of their own organisation. These records of the business, donations, correspondence and research are a valuable resource which must be managed well to support current activities and future research. They will often not be accessioned as part of the museum's collections.

### **Key points about Archive Collections:**

- Archives are the records of everyday activities, which have been selected for permanent preservation.
- The provenance of archives makes them valuable as authentic evidence of activity.

- Archives are preserved permanently as evidence.
- Archives are unique.
- Archives exist in many formats (including: digital, film, paper), the format of the information does not govern whether it is archival or not.
- Archives can include the selected records of your own museum, if it is defined within your collecting policy.

### **The Archive sector**

The word “archive” is also used to describe the diverse network of archive services in the UK and beyond. They range from national organisations such as The National Archives, the National Records of Scotland and services at the National Library of Wales; to local record offices and small, volunteer run archive services.

Most local authorities, at county, borough or unitary level, have archive services which care for the records of the authority and its predecessors, but also collect archives relating to their local area. These collections can cover local families, businesses, organisations and locally relevant Public Records.

A good working relationship between museums and archive services with shared collections interests can be fruitful for both the organisations and their users as they can signpost areas of mutual interest and even consider joint working etc.

The rest of the archive sector is highly diverse. Many specialist organisations, such as the British Geological Survey, British Council, The Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the Nuclear Decommissioning Archive have developed archive services to manage and provide access to their archives. Businesses such as Marks & Spencer, Boots and Unilever manage archive services as a core part of their business, providing services such as records management or maintaining evidence of business actions. They also provide inspiration for business and product development and help to develop marketing campaigns. Some membership organisations also have archive services as part of their work.

A growing area of archive services is the education sector at university and school level. Many large universities such as Edinburgh and Manchester have long established archive services which care for the records of the university and its staff, but also collect archives which match their research interests. Finally, there are specialist archive services designed to meet the needs of a particular subject such as the Black Cultural Archive, or National Theatre Archive.

There are a number of archive services within museums in the UK. Examples range from large collections such as the Tate or the Natural History Museum to services at the People’s History Museum, Cooperative Archive or the Museum of London.

### **Managing Structured Archive Collections**

#### **Principles**

We have already outlined a number of important principles for managing archives:

- Manage archives throughout the lifecycle of the record, from creation to appraisal and selection.

- Respect the provenance of collections.

The section below details further principles for efficient archive management:

- Ensuring legal compliance for your organisation in its archive management
- Preserving the integrity of the archive
- Maintaining the original order of the collection.

### **Legal context for archives**

There are a number of pieces of legislation and guidance that may apply to the management of archive collections. Data protection and copyright are likely to be the key areas that apply to your museum. If you hold any of the following:

- Records of public authorities in England, Wales & Scotland.
- Personal data about living individuals.

You should consider how you apply the following legislation and responsibilities:

- **Managing Personal Data:** UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), tailored by the Data Protection Act 2018, which outlines the rules for managing personal data about living individuals, including medical records. The National Archives provides detailed guidance <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/legislation/archives-data-protection-law-uk/>
- **Copyright:** Copyright Rights and Designs Patents Act 1988, is the principal legislation covering intellectual property rights in the United Kingdom. This gives the creators of archive and artistic material, rights to control the ways in which their material may be used. The legislation also protects patents, trademarks and design rights.
- **Freedom of Information:** Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities. It does this in two ways:
  - public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities and
  - members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.

The Act covers any recorded information that is held by a public authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and by UK-wide public authorities based in Scotland. Public authorities include government departments, local authorities, the NHS, state schools and police forces. Recorded information includes printed documents, computer files, letters, emails, photographs, and sound or video recordings.

- **Public Records:** The Public Records Act 1958 governs the management of the records and archives of the UK central government and courts. It also allows for the deposit of Public Records in places other than The National Archives, such as local archive services. These Places of Deposit are appointed by The National Archives and you should contact them if you hold archives covered by the act. The Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 places an obligation on named public authorities to prepare and implement a records management plan which sets out proper arrangements for the management of their records. The National Records of Scotland can undertake records management reviews and issue notices for improvement if authorities do not meet the requirements of the Act.

- NHS Records: Department of Health Records Management: NHS Code of Practice is a guide to the required standards of practice in the management of records for those who work within or under contract to NHS organisations in England.

This is a list of the main legislation/guidance, but some others may apply to specific organisations. Other legislation covers Manorial Records and Tithe records and guidance from the General Synod of the Church of England covers the preservation of parish records.

For more details on all these areas of legislation see Legislation and regulations: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/> and Re-using public sector information <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/re-using-public-sector-information/> For intellectual property rights: Intellectual Property Office: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office> and The National Archive's own guidance on copyright: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/legal/copyright.htm>

### **Collecting archives**

Museums and archive services collect archives and other collections according to well defined collecting or collection development policies. Between archive services collecting policies are mutually agreed and seek to avoid overlap and to meet the evidential role of archive services. These policies are publicly available and will confirm which services are responsible for collecting from which public bodies in particular. Museums who intend to collect structure archives should ensure that they are referenced in their own Collections Development Policy.

Archive services collect archives from a range of sources. Most services are the repository for the records of their own organisation, but some also collect from other organisations, businesses and individuals. The collecting policy will describe this.

It is a foundation principle for archive services to seek to preserve the integrity of the collection when collecting. For the user this means they can usually see the whole collection in one place, through one catalogue, providing a comprehensive view of the history and work of an organisation or individual. In practice this means that services will not accept archives when the majority of the collection is already held elsewhere, but advise on deposit with the relevant service.

### **Storage and preservation**

As for museum collections, archive collections need to be stored in safe, secure areas, away from the risk of damage by threats such as fire, water, theft and light. In general, good museum storage areas meet these needs, as they are cool, temperate, secure areas, covered by a fire alarm. For the storage of mixed collections of different formats a stable environment is recommended for the preservation of paper and parchment, maintained within a temperature range of 13°C - 23°C with an annual average storage temperature of less than 18 °C. Storage for traditional mixed archive materials should have a relative humidity between 35% - 60%. Ideally, fluctuations of temperature and humidity are kept to a minimum, as fluctuations speed up degradation over time.

Additional steps need to be taken to directly preserve the collection by repackaging the material in acid free boxes and wrapping. In addition, non-archival quality plastics, metals etc. should be removed to ensure they will not decay into the collection in future. Taking these steps will enhance security and ensure preservation of the material in the future.

Specific storage environments and storage are required for some formats of archives such as film or photographs. Generally these should be in cooler environments than paper or mixed format archives.

For more detail see:

BS4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections

BS EN16893:2018, Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections.

The National Archives, Archives Principles and Practice, an introduction to archives for non-archivists <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>

Benchmarks in Collection Care can be a useful tool for assessing care and conservation priorities across museum and archive collections.  
<http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/benchmarks-in-collections-care/benchmarks-in-collections-care-homepage>

Extract from Arts Council England's guidelines for Museum Accreditation in relation to archival holdings: 'Museums that hold or intend to acquire material that may be considered archival in nature, for example documents and photographs – in paper-based or digital formats, should describe the rationale and approach to developing this collection. For material of particular size, coverage and significance it may be appropriate to be additionally guided by the requirements of the Archive Service Accreditation Scheme.'

### **Documentation/cataloguing & arrangement**

There are many processes that an archive service collection will need to go through before it can be made available to the public. PAS 197 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management, provides a useful table that compares the processes. Cataloguing is just one part of a series of stages that ensures that a collection is secure, legally sound (in terms of both ownership and legislation) and accessible.

The following sections outline the administrative and practical needs of a structured archive collection, which must be addressed before cataloguing can take place. As in general museum documentation, the entry of the collection or item into the custody of the museum is recorded and agreed using documentation - for example, an Entry Form, or Donation Agreement.

### **Step 1: Appraisal**

Before the collection can be catalogued, the papers will need to be appraised and where necessary, arranged into groups of records, or series. Part of this process involves reviewing, sorting and weeding the papers. This should be undertaken according to the archival principle of original order. Archives are kept in the order in which they were originally created or used. This original order allows custodians to protect the authenticity



of the records and provides essential information as to how they were created, kept and used. Sometimes this original order has been lost through poor handling or re-sorting.

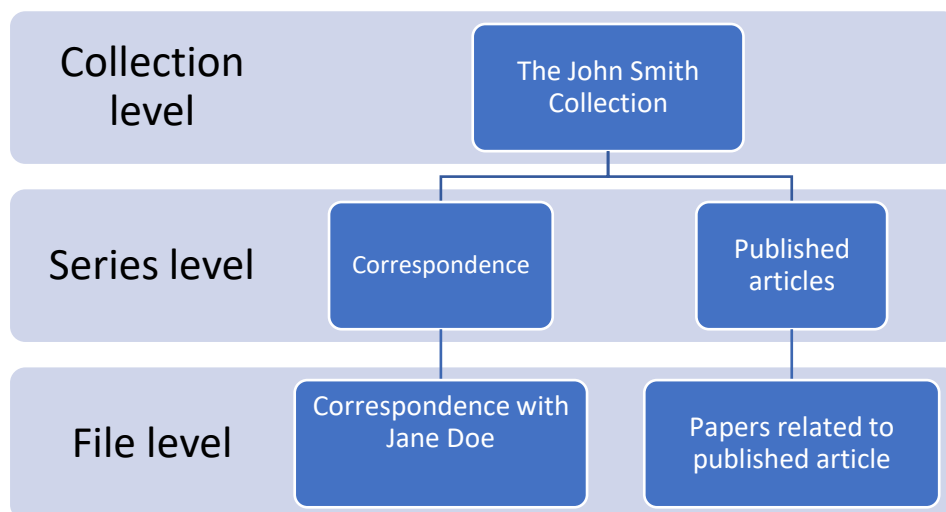
Appraisal also involves assessing whether the items and collection are worthy of permanent preservation. If not being permanently preserved, items should be disposed of according to the donation agreement.

### Step 2: Description or cataloguing

The purpose of archival description, or cataloguing, is to identify and describe the context and content of archival material to make it accessible to researchers. Without an accurate and appropriate catalogue, researchers will not be able to gain meaningful access to the collection. Uncatalogued collections are also at risk of mis-sorting and loss.

Within the archive sector, archival catalogues are based on the concept of a multi-level hierarchical description, which preserves the contextual relationship between items. Museum documentation under Spectrum also preserves contextual relationships, but in a different way, and is used in some museums to catalogue archival collections.

To demonstrate and preserve contextual relationships, archival catalogues have a hierarchical structure: the entire collection is described first, then its record groups (or series), followed by files and/or individual items. The structure descends from the largest to the smallest unit. To maintain the contextual relationship of documents within a collection, it will need to be catalogued using multi-level hierarchical description. See above for an example of the potential levels within a sample collection.



For a museum, this is a similar approach to that for cataloguing archaeological excavation archives and ensuring that the different components of the collection are all linked to each other through the cataloguing process. At a very simple level this can involve the allocation of a single accession number to the whole archive and then using part numbers to ensure that the relationship between the different elements of the archive is preserved through its documentation.

If your museum holds significant and/or extensive archive collections, you need to be aware of the International Standard of Archival Description (General), more usually known as ISAD(G).

ISAD(G) identifies and defines 26 elements that may be combined to constitute the description of an archival entity. Of the 26 defined data elements, the following 6 are essential:

- Reference code
- Title
- Name of Creator
- Dates of Creation
- Extent of the Unit of Description [i.e. size, number of items]
- Level of description

For more information on ISAD (G) and how it relates to SPECTRUM see:

International Council on Archives, ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description Second Edition. <https://www.ica.org/en/isadg-general-international-standard-archival-description-second-edition>

Shepherd, E and Pringle, R, (2002) Mapping descriptive standards across sectors: a comparison of ISAD(G) and SPECTRUM. *Journal of the Society of Archivists* , 23 (1) 17 - 34.

### **Access and integration**

Providing access is the ultimate purpose of collecting archives, even when this access is limited to an internal or defined audience. Access is delivered to these audiences by:

- Collections information provided by catalogues.
- The original archival document.
- Digital images of archival documents.
- Research services.
- Variety of interpretative methods e.g. exhibition, blog, published book, social media.

The key access point is usually through an online catalogue, published by the archive service. In some cases this is provided by a catalogue networking service such as *The National Archives Discovery*, *Archives Hub* and *Aim25*. A catalogue enables researchers to identify documents which may appeal to them and is therefore the most important access point.

When providing physical access to archives, museums should ensure the preservation and security of the archives. Researchers studying original documents should study records in a constantly supervised, secure room and never borrow archives. To support preservation of the records, book rests, weights and covers should be used by researchers. Researchers should be asked to use pencils and never pens to make notes when studying archives. Basic handling training can also benefit preservation of the archives and better understanding and use by researchers.

## **Records management**

As we discussed earlier, archives are records which have been appraised as being worthy of permanent preservation. Records in current, active use should be managed effectively to:

- Ensure that they support current activities of the individual or organisation
- Ensure that records exist for appraisal as part of legal and archival needs.

Records management techniques and tools are used to manage these day-to-day records. They enable the museum to save space and resources, to ensure that the correct records are retained, and can easily be searched and found when required. This approach will save your museum time and money in the future.

When setting up a new records management system you should start by understanding what records you have. Undertake a short survey to discover the records that each person/department holds. Use this as the basis for producing a list of the files held in the museum, according to the structure of the organisation, and the functions and activities it delivers. This is called a file plan. Using this plan you can develop a schedule which lists how long to keep each series of files and what their ultimate destination might be. For example your series of object files will probably be retained permanently, but a series of correspondence with teachers might be retained for three years before destruction. The retention plan also enables you to identify files subject to legislation such as UK GDPR and ensure that they are managed properly. Remember, records can be many formats, including electronic.

For more detailed advice on records management in museums see: Renaissance London Information and Records Management Project 2007-2012:  
[https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/4915/1091/6843/Information\\_and\\_Records\\_Management.pdf](https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/4915/1091/6843/Information_and_Records_Management.pdf)

## **Digital preservation and management**

Museums have always created and kept information on objects, buildings and people. Today they use, keep, manage and share information on an increasing number of digital formats and channels of communication. These digital objects require efficient management to ensure they are discoverable and accessible for the long term. At a minimum level to manage digital records, museums should establish procedures to cover your policy on:

- Storage – on what media can individuals store records?
- Metadata – what information should we record about each record?
- Naming conventions – what is the best name for a file to enable others to understand its contents?
- Version control – how should these be managed?
- Access controls – who should have access to which records and how?
- Email management – how can we capture emails as records and make them available to others?
- Disposition – how and who will destroy/preserve records?
- Migration – How will you transfer your digital records to new formats and how will you fund this work?

Even well-managed digital objects run the risk of a range of threats to their long-term preservation, including:

- File format obsolescence
- Media degradation or failure
- Barriers to access e.g. encryption
- Insufficient metadata to allow for retrieval & resource discovery
- Insufficient information to allow data to be presented in the format it was originally seen
- Authenticity and provenance of data is not recorded.

If museums do not consider how they will tackle these threats to preserve their digital objects they will risk loss of corporate memory, waste investment in digital projects, risk non-compliance with legislation and prevent the reuse of digital objects in the future.

Basic recommendations:

- When creating files choose the format which best suits your needs at the point of creation for image, audio, video and documents.
- If you don't have a digital repository in which to safely preserve your digital records or any organisational IT infrastructure at your disposal, keep multiple copies in different locations, also known as backing up.
- There are many options available for storing digital records, when evaluating these different options you should keep in mind the volume and type of digital records you need to keep, what resources you have at your disposal and any privacy or security concerns you may have.
- Whatever storage options you choose initially, continue to review the situation going forward.
- Regularly check the integrity of your digital records with a virus and fixity-check<sup>1</sup>
- You might want to record information about your digital records to help you manage and most importantly find them; this information is commonly referred to as metadata. This can be a simple document, probably a spreadsheet, containing filenames and their location e.g. URL or filepath, their corresponding dates of checks.

Managing digital records requires exactly the same principles as looking after paper records – filing things in an orderly fashion and naming them well will help.

Many museums will now have a greater number of digital assets than they had previously, whether these are digital records they have created themselves (born digital) or records they have created by digitising archives or objects. Digital preservation is therefore increasingly important for even the smallest museum, imagine the impact if you weren't able to access your digital photographs or organisational records. The National Archives have created a series of practical examples of managing born digital content, which you

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<sup>1</sup> Fixity checking involves the generation of checksums or hashes, which are unique strings of letters and numbers produced by particular algorithms. These can then be used to identify if something has changed within your files. As with anti-virus software, there is free checksumming software available on the web.

can change and use in your own organisation, whatever its size.

<https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/plugged-in-powered-up/digital-preservation-workflows/>

For further information on digital preservation see:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/manage-information/preserving-digital-records/>

<https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/projects-and-programmes/plugged-in-powered-up/>

### **Archives in museums and Archive Service Accreditation**

Archive Service Accreditation is the UK wide standard for archive services, developed in partnership with the archives sector and its stakeholders through a process of co-creation and consultation. The standard defines good practice and agreed standards, encouraging and supporting good practice and development. It is aimed at organisations that hold archive collections, whatever their size or constitution, and covers both private and public sector archives.

The Archive Service Accreditation standard complements the requirements of the Museums Accreditation Standard. Museums which are also Places of Deposit (recognised repositories of Public Records) need to participate in Archive Service Accreditation. Eligible museums are also encouraged to apply for Archive Service Accreditation.

For further information see:

Arts Council England, frequently asked questions: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/accreditation-scheme/accreditation-for-archive-services/faqs/>

The National Archives, Alignment of Archive Service Accreditation with other standards: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-service-accreditation-alignment-with-other-standards.xls>

Archive Service Accreditation website for further details on eligibility and how to apply <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/archive-service-accreditation/>

### **Other sources of information and help**

This guidance provides a short introduction to managing archives in museums. There are many sources of advice and support available to support you in managing your archive. For more information and for specific questions, please contact one of the organisations below.

- [The National Archives](#)
- [Archives and Records Association \(ARA\)](#)
- [Scottish Council on Archives \(SCA\)](#)
- [Museums Archives Libraries Wales](#)
- [National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#)

### **Written sources of information and advice**

Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists,  
The National Archives  
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>

### Digital Preservation Coalition

The Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) is a membership organisation advocating for digital preservation. They provide a range of advice and guidance, including the Digital Preservation Handbook

ARLIS/UK & Ireland Visual Arts Committee First Steps in Archives: A Practical Guide  
ISBN: 978-0-9519674-9-2

## **Case Studies**

### **Case Study 1 – The Museum of the Order of St John**

The Museum of the Order of St John holds a large archive which spans from the late 19th Century up to the present day. The archival collections include photographs, ephemera and rolls. There is no permanent archivist at the museum and most of the archive is uncatalogued. The museum is tackling this significant challenge with a phased and integrated approach.

One way in which the staff achieved this was through a project that told the story of Veronica Nisbet, a St John Ambulance nurse who volunteered to save soldiers' lives during the First World War. The project has been successful in securing National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) support of £69,400. It commemorated the work of 45,000 St John volunteers during the Great War and re-engaged current St John Ambulance volunteers with this pivotal part of the charity's thousand year history. The grant enabled the museum to recruit a fixed-term full-time archivist and for the first time, catalogue the First World War materials in its archive including diaries, photographs and official correspondence with the War Office.

By focusing on one specific theme, it was possible to prioritise cataloguing activity and to identify the approach needed to effectively enable greater access to the archive collections.

### **Case Study 2 – The Wordsworth Trust**

The Wordsworth Trust is home to a Designated collection of over 65,000 items, including internationally significant manuscripts, printed books and fine art from 1750 to the present day. At the heart of the museum's collection is the Wordsworth family archive, which was received by bequest from the Wordsworth grandchildren in 1935.

This archive is the largest collection of the poet's working papers and letters from anywhere in the world, and it is housed in the very place which inspired his greatest poetry. It includes, for example, all surviving drafts of Wordsworth's great semi-autobiographical work 'The Prelude'. It also includes all of Dorothy Wordsworth's surviving notebooks which make up what is popularly known as the 'Grasmere Journals', a major literary work in its own right.

The collection is managed holistically by the Curator, whilst also operating on Principles of Museum Documentation. The collection of manuscripts, books and paintings have all been catalogued in the same way using SPECTRUM Museum Standard and Modes Complete software, and can be searched online. This includes transcriptions of over 400 unpublished letters from 200 years ago. In addition to this researchers can visit the library to undertake detailed study of original materials.

Specific exhibitions support on-going exploration and growth of the archive collection. In 2015, the Wordsworth Trust presented a major exhibition 'Wordsworth, War and Waterloo', exploring the poet's response to three decades of conflict. The activities of the Trust are supported by Arts Council England, South Lakeland District Council and many other generous institutions and individuals

### **Case Study 3 – The Bowes Museum**

The Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, County Durham tells the story of John and Joséphine Bowes who built it in the late 19th century. The archive has a significant role in informing exhibition and education programmes, enabling local, national and international research and providing opportunities for skills development and training.

The museum opened a reading room in recent years, providing greater public access to the library and archive. In addition to onsite research it is also possible to access and cross-search the catalogues of the museum's collections of objects, books and archives through the museum's website. A Memorandum of Understanding with Durham University has enabled even greater research and use of the collections.

A professional archivist guides the collection and ensures it is managed to archival standards, supported by a strong body of in-house trained volunteers. A grant from the National Cataloguing Grants Programme for Archives has enabled them to catalogue most of the collection to item level.

The Museum successfully secured Archive Service Accreditation and award is seen as hugely important throughout the museum. It has helped to raise awareness of the collection and build credibility both internally and externally among Trustees and stakeholders.

### **Case study 4 – The Wiltshire Museum**

The Wiltshire Museum is governed by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS), and was formed in 1853 to establish a Museum and Library promoting the study of objects connected with Wiltshire.

The 'letter book' contains 246 letters sent to William Cunnington between 1799 and 1810. Written to him by fellow antiquarians they discuss archaeological discoveries as they began exploring some of Wiltshire's prehistoric sites, including from the World Heritage Sites of Avebury and Stonehenge. The letters contain information about many of the objects in the Museum's Prehistoric Wiltshire Galleries and are much used by researchers. For years the book has had restricted access due to conservation concerns.

In 2019 the museum received a grant from the AIM Pilgrim Trust Conservation Scheme to conserve and digitise the letters and house them in bespoke archival ring binders.

Lancefield Conservation cleaned, repaired and digitised the letters before making three clam shell ring binders to store the letter collection. During the conservation work additional information and some correspondent names and addresses were revealed.

The outcome of the conservation work to the letters is amazing. They look clean, the curled edges have gone and the script is much clearer to read. The clam shell ring binders are beautifully made and will safeguard the letters for future generations to enjoy.