

# Archives and Sustainability: Developing a Successful Partnership Between Archives and HLF

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# Some common misconceptions about archives

- They are old.
- They are dusty.
- They are written on paper and parchment.
- They are difficult to read and interpret.
- They are of interest only to academics and family historians.

# What are archives?

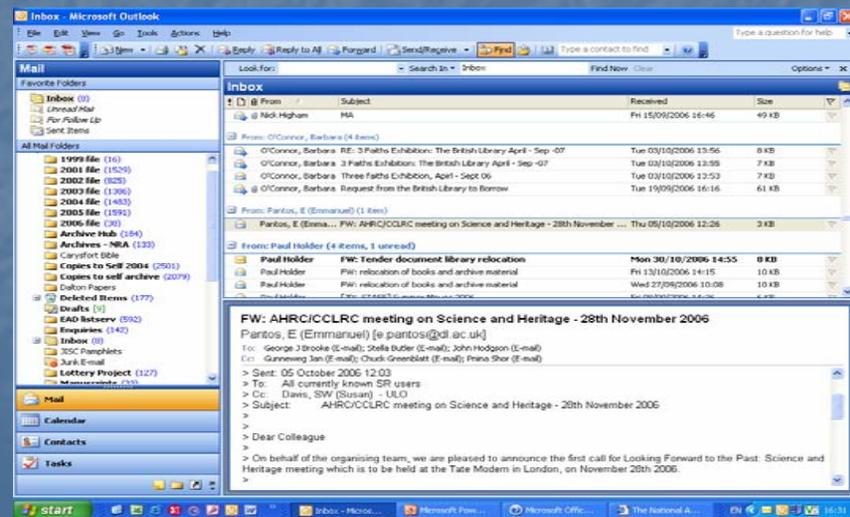
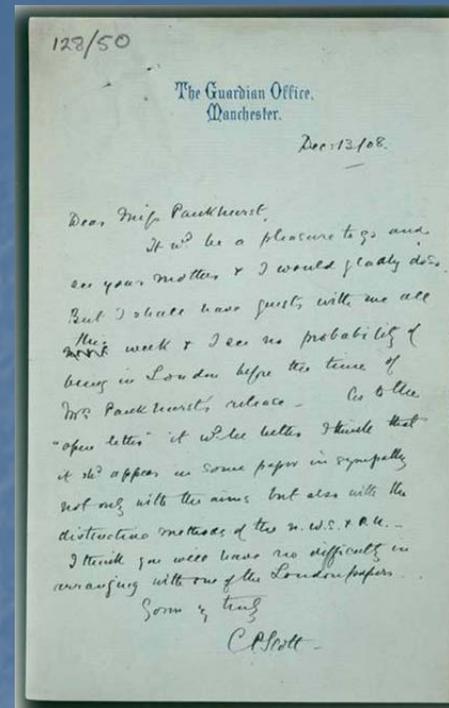
*'Archives are documents in any medium that have been created by an individual, family, business or organisation during its existence and have been chosen to be kept permanently because they are considered to be of continuing value. These documents are unique and irreplaceable.'*

The National Archives

# So what's special about archives?

- They are *immediate* – they provide direct evidence of events, attitudes, policies, issues, people's lives.
- They are *unique* – although individual documents can now be copied, archives as a whole are unique and irreplaceable.
- They are *complex* – whether in paper or electronic formats, archives are usually highly structured, and items derive significance from their context.

# Examples of archives



# Archives in England's Northwest

- 40 major public, academic, special and business archives.
- 100 other institutions holding archives.
- Over 10,000 cubic metres of material.
- Over 175,000 visits to archives per annum.
- Sector needs to produce hard evidence of its full contribution to the regional economy and society.

# What do archivists do?

- Archivists have a tremendous responsibility – they are the keepers of our collective memory.
- They select material for permanent preservation.
- They appraise (dispose of) material that isn't worth keeping.
- They make archives accessible, primarily through cataloguing, providing searchroom access and enquiry services, but also through digitization, exhibitions, tours, talks, education programmes.
- They ensure that material is preserved, for ever.
- They promote archives and archive services.

# Breaking the mould



# Priorities for North West archives

(in no particular order)

- Undertaking research and advocacy – both internal and external.
- Strengthening links with other domains in order to gain from best practice and to leverage funding, e.g. the Museums Hub.
- Improving the building stock.
- Improving access to collections, via cataloguing, promotion and outreach (uncatalogued collections are inaccessible).
- Strengthening community involvement.

# Priority 1: Research and advocacy

- There is insufficient evidence of the contribution archives make to the regional economy and society. We need both hard and soft measures.
- Lots of general goodwill towards archives (e.g. success of *Who do you think you are?*), but this rarely translates into funding.
- Individual repositories must promote themselves within their parent organizations: unless the Chief Exec., Leader or VC is supportive, why should HLF be?
- Archive sector lacks strong, effective advocates, especially at the national level.

## Priority 2: Links with other domains

- Archivists tend to be fiercely independent, jealously defending the interests of our sector against the much larger library and museum domains.
- We have a lot to learn from them, while not abandoning professional principles, or ignoring the special nature of archives.
- Areas for fruitful collaboration: education and outreach, community involvement, advocacy.
- Example: Walter Crane Archive Project – John Rylands Library and Whitworth Art Gallery.

## Priority 3: Improving building stock

- Archives are a capital intensive business: we have a large and growing stock which must be housed in appropriate conditions.
- Unlike libraries and museums, archives have their own British Standard (BS5454:2000), and a system of inspection by The National Archives.
- Many archive buildings are simply inadequate (less than 50% of NW archives meet BS5454).
- Collection development is compromised – we simply haven't the space to take in new archives.

## Priority 4: Improving access

- Cataloguing was traditionally seen as the core activity of the archivist. It *is* a key to access – uncatalogued collections are inaccessible.
- Archivists understand that cataloguing is not enough – we must go further and promote our collections and educate users about archives.
- Archivists must listen to and involve our users (and non-users) in addressing access needs, e.g. which collections to prioritize, how to make them accessible.

# Priority 5: Community involvement

- Archives have always worked with local communities: volunteer programmes, tours, outside talks, advisory boards, etc.
- We need to celebrate what we have already achieved, and go further – closer engagement.
- Community archives - a priority, e.g. Archives Taskforce report, but also a challenge.
- We need to address under-representation of BME groups among our current users, looking at examples of good practice.

# Examples of community involvement

- *Burton Street Community History Project*, Sheffield: <http://www.burtonstreethistory.org.uk/>.
- *This is Our History*, West Yorkshire Archive Service: <http://www.archives.wyjs.org.uk/>
- *More Than Meets The Eye*, Greater Manchester County Record Office: <http://www.gmcro.co.uk>

# Other issues facing archives

- *Digitization* – there are major initiatives, esp. in the HE sector, but it is very expensive.
- *Born digital archives* – technological and methodological challenges of capturing and preserving e-records.
- *Acquisitions* – archivists are often unwilling or unable to purchase material, but in some areas this is key to development: literary archives, medieval manuscripts.
- *Conservation* – funding for conservation has been cut back in recent years. If we fail to meet the preservation needs of our collections, present and future generations' use and enjoyment of archives will be curtailed.

# Some obstacles to successful HLF applications from the archive sector

- Lack of advocacy and effective champions in the sector.
- Lack of capacity – many archives are small and struggle to put together good applications.
- Lack of fundraising skills generally.
- Perception that it is very difficult to win funding and support from HLF.
- Archivists are in general highly principled and committed. This can lead to a reluctance to compromise or to tailor projects to HLF's goals.
- Half a cake is better than none.

# Ask not what HLF can do for you...

- Rather than asking what HLF can do for archives, it would be more productive for us to consider how the archive sector can help HLF to achieve its three main goals:
  - Achieving greater involvement,
  - Supporting conservation,
  - Enhancing access and learning.
- We can then tailor our projects to these goals.

# Matching HLF's goals to our needs

## HLF's goals

- Achieving greater involvement.
- Enhancing access and learning.
- Supporting conservation.

## Sector's needs

- Community involvement, community archives, volunteer programmes.
- Improving access, e.g. cataloguing, digitization, education programme.
- Improving building stock, conservation.
- Acquisitions.

# What we can do for ourselves

- Improve our advocacy skills, and develop champions of the sector.
- Build partnerships with other organizations, locally, regionally and nationally, including other funders.
- Strengthen our links with the other domains, learn from them and take advantage of their networks and funding.
- Strengthen our links with local communities, especially hard-to-reach groups.
- Learn from one another, collaborate in developing bids, and shout about our successes.

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