

## **ARCHIVING THE ARTS: SUPPORTING THE ARTS, SUPPORTING ARCHIVES**

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### **Prologue**

Archives record the history of art and artistic practice. Archives inspire art and creative expression. Archives help drive the cultural and creative industries.

The National Archives' *Archiving the Arts* programme supports the strategic development and sustainability of archival collections of the arts across the UK and across all disciplines - visual art, literature, music, dance, theatre, combined arts, live art.

The work began in Autumn 2012 with exploratory surveys of collecting organisations, strategic and funding bodies, and arts practitioners to test assumptions and support planning. Respondents shared information on the coverage and scope of collections; types and format of material; existing projects and partnerships; skills and funding gaps; commercial and non-commercial use of collections; deposit arrangements, rights and ownership; sources of advice and guidance; and key challenges.

### **Backstory**

*Archiving the Arts* is a practical experiment in strategic collection development: an example of the application of *documentation strategy* based on a particular theme. But it is not the first time that The National Archives has embarked on such an initiative.

In 2008 we began *The Record*, a programme for ensuring a documentary legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, and Cultural Olympiad. Strategic collecting based on an event, *The Record* established a methodology for working with partners from across diverse sectors to agree a collaborative approach to recording the planning, delivery and impact of the Games. The work continues today with the ongoing development of a website linking The National Archives' digitised records and the official archive of the London Organising Committee (LOCOG) with other Olympic and Paralympic-related collections.

Now we are adopting a similar approach for the arts: creating an active network of stakeholders including artists, arts organisations, collectors, researchers, funders and anyone with an interest in *archiving the arts* to educate and inspire future generations.

After only the first few months of the two-year project, it became clear how much was *already* going on within the archives and broader cultural and cultural heritage sectors. The challenge has been to position The National Archives - with our official responsibility for archives in England and wider mandate to represent private owners and collectors - as facilitator, creating the right environment for a self-sustaining network of practitioners and encouraging sector-led activity when the formal project finishes at the end of March 2015.

Because just like *The Record* - and other initiatives to support religious and business archives - *Archiving the Arts* is helping The National Archives realise the wider ambitions of its National Collections Strategy.

Though the mechanisms for delivering the Strategy have changed since it was formally published in 2009, its core principles continue to define The National Archives' approach to sustained strategic collection development right across the UK. Described under separate headings, each principle has a clearly stated objective:

<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	To record the lives, interests, views and issues of all individuals and communities - including marginalised and minority groups - to ensure a balanced representation of all sectors of society.
<i>Community participation</i>	To support and encourage voluntary community participation in managing and promoting collections to a wider audience and in demonstrating their value for enhancing citizenship, identity and social cohesion.
<i>Comprehensiveness</i>	To document across all media and on all formats, key events, activities, decisions and policies that have had an effect on people's lives.
<i>Collaboration</i>	To facilitate partnerships and overcome conflicting approaches to collection acquisition, management, preservation and access and to avoid competition, overlap and duplication where appropriate.
<i>Access</i>	To facilitate public access to digital and other information, or to provide clear explanation as to why, when and how access might be limited.
<i>Information rights</i>	To acknowledge and communicate the legitimate information rights of creators, owners, custodians and users.

*Preservation* To observe best practice, seek guidance and implement standards in preservation for digital and physical media across all formats.

These principles have helped shape *Archiving the Arts* into a programme for supporting the sustainability of arts collections for education and learning, for research and reuse, and to inspire future creativity.

### **Opening scene**

In the initial desk research we examined the thinking and practice of all those involved in the arts archiving life-cycle: artistic practitioners and organisations who create records and archives; collecting institutions who manage and care for them; and strategic and funding bodies who affect and influence their development. A review of their activities, policies and procedures helped us to identify strengths and weaknesses in collections and collection development; and to establish priorities for the programme. This was then supplemented with customised online surveys in which we:

- asked arts practitioners about:
  - types of records and whether they were mainly analogue or digital;
  - plans for long-term deposit, contact with archives and any agreements to transfer records;
  - policies for keeping records within the organisation and the need for advice on their safe-keeping.
- and we asked collectors about:
  - scope and coverage, collecting and collections development;
  - projects and initiatives for strategic collecting and partnerships;
  - funding sources and the sustainability of existing, current and future collections;
  - policies, methods, toolkits, standards or other guidance used to support collections management.
- and we asked strategic and funding bodies about:
  - perceived skills and funding gaps, issues, challenges and successes;
  - drivers for collecting and reuse of archival material, including commercial and non-commercial, creative, research, education and learning;
  - collections sustainability, coverage and comprehensiveness;
  - local initiatives and effective strategic partnerships;
  - models for collaborative collecting;
  - policies, advice and guidance for funding and strategic programmes.

Several key challenges surfaced from the desk research and survey findings:

- the need to balance public access and creators' rights within the context of changing national and international intellectual property frameworks;
- how to record the experiences of both artist and audience;
- building less traditionally archival, mixed collections of three-dimensional objects, ephemera, audio-visual and written materials;
- the technical demands of managing multimedia formats with particular capture, storage and preservation requirements;
- and exploring new and artistic ways of engaging with collections.

### **Big themes**

These challenges have been encapsulated in our 'big themes', which might not be peculiar to *Archiving the Arts* but which recognise that art and artistic expression is personal, crafted and unique, and that all archive activities need to be sensitive to the artist's creative process and professional reputation. So each of the following 'big themes' focuses on partnership and finding collaborative ways for the programme to support shared goals:

#### *Funding*

To identify specific constraints for archives, artists and arts organisations, and advise on funding sources.

To influence funding bodies to develop targeted funding streams and programmes to support archiving the arts and artistic reuse of collections.

#### *Access, use and outreach*

To encourage creative reuse of archive collections, establish effective partnerships, inspire new works, and necessitate further collecting.

To ensure that the value of arts archives is recognised by the people who create and care for them, and by research communities, commercial companies and the wider public.

#### *Collections development and management*

To ensure that arts collections are both cared for and accessible.

To gather knowledge of collections and provide a framework for strategic collection development.

To facilitate skills- and knowledge-sharing between the arts and archive sectors, build professional respect and nurture best practice.

To improve collections information and facilitate online resource discovery.

*Diversity and inclusion*

To encourage the development of diverse collections and appropriate, expert listing of those collections.

To adopt the *Revisiting Collections* methodology to expose diverse content currently 'hidden' in collections.

To welcome new audiences through collaboration and wider engagement.

*Intellectual property and copyright*

To help archivists, arts organisations, artists and audiences to understand and respond appropriately to the changing demands of intellectual property and copyright legislation.

To identify and share resources which inform appropriate use and reuse of arts collections.

*Digital preservation*

To encourage sustainable plans for managing, preserving and sharing digital collections.

To promote resources which increase understanding and equip artists, arts organisations and archives with the skills and knowledge to confidently address the challenges of digital preservation.

*Academic research*

To broker partnerships by facilitating conversations and initiating collaborative working.

To create an environment for academic research in areas of benefit to the arts and archive sectors.

To support university archives building unique and distinctive arts collections.

Echoing the principles of the National Collections Strategy, the 'big themes' are all bound up in professional and cultural exchange, defining and adopting a shared language between

archivists and artists. For example, there are many questions about *how* artists want to see themselves and their work captured and represented in archives:

- What should be recorded of a live performance, a concert or play, or an art installation?
- Can a recording ever be true to the original artistic intent?
- Who is responsible for capturing the audience response and how: through written feedback, oral histories or via social media?
- How do you document and legitimately share artistic practice, theory and process?
- Should an artist's personal papers be part of their public legacy, and who decides?

*Archiving the Arts* is designed to facilitate debate, to encourage artists and archivists to find their own answers to these and other questions; and so inform best practice in building collections which respect the needs of creators and curators, and are there for users to discover and enjoy.

### **The plot thickens**

At The National Archives we manage one of the most comprehensive and extensive online information resources. Our *Discovery* platform offers users entry to The National Archives' own collections and to collections from across the UK's wider archive sector: a single search to surface written, spoken and visual records from central and local government, from public and private collecting institutions, from businesses and charities, arts and religious organisations, from anywhere with something to be discovered, shared and rediscovered.

But it is easy to do that with digital - or digitised - collections and collections information. *Archiving the Arts* is collections neutral but digital underpins all of its 'big themes' and a focus on *Digital preservation* emphasises the need to think a bit differently about capturing, describing, providing access to and preserving digital records.

*Archiving the Arts* has been identifying collections suitable for digitisation: because of demonstrable or perceived research and reuse value; because of relevance to other collections and potential links to networks of national, European or international resources; because digitisation will demonstrate the ambitions of the archive service to engage in new ways of sharing their collections online with wider and more diverse audiences.

### **What do you think of it so far?**

The project team has been working at all levels:

- nationally by engaging with experts from the Wellcome Library, the British Film Institute (BFI), the National Media Museum (NMM), the British Library (BL) and representatives from higher education on its Advisory Board;
- regionally with support from The National Archives' own team of Engagement Managers and our key stakeholders, Arts Council England (ACE) and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF);
- and locally, supporting individual artists and arts organisations from all disciplines and practices, archivists and collecting institutions, translating information about current activity into advice and guidance to share more widely.

The emphasis is on 'showing and telling', and tangible outcomes. We learned quickly that the most effective way to make things happen was to bring people together, so our regional workshops are occasions to listen to speakers from funding bodies and funded projects, and to share real life challenges and experiences. They are networking events with time just to talk, explore ideas and start conversations to be continued without The National Archives' further facilitation; and over one hundred individual organisations have so far taken part.

Tackling subject areas general to the management of archives, the workshops are pitched appropriately to the needs of an audience who may have no previous experience of collections management, who don't know where to start with sorting, listing and storing potentially valuable archive materials, and have never previously grappled with the perhaps daunting challenge of digital preservation. Each session builds on the success of the one before: doing more of what works - networking time, case studies, practical tips and sources of information; and less of what doesn't - Powerpoint presentations too long and too detailed to be easily digested and immediately useful.

From the general workshops, we are moving on to more specific single strand events focused on particular topics and delivered in partnership with experts in the field. We are working with the Digital Preservation Coalition (DPC) on introductory training for the arts sector to demonstrate to artists - and archivists - the usefulness of developing a digital asset management and preservation strategy at the *point-of-creation*, or as early in the creative process and records lifecycle as possible.

We also offer one-to-one support and respond to cries for help, following The National Archives' accepted pattern of conducting advisory visits to review collections *in situ* and provide customised advice. Some of those in need have come to a workshop; others are

referred by colleagues or simply contact us through our website. In certain cases, visits lead to funding bids for collections development, preservation or access where we might guide people - often partnerships - through the application process or draft letters of support.

We have surveyed collections at universities, record companies, theatres, concert halls and galleries, and gathered information on more than one hundred arts archives to be recorded and made searchable via *Discovery*, The National Archives' online gateway to its own collections and collections held elsewhere. Surveys help us to identify gaps in collecting and prioritise areas to target, encouraging archives to establish and build collections where research sources are limited.

We have advised over fifty arts organisations, professional bodies and individual artists on collections care, access and management, and suggested depositing those collections with established archive services where appropriate; and we have reached 200 more through our own and other events or conferences including disability and community-based arts groups.

The initiative is being delivered from an archives' perspective but the approach is broad and inclusive, and the programme team has established relationships with expert bodies to support key strands of activity.

For the arts, intellectual property rights are central to the development, management and use of archive collections. Perhaps more than for creators of other types of records, for an artist, their work is their livelihood so managing rights means financial security and freedom to continue to practise. Archives are interested in recording or displaying finished pieces - pictures and performances - and in their context too, in the evidence of the artistic journey. But in building collections, archivists need to be sensitive to rights and balance the immediate needs of artists with the potential future use of collected work.

The Design and Artists Copyright Society (DACS) has helped us to understand the commercial landscape and artists' contribution to the creative economy by facilitating our direct access to individual artists, to talk to them about what *they* see as the rights challenges for managing their own 'history in the making', for depositing works, associated materials or private papers with publicly-accessible archives.

Similarly, our academic partner, CREATE - a UK-wide copyright research programme - is represented on our external Advisory Board and informs our approach to developing advice

and guidance based on the outcomes from practical research studies with artists and archives.

On the same 'big theme', we are planning a copyright conference with ARLIS/UK & Ireland: the Art Libraries Society, and their Committee for Art & Design Archives (CADA). The conference will tackle issues specific to those in the visual arts sector who are providing library and information services, documenting sources, and managing collections held outside of established archives or archive services.

Beyond the conferences and networking events, *Archiving the Arts* has supplemented face-to-face activity with online resources: case studies in collections and audience development, education and partnerships; advice and guidance on how to identify what to keep, how to store and label things, provide access, encourage reuse and preserve paper and digital records. We have established an online space within *The National Archives Community* for artists and archivists to talk to one another, identify potential partners, generate ideas for projects, and find solutions to shared challenges. It's where we report progress, advertise events and encourage participation in new activities: for example, the opportunity to contribute to a curated web archive collection which fully documents the breadth and scope of the online UK arts scene.

Using new and existing networks for archivists and for artists - including the Association of Performing Arts Collections (APAC) and Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM) - is a way of extending the reach of *Archiving the Arts*, of increasing its impact and improving our chances of future sustainability for arts collections and collecting.

### **Smash hits**

There is already evidence of that impact with plenty to celebrate at a local level: stories of successful creative partnerships exploring and exposing collections through artistic interpretation.

#### So should an artist help to redesign an archive building?

At Derbyshire Record Office, the whole community was engaged in the design of a new space, creative and inspiring for staff and users, and sensitive to the needs of managing a busy archive. The artist-in-residence worked with the architects, engineers, surveyors,

archivists and conservators, and produced new artworks, wallpaper and fabrics influenced by the collections, and recreations of items from the collections themselves to decorate the walls and windows. The programme successfully raised the profile of the service across the county, and continues to attract positive feedback from an increasingly diverse audience.

#### And do family records make good soft furnishings?

The Threads of Time project was a creative way of discovering the archive at Hertfordshire Archives & Local Studies (HALS). Textile enthusiasts used a specific family collection as inspiration for individual artworks exhibited at the centre. Stories of a Tudor sea adventurer, civil war general, a woman accused of witchcraft and a weatherman were fashioned into quilts and caps, fabric books, pots and wall hangings.

#### How many artists fit into a *Story Box*?

At the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, forty writers and visual artists explored the archives as sources of creative inspiration, both the information they revealed and the collections as physical objects. Three hundred more took part via social media and a community of 'artists in the archive' has been established.

#### And have you ever seen an archive on the stage?

Children and young adults involved in Chichester Festival Theatre's *Pass it on* project performed short pieces inspired by material gathered and listed by volunteers - trained by the West Sussex Record Office - for the growing Chichester Festival Theatre Archive.

#### So would you find a strong room inspiring?

One Bristol-based photographer certainly did and spent a year visiting and photographing 'behind-the-scenes' in Bristol Record Office's strong rooms. His exhibition of images of 'found still-life' aimed to capture the emotions evoked in him by the serenity, accidental beauty and hundreds of years of personal touches found in the archives.

#### And can you enjoy archives and a good read on the move?

Bristol Record Office provided further stimulus for an experimental collaborative project with a public art agency. The result is the urban soundwork *Missorts*, a mobile application of ten short stories triggered by location, set to specially-commissioned musical works, and inspired by the archive. Accompanied too by a novella, the project is a multimedia celebration of the city's literary heritage.

### **The sequel**

Over the next six months - the programme is funded 'til the end of March 2015 - work will focus on ensuring its legacy: collections information shared, digitisation underway, funding sources clearly signposted, access and outreach projects established, advice and guidance published, and *Archiving the Arts* business-as-usual for all.

Developed in partnership with the arts and archive sectors, *Archiving the Arts* is an example of *co-creation*, of The National Archives' working collectively within the community it both represents and serves, and encouraging stakeholders to do what they can most usefully do:

- archive networking groups' and professional bodies' sharing knowledge, learning, and pragmatic advice on delivering projects;
- artists' and artistic organisations' thinking creatively and exploring the potential of archive collections, celebrating the value of their own work and the work of artists before them;
- and The National Archives' taking the lead, providing the bigger picture, the context, and leveraging support from strategic partners across the wider cultural heritage sector.

### **Encore! Encore!**

Just as *The Record* of London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad established the methodology for *Archiving the Arts*, so *Archiving the Arts* will inform future priorities. The National Archives is currently planning similar initiatives for science and technology, and the third sector, topical at a time when the volume of research data is increasing immeasurably, and when pressure on limited public resources means charities and voluntary organisations are stepping up to fill a gap.

So the legacy of *Archiving the Arts* is more than arts collections - it is the continuing delivery of our objective: to support strategic collection development, now and for the future.

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