

Research Guide: Community Archives

What are Community Archives?

Community archives are collections – real or virtual – through which communities seek to preserve their heritage or identity. They may include photographs, documents, manuscript material, audio-visual material and more collected by groups within communities, kept in communities and, usually, with the copyright owned by people in those communities. The reasons for creating a community archive collection may be varied, from wanting to celebrate an anniversary in a town or village, to the desire to reflect the activities of a local business or family. Community archives are those held out in communities, as opposed to archives deposited with local authority or specialist record offices. However, at some point in their lifecycle, some community archive collections are offered to record offices for permanent preservation.

Information and support provided by this guide

This guide was originally compiled by the County Record Offices of Cheshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire County Councils, for anyone who was thinking about (or already involved in) building a community archive collection. The Record Offices that worked together to create this guide are keen to provide this support to ensure the long-term preservation of and access to the nation's history in documentary form. Guidance is provided on the following:

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This guide is not exhaustive. There is much more to learn about the collection, care and promotion of archives. If you would like any further advice, please contact the Record Office.

Collecting Archives

What archives do we collect?

Community heritage groups can play a vital role in safeguarding the history of their local area. Once your group becomes established and known within the local area, people are often interested in loaning or giving some of their family memorabilia so that others can learn from and enjoy it too.

You may find it helpful to write a list of the sorts of records you are interested in collecting, and why. You can show this to people interested in your project as it may jog their memory of things they have at home that may be useful for the project. The sorts of records that come to light typically include photographs, press cuttings, diaries and maps. Occasionally, community groups are surprised to be offered more official records such as title deeds or even school logbooks.

Some official records must be transferred to the local record office by law. The Record Office will be able to advise on this, and may already have information on related records. Alternatively, your collection can be deposited to the Record Office for safekeeping.

Why is it important to record who gave us what?

It is a very good idea to record any information you can about the background of the records you have been offered. Information about who created them in the first place, and whose hands they have passed through over time can make it much easier to understand their significance and meaning.

We recommend that you record the following details when someone offers you material, whether it be on a temporary or permanent basis.

- The name, address and signature of the person handing the records over to you
- The name and address of the owner of the material, if different from above
- The date that you took the records in
- A brief description of the records, including dates
- A note as to where you have placed the records for safekeeping
- Is the person giving the records outright, or loaning them to you? If the latter, make a note of any agreement to return the documents including any specified deadlines for return
- If any money changes hands, make a note of the purchase price
- Is the person handing them over happy for you to copy or publish the records, either in an article or on the worldwide web? Talk to them about what you hope to do with the records, and make a note of any agreements or discussions
- Make a note of any background information the person has about the origin of the records. Did a family member or friend acquire them as part of their job or a particular responsibility that they held in the community, for instance?

It is a good idea to keep a proper register to record all of this information. Computerising the information is fine as long as the data is regularly backed-up and all involved know how to use the system or database that you set up. Alternatively, handwritten records are just as good, and possibly more reliable! Designing a form with columns for all of the information you need to know can act as a useful checklist.

Caring for Archives

Why do we need to care for archives?

Archive material may well be unique and therefore every care should be taken to protect it. Any archive material, whether in paper, photographic, film or electronic format is vulnerable to damage or eventual decay if it is not kept in appropriate conditions or if people take the wrong preservation actions. By following these simple guidelines, you can help to ensure a long life for your community archive.

You may find that you have to deal with a number of diverse materials and formats, for example:

- transcripts/ typescripts of oral histories and testimonies
- letters
- photographs & albums
- engravings
- billheads
- pamphlets
- newspapers, cuttings, posters and other ephemera
- scrapbooks
- CD ROMs
- Videos / films

Damage

Most damage to archive material is caused by a combination of factors; these may include; damp, mould, insects, unsuitable packaging and frequent or careless handling. All materials are damaged by light, particularly ultra violet light. Low-grade papers such as newspapers and posters degrade quickly and become very brittle and discoloured, particularly if exposed to heat and light. Photographs can be on a support of glass, plastic, paper or metal, which all require special care. Their emulsions are very absorbent and delicate and must not be touched.

How should we store archives?

Archives need to be stored in appropriate conditions to ensure their longevity. For the safe storage of archives a constant temperature and humidity within the range of 13 -18° C and 50-60% Relative Humidity (RH) is recommended. (RH is a measure of how damp or dry the air is)

In practical terms this means finding a cool dry place. Avoid storage in hot or damp conditions. Cellars are prone to high humidity and damp and roof spaces will often be subject to extreme fluctuation, being cold and damp in the winter and hot and dry in the summer. The goal is to maintain a stable and consistent environment and to avoid extremes.

All items should be kept out of direct sunlight. If items must be displayed then ultra violet filters will help to reduce damage; these can be fitted to windows and lights. Curtains and blinds can also help to reduce exposure.

Archival storage materials

Archival storage materials provide support for fragile items and protection against light, dust, careless handling and damage during transport.

If possible, all material in contact with an original item should be of archival quality and acid-free. Terms used to describe these materials are often described as "archival quality", "conservation quality" or "acid free". It is important to remember that products will not be of archival quality unless specifically stated.

A list of suggested packaging materials can be found at the end of this section.

Do's and Don'ts

Don't:

1. Don't use self-adhesive photograph albums. Traditional photograph corners or polyester pocket albums are recommended.
2. Don't use newspaper to wrap documents or to line shelves and boxes as it can be highly acidic
3. Don't use ordinary envelopes, files, folders, tissue paper, or corrugated card. These are often of poor and unknown quality.
4. Don't use wooden boxes. The oils and adhesives in these can be acidic.
5. Don't use photographic paper or print boxes, cardboard boxes, shoe boxes etc.
6. Don't use polythene or plastic bags, PVC. plastic envelopes and files. These all contain plasticizers and chlorine which release harmful chemicals as they degrade. (See 6 under Dos below)
7. Don't use frames that have poor quality mount board or are backed with wood.
8. Never under any circumstances be tempted to use pressure sensitive tapes "sellotape", "scotch tape" etc. as the adhesive used will change chemically and physically and may become impossible to remove at a later date.

Do:

1. Do keep newspaper cuttings separate from all other material. Ideally they should be stored in separate acid free or MicroChamber envelopes.
2. Always remove any rusty paper clips or staples from papers.
3. Do store papers and photos flat, this will help prevent distortion.
4. Do consider rolling large items around the outside of an archival quality tube.
5. Do store items individually in acid free envelopes or folders.
6. Do use plastic sleeves made from archival grade polyester. Polyester is ideal for single unfolded sheets as the item can be viewed without removal from the protective sleeve (see 6 under Don't above)
7. Do store books in acid free boxes or wrap them in acid free dust jackets to prevent further damage.
8. Do use acid free tissue paper/Silversafe® paper to interleave between pages of volumes with colour plates to prevent off-setting or blocking.
9. Do protect prints or drawings in their frames by placing a sheet of u v filter material over the face of the glass (not the drawing). Filter sleeves can also be placed over lamps/lights used to illuminate objects.
10. Do keep prints, drawings and water colours in individual acid free folders, and store them flat in a box.

Can all archives be stored the same way?

Archives have different storage needs depending on their medium. This guidance provides tips on storage of some typical media.

Photographs

Some tips on basic preservation

1. Gloves should always be worn when handling photographs. Grease and acids from our hands can be absorbed into the emulsion, which is impossible to remove and will cause tarnishing.

2. Pencil should be used for identifying your photographs. Pencil is graphite, which is chemically stable and will not alter over time, ball point pen, fibre tip and other inks can fade or change chemically.

3. Photographs may be cleaned by the use of a very soft artist's brush or, preferably a puffer similar to those used to clean computer equipment. This will remove loose dirt or dust, but care must be taken not to use anything stiffer as it may scratch the surface of the emulsion.

4. The best possible preservation care for any photograph is to take a good quality copy printed onto archival quality paper. The original should then be packaged and stored in Silversafe paper under ideal conditions.

Volumes

Good handling and storage are the best methods we can use to prevent damage. Books are designed as mechanical objects, and as such they all have the potential to break down with wear and tear.

1. Never force open the cover of a volume if there is any resistance. Many books may not open beyond 90 degrees if the structure is particularly stiff.

2. Never extract a volume from the shelf by pulling on the top of the spine, grasp the book either side of the spine and pull gently. It may be necessary to push-in the volumes on either side to make this possible.

3. Turn pages with care, particularly the pages of scrapbooks which have items pasted to them. This will help to avoid tearing.

4. If pages are falling out of a book due to the binding having broken down, try to keep them in their original order.

5. Never use any type of pressure sensitive tape to repair tears.

6. Large volumes are best stored flat to prevent any strain on the binding. Books can also be stored in archival boxes for protection

7. Loose or detached boards can be held in place by wrapping the volume with a clean dry linen wrap.

8. Silversafe / MicroChamber/ acid free paper can be used for interleaving coloured or heavily printed pages to prevent off-setting.

Film, Video and CD Rom

- Video is magnetic tape and so needs to be stored well away from plant, machinery or generators. The environment needs to be at a constant average level of 16-18C and 50% relative humidity. Video tapes need to be rewound every three months.

- For guidance about the preservation of tape film, we advise you to contact your nearest film archive.

- The long term life of CD ROM is not yet proven so the best advice is to regularly update or migrate your master copies.

If in doubt about any storage or preservation issues relating to your community archive, then please contact the Archive Service for advice

Materials and Suppliers

- **Silversafe paper:** storage and interleaving of photographs
- **Acid free paper:** storage, making of folders, four flap enclosures
- **Acid free board (folding box board or museum board):** support of fragile material, box making
- **MicroChamber products:** box making, storage, box /shelf lining
- **Polyester film : (Melinex, Mylar):** pocket making, general protection
- **Archival quality Manilla:** folders/four flap enclosures
- **Archival Kraft (brand name) paper:** wrapping and packaging

Describing and Indexing Archives

Why do we need to describe and index archives?

In order for anyone to access a collection, they need to know what it is and what it contains. The bigger a collection becomes, the more information will be needed for the potential user to find what they want. Describing and indexing can provide that information.

Describing

The way to describe a collection depends on the nature of archives collected: photos, engravings, drawings, letters, diaries, newspapers, news cuttings, magazines, pamphlets, bill-heads etc, either in original form or digitised.

The nature and level of describing will also depend on the intended audience: is it for members of a group, local community, schools, or for anyone using the internet? The language required may be different in each case.

The basic rule is that the wider the audience the more information you need to provide to enable users to make use of it: e.g. the Primary School is sufficient within the local community, Ambridge Primary School may be enough in the same county, but for an internet audience it would be helpful to describe it as Ambridge Primary School, Borsetshire, UK

There are two main elements to description:

The object itself: diary of John Smith, 1960; letter from Ann Bryant to her mother Mary Jones, 6 March 1943, photograph of the staff of Eldridge's drapers shop, 1898

Contextual information about the object which makes it easier to understand its significance. For example:

John Smith (1912-1992) was born in Ambridge and worked for most of his life in Shires Brewery, Borchester; he was a keen cyclist and bird-watcher.

Ann Bryant was born in Sutton, the daughter of Mary and James Jones. She married Walter Bryant in 1937; during the war she worked as an ambulance driver in Wapping.

Eldridge's drapery business was opened in 1865 by George Eldridge in West Street, Easton, Surrey. In 1879 the business moved to larger premises in the High Street. It closed in 1967.

Both elements are key to a proper understanding of the value and potential relevance of the object.

Basic questions to answer in a description are the obvious ones of who, what, where, when and why. The last question is particularly relevant if you decide to publish an extract or a passage from a larger document: you should explain why you have chosen it and why it is significant.

Indexing:

Indexing is a useful way of helping users to find what they want. Persons and places are relatively straightforward, although if the people and places are not nationally or internationally famous, you will need to add a bit more information beyond the simple name: for example, "Smith, John" will not be very helpful, but if you can expand it to "Smith, John (1893-1958), of Batley" it will be more helpful.

Subject indexing is very much more complicated. It can be done at two levels: the first is essentially format: letter, photograph, diary etc. The second level is the content: a photograph of a townscape could include shops, a mediaeval church, advertisements, a bicycle, a tram, a uniformed policeman, the library etc. The list is potentially endless, and it is obviously unrealistic to expect to index every possible subject.

For subject indexing it is best to use an agreed thesaurus of terms, rather than making one up as you go along, particularly if you have a number of people working on the same project. The most widely-used in the archive sector is UKAT which is available online (<http://www.ukat.org.uk/>)

Putting on exhibitions and providing access

Putting on exhibitions and providing access to the archives

Exhibitions can be a great way of publicising your project to the wider community. Archival records and documents can sometimes work well in exhibitions and displays, but it is important to plan carefully before including them to make sure they look good and don't suffer irreparable damage.

Planning

The key to a good display or exhibition is to fix upon a theme and stick to it. It can be muddling for others if they cannot follow a particular train of thought. Sit down with a blank piece of paper and decide

- What the exhibition is for (Raising awareness of your project? Attracting more volunteers?)
- Who it is aimed at (School groups? Local residents?)
- What your main theme is (History of your community? The life story of a local worthy?)
- What you hope people will learn from your exhibition, or what you hope they will do as a result of seeing it (Take pride in their local community? Share their memories of x or y?)

Once you have started to compile answers to these questions, you should find it easier to decide what sorts of material you want to include, what level of detail to aim for, and the style of the exhibition (e.g. formal or informal, light-hearted or scholarly).

Choosing a venue

We are not always in a position to choose a perfect venue, but if you are considering displaying any of your original documents or records, there are a number of factors to bear in mind. Putting on an exhibition that includes original records is a balancing act, with the needs of the audience on the one hand, and the safety and security of the records on the other. These are all factors to take into consideration:

Temperature, relative humidity and light levels

Extremes of temperature are not good for original archives, and can cause lasting damage. A venue with a constant steady temperature is preferable to one which fluctuates. Avoid putting showcases or tables right next to radiators or lights. An ideal temperature range to aim for is 18-21oC, which should feel comfortable for visitors, and tolerable for paper and parchment. Relative humidity (RH) is the amount of moisture in the air and, again, it is good to avoid extremes or fluctuations. Parchment is particularly badly affected by dry environments. Aim for an RH band of 50-60%.

All light is harmful to images and text, but ultra-violet (UV) light is particularly damaging. UV light is present in both daylight and fluorescent tubes. Light damage is cumulative, so the longer you display an item in strong light, the more damaged it will be. You can buy special showcases with UV filters, but these are expensive. As an alternative, keep blinds closed to create some shade, and cover exhibition cases with a cloth out of hours, and limit the length of the exhibition.

Security

People represent one of the greatest threats to archival records. Damage or loss can occur accidentally (e.g. someone tipping a cup of coffee over your prized exhibit), or through deliberate theft or damage (a visitor takes a shine to your prized exhibit and takes it for their own collection). To reduce the risk, consider displaying your original material in a lockable showcase, and have volunteers who are aware of the hazards on hand to ensure nothing comes to any harm, while chatting to people about the display.

If the material you are displaying is particularly valuable, the building itself should be protected with intruder and fire alarms, and it makes sense to locate the showcases away from other hazards such as water pipes.

What to include in the exhibition

Once you have decided your theme, audience and style, consider what records you want to include. Check to make sure that the person who gave them to you (or the publisher, in the case of published works) has no objection. Consider whether they are suitable for display, or whether copies might work better.

It's worth bearing in mind that records aren't always so very attractive to display in themselves; it is the information they contain that is interesting. It may be worth considering including other items in the exhibition to create a more visually appealing approach. 3-D artefacts can be helpful in this respect.

Brief captions are helpful to visitors who are not familiar with the subject matter, but take care not to overdo the detail. Keep the captions simple and aim for language that everyone can understand.

Remember to include the contact details of those involved in the exhibition who are willing to answer questions, or give out more information about the project or community group.

Supporting the records and documents

Leaving books in the open position can put pressure on their spines, and cause lasting damage. Make sure all documents are properly supported, and that for volumes, the angle of opening does not put undue strain on the binding. Single sheets should be supported by window mounts, and bound volumes should not be displayed at an angle greater than 30° from the horizontal.

Creating a virtual exhibition

Many local community groups can now call upon the expertise of a computer expert, and have branched out into on-line exhibitions. Provided you are careful when making digital copies of documents for the display, this approach can be a great way round security and venue problems, and means that your exhibition can be viewed all day every day from anywhere in the world.

Day to day access to your collections

Every community group differs in what it can offer in terms of day to day access to its collections. Loaning material to people can be a problem, as not everyone is conscientious about bringing it back. If you do decide to loan things out, keep a log of what it was, who it was loaned to, when you loaned it, and when they agreed to bring it back. Most losses occur not through malice or deliberate intention, but through lack of care being taken.

If access is a problem, perhaps because you don't have enough volunteers to be able to have a regular session, you may want to consider seeing if the local record office would be able to take your collection, where opening hours and security will give you the reassurance of knowing that the material is safe but open for all to view.

Publishing and using the archives

Publishing

Publication has always been a popular and desirable end result for community research projects. Until recently, this usually meant:

- Successfully persuading a commercial publisher to undertake the printing and distribution
- Underwriting a significant proportion of the costs yourselves, so-called vanity publishing
- Submitting smaller articles to local journals or periodicals

In recent years, options open to local groups have been extended by the widespread use of computers. Community groups have successfully used Information Technology to:

- Word process or desk-top publish the results of their research, and print off multiple copies for circulation to interested parties
- Put information onto the Internet.

As with an exhibition, the key to a good publication is advance planning. What is it that you are hoping to achieve? Answering the following questions may help you settle on the best approach for you.

- What is the overall purpose of your publication?; to record the results of your project for posterity?; to circulate the results to as many people in the community as possible?; to raise funds for other community projects?
- Who is the publication aimed at?; project members only?; the wider community?; local schoolchildren?
- Is your project part of a bigger overall umbrella project? Are there advantages to joining forces with other groups to share costs and workload?
- What funds are available to pay for publication?

Making a permanent record

Many community and heritage groups deposit a copy of their research reports or publications with their local record office. This is an effective and inexpensive way of making sure that your hard work survives for posterity, and is easily accessible to a wide range of other record office users.

Copyright and Data Protection

Are we free to use the records in anyway we choose?

Keeping interested parties up to date with your ideas and plans is a really good way of avoiding problems further down the line. If someone offers you some records, talk to them about what you are hoping to do, and make sure they are happy for their records to be used this way before going ahead.

Copyright gives the creators of certain kinds of material rights to control ways their material can be used. These rights start as soon as the material is recorded in writing or in any other way. There is no official registration system. The rights cover:

- copying;
- adapting;
- distributing;
- communicating to the public by electronic transmission (including by broadcasting and in an on demand service);
- renting or lending copies to the public; and,
- performing in public

If you wish to publish copies of or extracts from copyright material in a publication (including magazine articles), an exhibition or on the Internet, or use material that others have published in some form, you should obtain the permission of the owners of rights in the material before going ahead.

Make sure you obtain permission from anyone whose records you use. Many of the collections held at the Record Office are privately owned, and it is important to let us know of your intentions so that they can ensure that all parties involved are aware of and have had a chance to comment on them.

Data Protection laws mean that information about living people cannot be circulated, used or held unless you meet certain requirements. As a basic rule of thumb, avoid including information about named individuals less than one hundred years old in your project unless you have obtained the person's permission, preferably in writing.

Further guidance

Copyright -

- <http://www.is4profit.com/busadvice/copyright/>
- Timothy Padfield, Copyright for Archivists and Users of Archives (London, Facet, 2004)

Data Protection: -

- <http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

Oral History in Community Archives

How does oral history fit into community archives?

Oral history is about capturing memories so that we can learn from the experiences of others. It is a wonderful way to connect with people.

Making a Start

Before you start doing an oral history project do spend adequate time **planning the project**, considering its scope, limitations and timescale and being realistic about what you can achieve. You want to avoid an over-ambitious project which does not deliver and leaves people disappointed.

You need to ask yourself:

- Why are you doing it?
- Can you achieve your objective without doing oral history?
- What do you want to achieve? E.g. a book or publication, a collection of tapes to archive, an exhibition
- What is going to be your main topic or theme?
- What kind of an approach are you going to be taking to the interviews – life story or specific topics?
- What kind of resources are you going to have in terms of time, money and people? Do you have a budget for equipment, training, stationery and promotional work?
- Are you going to involve partners in any aspect of the project?
- When do you need to have the finished product ready by?
- Would it be better to run a small trial project to see how things work out before tackling a large scale enterprise? It is easier to scale up than down.

Equipment

You need to decide early on what sort of equipment is to be used. Video camera, cassette tape, CD or mini disk recorder or solid state recorder are some of the options.

- Are you going to borrow or purchase the equipment? Whether you buy or borrow equipment you will need a routine to keep track of it to ensure it is available when it is needed and is in good running order.
- Will your interviewers be familiar with the equipment or will you need to arrange training?
- If you are intending to make back up copies, transcribe interviews or edit recordings you will also need to consider buying or hiring equipment for this purpose too.

Recruiting Interviewers

You will need to consider very carefully who will be involved in the project and what their roles in the team will be. Some things to consider are:

- Will everyone be interviewing?

- Will anyone be summarising or transcribing or undertaking any administrative tasks such as checking and maintaining equipment or returning calls?
- How you are going to select the interviewers? It is important that they are competent to undertake the task and respect the rules and standards under which the project will operate as the reputation of your project will rest upon their actions in the community.
- You may need a range of interviewers so that you can be sensitive to the sensibilities of those who may be willing to tell something to one type of interviewer but not to another.
- You must find out how involved in the project would-be interviewers want to be. How far are they prepared to travel? Do they have their own transport? Are they expecting you to provide transport or pay for mileage? Do they have their own equipment or are they expecting you to supply it? Are they only prepared to undertake certain types of interviews?
- You may wish to consider giving interviewers a letter of introduction so people know they are bone fide and have official backing.
- You will also need to give some thought as to how you are going to tackle the issue of personal safety, especially if the interviewers are likely to be travelling around to conduct the interviews.

Selecting interviewees

This is an area which needs a great deal of consideration to avoid the project leading people to have unrealistic expectations of what is going to happen. Set some boundaries and limitations.

- How many people are you aiming to interview and are you going to find prospective interviewees?
- How will you choose which of the interviewees you will interview? Do aim for a balance of ages, genders, and roles.
- To get as wide a cross section of people as possible you may need to advertise in places which the people you are looking for are likely to visit such as libraries, community centres. You may also need to contact local societies/groups associated with the type of people you are interested in interviewing.
- You may want to get stories into the local newspaper or on the local radio or TV station. If you do this make sure that you can cope with a large number of contacts to follow up.
- What if you get more interviewees than you actually need or too many who are too similar? Some may be known to/suggested by members of the project group personally. How are you going to tackle this? It is important to keep people in the loop but without making promises you aren't going to be able to keep. You may want to put out your request for interviewees in terms of asking for help and assistance with the project without actually mentioning the word 'interview' so that you have some leeway in selecting people for interview without giving any offence.
- What if people don't want to be tape-recorded? Will you accept a written account?
- You will also need to give some consideration to how you will store personal details and who will have access to them.

Structuring the interview

It is important to be familiar with the subject you are planning to interview about and can ask the obvious questions. However, it is equally important that you don't over prepare or the interviewee may decide you already know about the topic so do not need their input.

You will need to make some kind of preliminary contact with the would-be interviewee. This is often more easily done by telephone as it gives the interviewer chance to check if the person is a suitable candidate to be interviewed. It also helps establish a rapport with the person concerned.

Most interviews will be on a one to one basis. It is worth remembering that interviewing a group is an approach which has been successfully used by some projects but bear in mind it can be difficult to control.

It is likely that the interview will be conducted in the interviewee's home. This has the advantage that the interviewee will be in familiar surroundings and so will be more relaxed. However the interviewer will also need to bear in mind that there could be noise or interruptions from other members of the household.

Some interviewees may not wish to be interviewed at home for variety of reasons. They may not feel comfortable having a stranger in the house or they may not wish their family to know they are taking part so it may be worth checking out if there is a small room for hire locally to use as a back up for those not prepared to be interviewed at home.

You will need to consider how the questions to be asked will be compiled. You may want to have a brainstorming session with the whole of the group involved. Will you use a questions sheet? This has the advantage that it can remain alongside the recording as a permanent record of how the interview structure was planned. It acts as a useful aide memoire and can allow a comparative study between interviewees. It can however set a more formal tone to the interview. It may not be appropriate to ask all the questions on the sheet to every interviewee. You may miss out on interesting side avenues which lie outside the structure of the questions sheet so you may prefer to use a question sheet as a memory-jogger. Do let the interviewee do most of the talking.

The interview will also have to be documented so that a record is kept of things such as who the interviewee was, when and where the interview took place, what the situation is going to be with regard to the copyright of the interview and what usage the interviewee agreed could be made of the interview.

Issues of copyright and usage need to be addressed and documented in writing at the time of the interview or as soon as possible afterwards. so it is clear that you got informed consent from the interviewees as to how they wish their interview to be used.

Have you covered all the possible uses you might make? It is not always easy to go back and get consent at a later date. It needs to be done as part of the interview process. Remember to send a thank you letter to interviewees and a copy of the recording if that's what you've agreed.

After the interview – storage and access

- Label recordings as soon as possible so that you do not end up with a series of interviews where you don't know which interviewee is which. You may think you'll remember who was who but you won't, especially with the passage of time.

- If you are using a medium which can be overwritten such as cassettes make sure you punch the lugs out to prevent this or you could accidentally lose your recordings.

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- You need to think about how and where the recordings will be stored. You need to store them somewhere dry, cool, secure so that they don't get lost or mislaid and away from sources of heat, light or magnetic sources such as TVs, loudspeakers. What will you do about the long term storage and preservation of the collection of tapes? Will you store a back up set anywhere?

- You will need to give some thought to some kind of accessioning or cataloguing system so that you can keep track of the recordings and any associated paperwork and find a particular recording when you need it.

- Who will have access to the recordings and how? Will this change over time?

- You should ideally treat the original recording as if it were a unique document. Never edit it. You should therefore play it as little as possible and make a copy for playback/access/editing and security purposes. Keep the original and the copy apart if at all possible.

- Decide what you are going to do about summarising and/or transcribing the recording. Transcribing is a very time consuming task. It can take 6-7 minutes to do one minute of speech. As a minimum you should listen back over the recording while it's fresh in your mind and make a summary and note down some key words.

- You need to bear in mind technological changes. Will the medium you have used still exist in five or ten year's time? Or if not, what arrangements do you have in place to migrate the information you have obtained to another format? Have you budgeted for this?

Undertaking an oral history project is very exciting but time needs to be invested in planning the project well so that the various issues raised above can be addressed. There are a variety of organisations which have been involved in oral history for a number of years and who are willing to offer advice.

The **Oral History Society** is a good place to start as this has a network of regional representatives who can offer advice and support. Their web address is

<http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/>

The **East Midlands Oral History Archive (EMOHA)** has a good website offering online advice on a wide variety of aspects of oral history work. Their web address is

www.le.ac.uk/emoha.

Making the archives available in digital form

Why digitise?

Digitisation is about making the archives available in electronic form – perhaps for the Internet. Whilst digitisation appears to offer fantastic opportunities to share the information in collections, any project needs very careful thought and planning. It is important to consider the nature of the material to be digitised and how the resource will be used.

The higher the quality of the initial capture of the archive, the more flexible you can be in future use of the data. The biggest threat to a digitisation project is the inability to sustain it.

Planning a project can be divided into four sections:

- Preparation
- Capture
- Editing/enhancement
- Storage and access

(However, they are all ultimately interrelated and should not be seen in isolation)

Preparation

- What type of material is to be copied, its size, shape, dimensions and nature?
- What is the condition of the material? Is any preparatory work needed and who is qualified to do it?
- What copying equipment is available and is it suitable for the job?
- What file formats will be used for capture, storage and delivery?
- How will images be stored and how will access be managed?
- Are there any copyright or other legal issues?

Capture

- An early point to be decided is whether a camera or a scanner (or a combination) is to be used.
- A **camera** is likely to be more expensive, and needs lighting and software on probably a higher specification computer. However, it will normally produce higher quality images, can cope with a wider range of material, and can probably be used to some extent away from the computer.
- A **scanner** is usually cheaper to purchase and operate, as it probably will need a lower specification computer and no special lighting, but is less flexible as to the material it can copy and where it can be used.
- The higher specification **computer** that can be used the better for the long term success of the project. At the time of writing it may be that a PC with 2 gigabyte of RAM, a 2 gigahertz processor and 200 gigabyte hard drive would be a good starting point, with access to a larger hard drive if that is to be the storage medium. With technological advances, most equipment is virtually obsolete as soon as it is purchased. It will need to be compatible with all the other aspects of the project and have good connectivity, e.g. for transferring data to appropriate storage.
- There is a huge range of **file formats**. In general, the chosen format should be widely recognised, fit the end use and seek to minimise data loss, and is likely to be a combination of .tif and jpg formats. The format for capture is the most critical, and needs to maintain highest

possible quality and fidelity to the original. It must be recognised by the imaging, end user, and storage software. It needs to be convertible to other file formats for other uses. For example, the initial data may be stored in .tif format but be made available for use in a jpg format.

- The file sizes will inevitably be large, so compression can be used, and a .tif file can be compressed without significant loss of data.

- The decision on resolution depends on end use. An image at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) will be suitable for almost any use, including high quality exhibition, but the file size will be large. For web use only, 72 ppi might be considered adequate.

Editing and enhancement

- All images will need some adjustment once captured, for example for colour, sharpness or contrast. This is **not** to be confused with manipulation/alteration of the image, which should not form part of the project.

- A decision needs to be made on imaging software, e.g. Adobe, Ulead or others. The image editing software must be able to recognise the captured image in the chosen file format and size.

- Quality assurance systems need to be established to ensure images are accurate before being stored.

Storage and access

- Where will the images be stored? Will it be on external media such as CD/DVD-ROMs or external hard drives? Or will it be on a central server?

- Will images be stored 'live' on-line or 'off-line' or a combination?

- What arrangements will there be for back-up copies?

- For how long are the images to be stored? This will affect decisions on back-up, and remember that research suggests images on disk can deteriorate after as short a time as 18 months' storage. Therefore, a migration policy will be required, which needs to be budgeted for, and also placed in the context of technological change. CDs/DVDs as we know them are unlikely to be with us in five years' time.

- Will an Image Management System be needed (probably only if there will be a large number of images).

- Will there be different types of users and will they have different rights?

- Who will be allowed to enter/edit metadata and at what stage? Accurate and appropriate metadata is essential.

- How will the images be accessed? Will it be on-line via the Internet or off-line via disks, and will users be allowed to copy/download images?

- Will users be allowed to print images?

- What search methods will be needed or expected?

- Will any users have special access issues, e.g. partially sighted.

- To return to the sustainability issue, is there a budget and expertise to allow for upgrading and replacement of software and equipment, and for migration of the data.

The possibilities opened up by a digitisation project are exciting, but the greatest care needs to be taken by the team planning the project to consider and decide on all these issues. Often outside technical advice will be needed. A good place to start is with the Technical and Advisory Service for Images at <http://www.tasi.ac.uk>

Funding community archive projects

How can community archives be funded?

In order to keep a community archive going, funding is sometimes needed. Community and heritage projects are often able to raise money from grant awarding bodies. Check with your local authority for specific funds that may be open to you, but it would be worth contacting your regional Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (<http://www.mla.gov.uk/>).

If your project has a particular interest for a local business or charity, it may be worth approaching them to see if they are willing to sponsor a publication.

Tracking down sources of funding for community archive projects can seem to be daunting but there are various avenues to try. Depending on the nature of your locality, for example if you are in a neighbourhood renewal area, there may be more opportunities available to you to try. The National Archives web site at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/caap/documents.htm This website contains information on possible funding streams for community archive projects. Details are included about sources of public funding (community, education and training, Arts Council and lottery streams), some charitable trusts and specific home country funding. The document online was produced in 2004 so you are advised to check back to the relevant web sites of each of these possibilities for current information.

- The Heritage Lottery Fund currently has a grant scheme called Your Heritage which is specifically focused on community heritage projects. See www.hlf.org.uk for details
- Some local authorities, for example Staffordshire County Council, have local member initiative schemes which enable local elected members to support community projects of their choice. Check your local authority web site to see if this is the case for your particular area.
- There are a number of charitable bodies which will support community projects which match their particular objectives, although not necessarily with large sums of money. As a starting point you should search the Charity Commission's register of charities on their web site using a key search word e.g. heritage, history. <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/>

It is essential when making an application to show clearly how your project fits their criteria and to follow their instructions about how to submit applications very closely. You may have to meet deadlines for Trustees' meetings and to provide only certain information and in a particular order.

The Exit Strategy

What to do when the project is over

If your community group has completed its project, or if circumstances mean that you are unable to carry on, please do not destroy or otherwise dispose of the records and documents you have collected. The Record Office may be able to help decide the most appropriate thing to do, and may well be interested in adding the material to their own collections, so that the records survive for the benefit of generations to come. If you have a website, there may be steps you can take to ensure its long-term maintenance.

Points to bear in mind

- Many projects are built around the enthusiasm of a small number of individuals, who may eventually move away or find other interests
- Some projects may be essentially short-term or of fixed duration, for example many of the Millennium projects in 2000.
- If you are collecting real documents and records, as opposed to taking images, it is essential to keep a clear record of the terms on which you hold them. Is it a gift or a loan? Does the owner want it back if the project finishes, or do you have permission to try to find an alternative home?
- Are there other groups or societies which might be interested in taking over the material? Is there an “umbrella” association for local history groups which might be able to help in finding an alternative home?
- Is anything suitable to be offered to the Record Office or local studies library?
- If your collections are on a website, who will maintain that site when the project has completed/when key people leave the group? Can the website become self-running?

Further sources of advice and guidance

Locating your nearest archive service -

- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/>
- Local telephone directory. May be under the local council listings

Community archive projects -

- <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/partnerprojects/caap/>
- <http://www.commanet.org/>