

## **SECTION 1: MANAGING YOUR ARCHIVES. PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE**

This section sets out the first steps you should take in looking after your archival material. It assumes that you have weighed up the factors involved in keeping such records or depositing them as set out earlier in the Introduction.

### **Identifying the mission**

If the community decides it wishes to retain its own archives, it is important to identify the reason or reasons for doing so and produce a statement which explicitly states this. The statement will provide the rationale for keeping the archives, setting out their importance, the role they play in the life of the community and its work, and thereby justify the expenditure of community resources on them.

Such decisions should not be taken by in isolation by the archivist, librarian, or any interested individual, however committed. The statement needs to have the explicit support of the governing body and be set out so that all the members can understand it. There should be provision for the archives to have a clear reporting line with responsibilities, a commitment to provision of resources, and a set of policies and procedures to be followed in looking after and providing access to the records.

Although those within, or associated with, the community may well be given priority and special rights in the use of the archive, adherence to the policies and procedures drawn up to regulate its management should be understood to be obligatory on anyone using the collections, from the head of the organisation and its members to external researchers.

### **Storing your archives**

As we have seen, archives are intended to be permanently preserved. In establishing an archival collection and providing for its management in-house, it is crucial, therefore, to ensure that there is suitable long-term accommodation for such material: somewhere for the records to be stored where they will be safe and from where they can be easily retrieved. If no such accommodation is identified, it will be prudent to consider whether the collections to be preserved would not be better off elsewhere.

It can be helpful in identifying suitable accommodation for archival storage to consider the risks to them, namely from neighbouring industrial or other activities: the suitability of the building in terms of floor loading and protection against the weather; protection against fire, flood, pests and theft; and unsuitable environmental conditions such as damp which may cause mould growth or excessive heat leading

to the embrittlement of the records. More detailed advice on the preservation of records is available in sections 2 and 3.

## **Responsibility for the archives**

As well as establishing that there is suitable accommodation for the archives, it is necessary to ensure that a named person or post-holder will have day-to-day responsibility for them. Who will be in charge of these records? To whom do they report? Will they receive the resources of time, money and storage and office space that are required? It is good practice to have a dedicated archival budget for routine expenditure. If the designated archivist is not a trained professional, is there a body with suitable expertise able to provide oversight and support?

Without a trained archivist, it may be necessary to put aside some funding to enable the post-holder to attend training courses and workshops in various aspects of archival best practice, or for a mentor to pay regular visits. If the community cannot identify a suitable person to act as custodian in this way, it will be prudent to consider whether the archives should be placed elsewhere.

## **What will be in the archive?**

Central to creating and maintaining an archive is the collecting policy. It forms the cornerstone of an effective archive and it should be rooted in the reasons why the community has committed itself to establishing an archive.

The collecting policy sets out the categories of records that will be accepted for permanent retention in the archive. It should cover whatever records the archive needs or is obliged to take in (such as certain internal records of the community, see below) and what it aims to acquire in addition (for example, personal records of community figures, material covering a particular area of spiritual life, or historical documents that illuminate the religious tradition of which the community is a part). This collecting might be to enhance existing strengths in the coverage of the collection or bring in previously neglected material, and it might be defined by reference to subject, date-range, creators, place of origin, or some combination of such factors.

The policy should specify terms upon which archives will be acquired, i.e. by automatic transfer, donation or gift, and whether the community is prepared to enhance its holdings through purchase, or accept material on deposit or fixed term loan from external sources. It should also state the requirement for anyone offering related archival material to have valid title of ownership and right of transfer.

It is advisable also to specify types of material that will not be acquired. Grounds for

declining might include: content, i.e. items that simply do not fall within the collecting criteria or are of insufficient interest or originality; alternative provision i.e. material that would normally be acquired by other archive repositories; the difficulty of curating specialist formats, requiring particular skills or equipment to enable access; lack of uniqueness, e.g. copies or facsimiles and printed material; legal restrictions, as with archives that would require a long closure period; lack of capacity, as some collections offered may be so large that they would require a disproportionate amount of storage space or processing work; or physical condition, such as archives in a poor state that would require a large amount of resources to render them fit for access.

There is more information on collecting policies and related procedures on the Religious Archives Group website at <https://religiousarchivesgroup.org.uk/advice/rag/> The policy should be formally adopted by the leadership or governing body, to indicate that the archive has the full authority of the community behind it.

Having an effective collecting policy allows clear definition of the scope and content of the archive, guiding the archivist, management, potential donors and users as to what categories of material are being acquired. It helps to focus resources in selected areas, identifies which media and formats you take in, and creates agreed criteria for the refusal of unwanted material. It provides an objective framework for consistent decision-making and demonstrates how the archival operation supports the broader aims and objectives of the community. It is crucial to the development of an efficient and effective archival operation.

### **Selection of records for the archives**

The core of the archives will be documents that have been generated by the community itself and its members. These will include records of management and governance, administration and finance, maintenance of buildings, and the whole range of activities including the spiritual life of the community. Many of these records do not need to be kept permanently, but only for a period of years, perhaps to comply with Charity Commission regulations. Organisations need to adopt a records retention schedule in order to maintain good record-keeping control over the ongoing management of their records and at the same time to ensure that the right records are transferred, at the appropriate time, to the historical archives.

### **Records retention schedule**

This is a list of the categories of records created or collected by an organisation, often arranged as a table, which gives a generic description of the types of records and their retention status. The schedule specifies how long the material in question is to be retained as current and what should happen to it once that time has elapsed - should it be destroyed, reviewed or automatically transferred to the archive?

A records retention schedule is an invaluable tool for establishing the categories of records being created by the community and managing their disposal or transfer to the archives. It need not be a daunting either in size or complexity.

The factors that will determine the retention of a category of records include:

- business and administrative requirements of the community, for example, trust deeds, property records, minutes of the governing body;
- legal requirements, for example for charitable bodies to produce accounts and annual reports
- historical and theological significance of the material for the community.

Records that are not selected for permanent preservation should be destroyed when no longer required through shredding or other means of secure and confidential disposal.

### **Establishing the archive**

With the community committed to the establishment and support of an archive, it is useful to collect key background information, whether in the form of individual historical documents or not: the date of its foundation, major events in its history from the foundation, moves to new premises and information about leading figures among its members. Some advice on the next steps can be found in the guidance on the Religious Archives Group website under 'Archives for Beginners' at <https://religiousarchivesgroup.org.uk/advice/rag/>

### **Data Protection**

Although no longer in current use by the community, not all archive material will be suitable for immediate access. If documents contain personal information about living people, they may be subject to data protection legislation.

The 2018 Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations provide clear guidelines on the type of material an organisation is permitted to retain about people, and how that information is to be handled. It strengthens the rights of the individual to have their privacy respected and in many cases requires explicit permissions to be obtained from them.

There are categories of archives that should not be produced for the researcher, either because of data protection legislation or because they contain other information over which the community wishes to retain discretionary control. Organisations may wish to close these for a period and much of the good practice

that flows from data protection legislation is relevant for other confidential records such as membership information on deceased members or personal diaries.

Following the above steps and addressing the issues outlined will enable the community to establish its archival operation on a sound basis, to serve the needs of its members and allow responsible research use in an efficient and accountable manner.