

THE MISSING LINK

SPECIALIST REPOSITORIES IN ENGLAND: a Map of Development and Funding Needs

***A British Library Co-operation and Partnership Programme
project***

Society of Archivists 2002

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Mary Clapinson
December 2001

Foreword

I have never understood (or, if I am honest, liked) the term Specialist Repository. It seems to stress apartness, exclusivity, even elitism. In reality what this significant part of the U.K. archive scene is involved in is the primary in-house care and preservation for posterity of all the bits which make up the fabric of society at large: business and commerce, schools, hospitals, charities, religious groupings, and many more. Individually, as agencies, they may be sharp in their focus and defined in their purpose; together they hold the future history of the nation. Later in their life, the records they now care for may become part of the collections of a larger, less-specialist archive (not non-specialist; every archive collection has, or should have, a defined focus), maintained by a national institution, a local authority or a university. For the moment though, these often unglamorous, generally under-resourced places, are the very nursery of our history.

It is to the credit of the various Directors, Trustees, Governors, Boards who sustain these archives that they invest in the future of these archives rather than taking the cheaper route of neglect or abandonment. This survey shows how far there is to go in investment to bring the care and accessibility of them up to standard. But if this history is, as I am suggesting our history, or at least our children's history, then the obligation and responsibility goes wider than the individual institution. This survey indicates to me that there is a need for a review of existing opportunities for external funding support for archives and how far they are deemed applicable to this seed-bed area of the archive world. Where they are not, then perhaps we need to see where adjustments in thinking, both on the part of funders and owners of archives, might shift the balance. Apart from the very real need for an injection of further funding support, a tangible proof that the rest of the world acknowledges and is prepared to encourage the investment which institutions have made and are making in preserving all our histories could be a significant spur to wider action.

Many of the issues which are raised here are ones connected to the relatively small size of the archive units themselves. Staff cannot get away for training, in-house conservation is not cost-effective, specialist ICT software is a relatively heavy investment for a small unit. There is every reason to explore the potential for collaborative or partnership ventures in some of these areas. This is particularly important at a time when new national and regional agendas, for archives and their sister sectors, museums and libraries, are being fast developed throughout England.

These new agendas should involve and embrace the whole of the archive sector. Some parts will be more applicable to some archive repositories than others. For the sector covered in this report, the issues of private ownership and public access may prove difficult - though I see no reason to assume them insuperable. But if the specialist repository sector (if that is the best label we have) is to be a part of and to benefit from new thinking and new investment, then it has to be within the circle of consideration and participation. It would, for me, be ludicrous - and, in the long term crippling - if it were not.

Vic Gray
Director of the Rothschild Archive

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Missing Link survey of specialist archive repositories in England was prompted by a concern that they were at risk of being overlooked in the analysis of development and funding needs based on mapping exercises of local authority and university repositories. The survey was based on the questionnaire used in the Public Record Office mapping projects, to facilitate comparison of the results. Detailed recommendations are set out at the end of each section of the report. These relate to accommodation and storage (p. 17), public access and services (p. 19), preservation and conservation (p. 20), finding aids (p. 22), information and communications technology (p. 24), electronic archives (p. 25), staff training and development (p. 26) and cross-domain and cross-sectoral collaboration (p. 27). Within the time available it was only possible to survey a selection of repositories and the results prompt a **recommendation that further surveys should be undertaken at a regional level to contribute to emerging regional archive strategies.**

Meanwhile, this report makes several general recommendations based on the survey of a sample 149 specialist repositories.

- **There should be greater recognition of the large percentage of heritage and information records held in specialist repositories in England.**
- **Specialist repositories need to be taken fully into account in the discussion and assessment of national and regional archive strategies.**
- **The significant investment of many of their parent bodies in the preservation and care of private archives and in the provision of public services should be acknowledged.**
- **Financial incentives need to be maintained and developed to ensure that there is continuing public access to private archives.**
- **A means should be found of including privately funded archives in the allocation of any public funding for the development of the archives sector as a whole.**
- **Partnerships and collaborations which are particularly appropriate in such a diverse sector should be encouraged.**

GLOSSARY

DCMS	Department for Culture, Media & Sport
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
ISAD(G)	General International Standard Archival Description
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NCA	National Council on Archives
PRO	Public Record Office
SRG	Special Repositories Group of the Society of Archivists

THE MISSING LINK

1. THE BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The last three years have seen an unprecedented level of activity in the archive sector in the United Kingdom. The approach of the millennium encouraged the profession to take stock of its position, while increasing awareness of the importance of archives as both heritage and information drew them more clearly into the area of government social, educational, regional and modernising policies.
- 1.2 Three significant publications, by the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC)¹, the National Council on Archives (NCA)² and the Lord Chancellor's Department³, drew attention to the richness and diversity of Britain's archival heritage and to the challenges of ensuring that it is preserved and accessible to all. It is cared for in over 2,000 repositories, which range from national institutions to local authority record offices and specialist repositories (including universities, charities, businesses, professional organisations, and private estates). It encompasses not only textual and graphic records, but also new media of sound recordings, film, computer disks and tapes. It is made available physically in search rooms and increasingly electronically on the Internet.
- 1.3 With a long history of under-resourcing, it has been a struggle for the majority of archive repositories to maintain standards of care and service and to meet an ever-rising demand for public access. Many have looked to outside funding bodies for assistance in meeting the demands of the new technologies. The need to analyse existing provision and to clarify priorities for development led to a number of surveys, or mapping projects, of archive repositories.
- 1.4 The Public Record Office (PRO) led the way in 1997-8 with a detailed survey of all local authority record offices in England⁴. The National Archives of Scotland (NAS) followed suit with a survey of local authorities, health boards, universities, national institutions and specialist repositories in Scotland⁵.
- 1.5 The Higher Education Funding Councils, through the Archives Sub-Committee of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), undertook in 1997-8 a survey of holdings of archives in UK higher education institutions⁶.

¹ *Archives at the Millennium*: the twenty-eighth report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts 1991-1999 (Stationery Office, 1999)

² *British Archives: the Way Forward* (National Council on Archives, 2000)

³ *Government Policy on Archives* (Cm4516, 1999)

⁴ *Our Shared Past: an Archival Domesday for England* (Public Record Office, 1998)

⁵ *An Archival Account of Scotland – public and private sector archives in Scotland* (National Archives of Scotland, 2000)

⁶ *Survey of Needs* – consultancy report by Willpower Information on behalf of JISC Archives Sub-Committee of the Non-Formula Funding of Specialised Research Collections initiative (1998)

- 1.6 More recently the PRO has conducted an archival survey in Wales and a second phase survey of local authority repositories in England.⁷
- 1.7 Meanwhile the Specialist Repositories Group of the Society of Archivists (SRG), concerned that there was a significant blank in the emerging picture of the state of British archives, sought means to fill it by surveying the great range of private and public bodies in England, which, although they are outside the network of publicly-funded repositories, yet care for and provide access to a significant part of the archival heritage of the United Kingdom.
- 1.8 The Society put forward a proposal to the British Library Cooperation and Partnership Programme, and received a generous grant to fund a six-month survey.

2 THE PROJECT

- 2.1 The project aimed to provide a clearer overview of the role of specialist repositories in English archival provision, to increase awareness of the richness and diversity of their holdings and to provide information on their current provision and their funding and development needs for Resource, the Regional Cultural Consortia of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the NCA Regional Archive Councils, the funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, archivists themselves, their employers and employing institutions.
- 2.2 It was administered by the Society of Archivists, which appointed two project officers, both seconded from professional posts. They reported to a Project Board, with members drawn from the Society, the Specialist Repositories Group, the British Library, the Historical Manuscripts Commission, the Public Record Office, the National Archives of Scotland, the National Council on Archives and Resource: the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries⁸.
- 2.3 The work was greatly assisted by the project's host institution, the Natural History Museum and by the willingness of the PRO to share the methodology of its own mapping projects. It benefited enormously from the advice of colleagues in the PRO and the NAS.
- 2.4 Only a sample of specialist repositories could be surveyed. 270 were selected on the basis of membership of the Specialist Repositories Group and inclusion in ARCHON⁹ (the on-line guide to repositories hosted by the HMC), *British Archives*¹⁰ and *The Directory of Corporate Archives*¹¹.

⁷ *Archival Mapping Project for Wales* (PRO and Archives Council Wales/Cyngor Archifau Cymru, 2001); *Our shared past: phase two: developing 21st century archive services* (PRO, 2001)

⁸ For a list of members of the project board, see above p. 3

⁹ <http://www.hmc.gov.uk/archon/archon.htm>

¹⁰ Janet Foster and Julia Sheppard, *British Archives: a guide to archival resources in the United Kingdom* (3rd ed., Macmillan, 1995)

¹¹ *Directory of Corporate Archives* (4th ed., Business Archives Council, 1997)

- 2.5 A 21-page questionnaire¹² was sent out, and archivists asked to assess provision in their repositories as poor, fairly poor, average, fairly good or good in the areas of accommodation/storage, public access/services, preservation/conservation, finding aids, information and communications technology, electronic archives, staff training and development, and cross-sectoral working.
- 2.6 149 questionnaires were completed¹³, divided into the following categories to facilitate analysis of the returns: Business (28), Charities (10), Educational (13), Film & Sound (4), Historic Houses (9), Medical & Scientific (10), Museums & Galleries (19), National (17), Professional & Learned (24) and Religious (15).

3 SPECIALIST REPOSITORIES

- 3.1 Specialist repositories tend to be defined by what they are not. The SRG developed within the Society of Archivists as a forum for archivists, records managers and conservators employed in repositories which were not based in local government.
- 3.2 The Missing Link took the membership of the SRG as the basis for its survey, but omitted repositories in the higher education sector as they had been surveyed by the JISC¹⁴.
- 3.3 Specialist repositories thus range from the single person (often part-time) establishments to the large national institutions.
- 3.4 The primary concern of many archivists in specialist repositories, especially within private or voluntary sector organisations, is to meet the business and information needs of their parent bodies. Provision for external users, although made by all the repositories surveyed, is in many cases a secondary consideration.
- 3.5 It follows that incentives will be required to encourage those which are essentially private archive repositories to contribute to the public agenda.
- 3.6 The importance of their participation is reflected in the high proportion of records of international, national, regional and local significance in their care. It is reinforced by the large number of specialist repositories which, designated by the PRO as Places of Deposit, have accepted responsibilities for the care of public records.
- 3.7 Although the questionnaire did not ask about the nature of the material held, comments made in the returns (and summarised by category in 3.8 below)

¹² To facilitate comparison with the results of other surveys, the PRO's archival mapping project questionnaire was used, in slightly adapted form.

¹³ For a list of participating repositories see below, Appendix I, p. 28

¹⁴ See above. p. 7

confirmed the enormous importance of their holdings already apparent from finding aids, where they exist, and from directories such as *British Archives*.

3.8.1 **Businesses**

Archives at the Millennium (p. 54) drew attention to the importance of business archives as a research resource across a wide range of disciplines. The returns of the twenty-eight businesses surveyed amply reinforce this. Many of them have archives which, in recording their growth from small family firm to national or multi-national company, provide a wealth of evidence for studies of individuals, local communities, the development of trade and industry, and (especially in their advertising material) society as a whole. Banks and financial enterprises in particular frequently have records dating back to the 18th century. The Royal Bank of Scotland, included in the survey as the majority of its records are held in London, has unique material on an expedition to establish a Scottish trading company in Panama in the 1690s. Technological advances, the shifting balance between private enterprise and government regulation, and the social effects of transport and communications can be studied in the archives of utility companies. Publishing and pharmaceutical firms hold important early materials, among them Oxford University Press, which in its museum also cares for artefacts associated with printing from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

All business archives have to compete for funding with departments that have a more immediate impact on the company's profitability. Yet in the archives community itself it is a commonly held misconception that business archives do not share in the widespread underfunding; while funding bodies do not, as one respondent put it, perceive business archives as 'legitimate areas of need'.

Nevertheless, the long term existence of some business archives is far from assured. One return reported plans, fortunately not implemented, to sell the company's archive. Others have sought to ensure survival by establishing a charitable trust for the archives. The returns as a whole confirm the need, clearly asserted in *Archives at the Millennium*, p. 55, to take business archives into account in the allocation of public funding.

3.8.2 **Charities**

The ten charities surveyed all hold records of importance not just for the history of charitable institutions, but also for wider studies of individuals, families and society. They share with businesses the problem of having, within their parent body, a low priority for funding, in their case compared with the organisation's charitable objectives. Several charities and organisations in the voluntary sector do not view an archive operation as a legitimate activity, but have difficulty in finding a repository prepared to take their archives on deposit. One respondent proposed the establishment of a single repository, devoted to the care of charities' archives on a national basis.

3.8.3 **Education**

The thirteen repositories surveyed ranged from individual schools and colleges to subject-specific archives established within educational institutions to collect materials relating to a particular theme, such as the theatre or advertising, and make them available as an educational resource. Many of the former hold, in addition to the school's own records, the papers of alumni who achieved fame locally, nationally or internationally. Lancing College holds material on all the educational establishments created by its founder, Nathaniel Woodard (1811-91), including an important collection of over 20,000 letters and pamphlets.

The contrast between the importance of the holdings and the resources available to support them was as marked in this as in other categories, and was exacerbated by the difficulty of classifying the parent institution in the context of different funding initiatives. One archivist reported frustration at being ineligible to apply either for higher education or for public library funding, while fulfilling some of the remit of both. It was evident that to build on the firm foundations laid by the institution itself '*external support will be required ... to automate its catalogues fully; to increase access to its collections via digitisation; and to upgrade and enhance the storage of its holdings to meet modern standards.*'

3.8.4 **Film and Sound**

This is one of the few archive sectors where repositories have been created on a regional basis to look after archive material of a specific nature, though not all regions have these facilities. The North West Film Archive, one of the four film and sound repositories surveyed, used Heritage Lottery funding to provide a state-of-the-art repository and is one of the leading exponents of its type in the country. The returns confirm the need, identified in *Archives at the Millennium* (p. 19), for more central funding as well as external grant-aid to bring this sector up to the specialist standards required. The Film Council also, in its development strategy *Film in England*¹⁵, recognised the need to assist these regional film archives 'to achieve a better degree of organisational stability, to undertake sector development and to fully participate in establishing an integrated regional planning process'.

3.8.5 **Historic Houses**

The returns of nine historic houses amply illustrate the wealth of material in their care, ranging from estate and agricultural records, a rich resource for studies of those who worked on the land, to family papers documenting the role of the aristocracy and landed gentry in local, national and international affairs and endorsing their vital importance to a proper understanding of local and national history. The contents of several, for example the Cecil (Salisbury) and Thynne papers, have long been available through calendars prepared over years and published by the HMC. While clear benefits accrue for keeping archives in the houses to which they relate (*Archives at the Millennium*, p. 56),

¹⁵ *Film in England: a Development Strategy for Film and the Moving Image in the English Regions* (Film Council, 2000)

the returns demonstrate the difficulties of providing facilities for storage and access in historic buildings.

3.8.6 **Medical and scientific organisations**

Of the ten organisations surveyed in this category, seven were responsible for the records of individual hospitals or groups of hospitals. One is widely regarded as having the finest collection of hospital archives in the English-speaking world, with records dating back to the 12th century. The enormous importance of all for studies of the history of medicine is self-evident, and is complemented by the collections of the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine. The holdings of the British Antarctic Survey are well-known, and representative of a number of scientific organisations which maintain their own important historical archives alongside the records of their current activities. The majority of medical and scientific archives share with other specialist repositories the difficulties inherent in being a small part of a much larger operation, with a low priority for investment.

3.8.7 **Museums and galleries**

The nineteen museums and galleries surveyed hold, as well as records relating to their own collections and to the administration of the institution, important archival material collected alongside the artefacts. The survey targeted museums with a designated archives department or an archivist in post, though many more have neither. Even in those included in the survey, the amount of uncatalogued archives is a cause for concern. The overall impression is of a very important but seriously under-used resource for studies of local, national and international significance. The returns amply demonstrate the need (identified in *Archives at the Millennium*, pp. 52-3) for a thorough, nation-wide review of archives in museums.

3.8.8 **National repositories**

The range and importance of the holdings of the seventeen national repositories surveyed is too well-known to need repeating here. They cover every aspect of central government, the Houses of Parliament, the Empire and Commonwealth, the arts, the environment, broadcasting, transport and the built heritage.

3.8.9 **Professional and learned bodies**

The twenty-four professional and learned bodies surveyed are for the most part based in London. All reflect the subject focus of the membership – medicine, the army, the law, architecture, trade and the like – and the majority hold records of national significance, many dating back to the 16th century. The returns demonstrate the difficulties of caring for archives in what are often essentially administrative headquarters, and of providing access, when, as in

so many specialist repositories, their prime function is to serve the parent body.

3.8.10 Religious institutions

Fifteen religious institutions made returns to the survey, which emphasised their longevity and their role in cultural, social and government affairs as well as in matters ecclesiastical. Some hold administrative records dating from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day, which include unusually detailed records relating to buildings and fabric; many also hold the archives of significant individuals.

4 THE FINDINGS

4.1 ACCOMMODATION AND STORAGE

Introduction

Archives are unique and irreplaceable. Their protection from destruction, damage, deterioration or loss is of paramount importance. Their primary defence is storage accommodation that offers both appropriate levels of protection against a wide variety of potential risks and suitable environmental controls. The *British Standard for the storage and exhibition of archival documents* (BS 5454: 2000) is an ideal towards which repositories can work to ensure that their records are stored in optimum conditions. Permanent preservation and the protection of the UK's written heritage can only be achieved with appropriate investment in these areas.

Many specialist repositories are accommodated within the headquarters or main building of their parent organisations. For them the ideal of a self-contained repository with separate areas for storage, staff and consultation is not a practical reality, and compromises have frequently to be made. For some, storage facilities are scattered in a variety of locations; for others, one all-purpose area has to fulfil all these functions. Very few specialist repositories are housed in purpose-built accommodation. Returns to this survey were made from vaults, crypts, attics and a nurses' home. 57% of respondents assess the accommodation of their repositories as inadequate.

Suitability of site

The concentration of specialist repositories in London creates a critical mass of archive resources with ease of access on public transport for the user and a network of professional support for the archivist. But these benefits are accompanied by parking problems for disabled users, high levels of urban pollution and rising accommodation costs.

The high proportion of specialist repositories located centrally within their parent organisations reflects the primary role of the archive (and in many cases

that of the associated records management service) as an information resource for the organisation. The repository's location can also reflect the purpose of its parent organisation. One business archive describes its location as next to high-pressure gas and liquid petroleum holders and one museum is on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal near a petro-chemical complex with all the increased associated risks. Another repository describes itself as in a *'lively part of Manchester (in between Canal St. and China Town) in the heart of the night club district'*; while one charity is based *'in a country mansion set in isolated parkland'*.

The objectives of the parent organisation may also bring increased risks. One respondent cites protests against genetically modified crops as a threat to the archives, while another observes: *'as the group has suffered the destruction of two major buildings as a result of terrorism in the last eight years, we cannot be complacent about risks in the City of London'*.

These factors combine to put the collections held by a number of specialist repositories more at risk than those held in more mainstream repositories. A greater emphasis should therefore be placed on funding appropriate levels of security and providing disaster control planning.

Soundness of structure

'Medieval [buildings] with steep/spiral staircases are not designed for modern disability regulations'. This comment highlights the difficulties faced by many specialist repositories, housed in old and often listed buildings, which cannot easily be adapted or converted to meet current standards for archival storage. The drawbacks of working in old buildings can be balanced by the beauty of the surroundings, as another respondent explains *"the searchers' facilities are basic...[but] the setting is superb: a distraction from minor inconveniences"*. Moreover, that these problems can be overcome when resources are made available has been demonstrated at St. George's Chapel, Windsor archives, where alterations to a 15th-century building are described as *'a model conversion of domestic to repository accommodation conforming to the requirements of BS5454'*. Other historic buildings are outstanding examples of their type, well maintained and secure.

Investment in suitable archive accommodation is not a one-off capital expense. It is imperative that parent organisations, or any institutions considering establishing their own archive service, recognise the need for long-term and continuing investment in upkeep and maintenance of the structure. Without sustained funding the repository will ultimately come under threat: *'the existing building (custom built in 1970) is considered to be not worth further repair because of problems with the foundations. The whole future/future location of the Archives and Museum is currently under discussion.'*

A number of repositories also find uncertainty of tenure an obstacle to securing funding from their parent organisation to improve storage conditions. Repositories in leased accommodation are most susceptible to an

unwillingness to commit financial resources to upgrading structures. On the other hand, the survey revealed encouraging examples of core funding being provided for new and improved accommodation by organisations whose primary function is not archival care, but which nevertheless recognise the long-term investment potential of funding high quality accommodation and storage.

Fire and water – records at risk

Archive collections are subject to a variety of external risks, but fire and water have the potential for total destruction if appropriate safeguards are not in place. Only 52% of the repositories surveyed consider their fire protection above average, while 14% believe the systems in place to be inadequate.

A number of respondents report relatively high levels of protection for the wider building as a whole, but a failure to address the specialist needs of archive storage. Several repositories try to mitigate these risks by having a disaster plan in place. Some have regular visits from the emergency services (especially the fire brigade) to familiarise themselves with the premises and to check on any alterations to the accommodation or storage.

Storage Conditions

Very few specialist repositories have storage which complies with BS 5454:2000 and those that do have often relied on external funding to enable the work to be carried out. One response to the question about the prospects of upgrading facilities to BS 5454:2000 was '*No chance*'. This comment reflects reality for many of those who took part in the survey. However the standard remains one which can be aspired to and every repository must aim to get as close as possible to it. 41% of respondents assess storage conditions in their repositories as above average, and 12% below average.

Unfortunately, judging from the returns, this will remain only an ideal for many repositories. One school archive describes its location as an attic above a chemistry laboratory, with no lift or fire escape. The environmental conditions are poor, and '*rain is blown under the roof tiles in windy weather and runs down walls*'. This highlights the problem of being housed in a building that is also used for other purposes by the parent organisation, where archive storage is necessarily a secondary consideration.

Another perennial problem is lack of space, which frequently leads to compromises. It is clear from the returns that most archivists seek to compensate for poor environmental conditions and accommodation by providing good quality archival boxing and packaging, and by having a preservation policy in place.

Levels of environmental control vary across the span of specialist repositories. Very few have sufficient environmental controls to achieve the figures set out in BS 5454 for temperature and relative humidity. This is an area where high levels of investment are required, and is in marked contrast to local authority

repositories in England, a greater proportion of which meet the recommended conditions. A common cry from respondents is that the *'installation of air conditioning is considered too expensive'* and another points out that it is *'not seen as a priority by the Company. Installation of air conditioning too costly. Temperature fluctuations and high humidity in the summer are the main problems'*. Investment in the structure of the building to ensure high thermal inertia is now more frequently seen as an alternative to the installation of air conditioning. The HMC has recently approved York Minster Archives, which thus becomes the first cathedral archive to achieve HMC recognition by meeting its *Standard for Record Repositories* (2nd edition, 1997). Special mention was made of the innovative approach to the construction of the storage accommodation, which, without the use of air conditioning, has been successful in maintaining stable environmental conditions within the limits recommended in BS 5454:2000.

Special Media

The majority of repositories surveyed hold few film, video or sound recordings, so the provision of the special environment they require is not a high priority, especially where the main storage conditions are below standard. The exceptions are those repositories where local projects have created records on specialist media (one reports *'There is a small section of cinefilm, video and audio tapes. This is to be augmented by allocating funds for a film and sound archive and possible oral history project.'*) and the specialised film and sound archives themselves. It is encouraging to note that the latter are being used for the deposit of special media by other repositories. Their expertise and specialist facilities provide a valuable service for repositories across the country and continuing financial support for them is both essential and cost-effective.

Accrual Space

The high percentage of specialist repositories with little or no expansion space is a major cause for concern. Shortage of accrual space is highlighted by many respondents. 19% are already full. Pressure from the growth of the parent institution's records is often exacerbated by requests from other bodies to deposit related archival materials. Very few repositories have static holdings and in the vast majority there will continue to be a need for additional storage space. The lack of it is tackled in a variety of ways, among them the appraisal and systematic weeding before accessioning and the careful de-accessioning of non-core materials.

A relatively small number of repositories (13%) have outstores. Among those which do the percentage of records held off-site varies between 3% and 95%. Where outstores are used, the level of security and environmental control is lower than on the main site and some archivists express reservations about their efficiency. Whether on- or off-site, the provision of suitable storage accommodation for expanding archival collections, matching the recommendations of BS 5454:2000, is essential.

Staff Accommodation

21% of the repositories surveyed regard their staff accommodation as below average. The response *'Archive is a single room comprising store, office and reader space. This has a compromising impact on each function'* is typical of many. Inadequate staffing levels are frequently cited as the principle obstacle to the provision of service, yet lack of staff accommodation can prevent repositories from applying for project funding when it becomes available. On the other hand, archive staff working within much larger institutions comment on the advantages this brings in the form of above average facilities such as canteens and fitness rooms.

Conclusion

Although many repositories have tentative plans to improve their buildings, and have often called specialists in for advice, implementation depends on funding, which is seldom available within the parent organisation. There are exceptions to this general rule – among them, the Post Office Heritage Services site which has recently been refurbished with internal funding; while the Royal Naval Museum was redeveloped with Heritage Lottery funding in 1997 and 1998. Several of the organisations that declined to participate in the survey were in the process of moving to new and better premises.

- **Investment in high quality accommodation is the key to the preservation of archives and to the provision of access for future generations.**
- **A greater emphasis needs to be placed on funding appropriate levels of security and promoting disaster control planning.**
- **Incentives for investment in measures to prevent and detect fire and flood are required.**
- **Funding for specialist repositories dedicated to the care of special media should be maintained.**

4.2 PUBLIC ACCESS AND SERVICES

Introduction

Many specialist repositories were established to provide records management and archives services to their parent organisations. Public access is necessarily a secondary consideration. On average, business archives surveyed make least provision in this area and museums and galleries most. One notable exception is HSBC which has made material available to researchers since the 1940s. Another is the Post Office, where the Heritage

Services deal with a large number of genealogical enquiries. Many respondents would like to increase access, but are prevented by inadequate resources. Many private organisations, under no obligation to provide a public service, nevertheless choose to do so, but understandably do not regard its enhancement as a priority. Staffing as well as funding levels can impact adversely on public access, as many repositories have only a single or part-time member of staff, who frequently also has library or museum curatorial duties or records management responsibilities.

Facilities for searchers

Emphasis in the public sector on public access has led to the development of searchroom facilities; but this is not the case in all specialist repositories. In half the repositories surveyed searchers share office space with staff, while in others, mainly libraries and museums, they use facilities provided in the parent institution. This lack of facilities inhibits personal visits, though, where they do take place, the researcher often benefits from one-to-one attention. *'The company does not have a policy of encouraging readers to visit the archive as it is mainly used as an in-house resource...however I am able to provide a very personal and good service to the small number of researchers who visit.'* Where search rooms exist they tend to have inappropriate layouts and insufficient security, the result of having been adapted from areas designed for other uses. Most have equipment such as book rests and weights to encourage proper handling of documents, but cloakrooms and lockers, standard in the public sector, are rarely available in private repositories. There are exceptions to this generally poor provision. For example, BP Amoco archive, sharing facilities with the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick, has a high reputation among researchers who regard it as *'among the best business archives for ease of access, facilities and openness...in the UK'*. Some repositories compensate for the difficulty of accommodating researchers by a willingness to undertake research on their behalf.

Remote access on the Internet is seen by many as an alternative to search room provision, and several, like BT, are as a matter of policy making more and more information available on-line. The British Museum is seeking funds to scan microfilm of archival material in order to provide remote access, and the Royal National Theatre also aims to increase electronic access. Several repositories, unable to provide for visitors, make their material available by depositing microform copies in public institutions, by publishing catalogues, or, increasingly, by mounting finding aids on the Web.

Public facilities

The majority of specialist repositories are not designed for public access and so provide little by way of public facilities. Many respondents noted in particular that the buildings they occupy are not adapted for disabled access.

Service delivery

In some specialist repositories documents can be ordered in advance of a visit. 49% have target times for the delivery of documents to readers, some of them differentiating between internal and external users. 40% reported that the number of enquiries and or visitors is rising, and the seating available for the consultation of original materials and of microforms is not sufficient to meet an increase in demand. Almost all provide facilities for photocopying; where none is provided it is the result of a policy decision to reduce the risks of damage. Opening hours reflect the nature of the repository, with those, like libraries and museums where public access is a fundamental part of their remit, having the longest. Most provide weekday access only; only seven are open in the evenings and thirteen at weekends. One repository is open on Sundays.

Conclusion

- **The considerable investment of many private organisations in the provision of public access should be more widely recognised and applauded.**
- **Financial incentives should be maintained and developed to ensure continuing public access to private archives.**
- **Private organisations which provide public services should be eligible for grants to improve them.**

4.3 PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION

Introduction

The development of preservation and conservation policies is an essential element in ensuring the long-term accessibility of archives. The implementation of preservation measures helps to protect them from the deterioration and damage associated with handling and the passage of time. Skilled conservators with specialist equipment and facilities are needed if the essential work of cleaning and repairing damaged materials is to be carried out. The holdings of the majority of specialist repositories are too small to make the provision of specialist conservation workshops an appropriate use of resources and too little used to make it necessary. For many the use of external professional conservators is an entirely satisfactory and more cost-effective alternative. Several of the recently published regional archive strategies identify the need to consider the development of regional conservation facilities.

Preservation policy

The survey asked for information about the existence of disaster control plans, the use of surrogates to prevent wear and tear of original documents, training in preservation issues, clearly articulated preservation policies and the

implementation of conservation surveys. The importance of these is widely accepted, but in the majority of repositories inadequate levels of staffing and funding make it impossible to follow best practice. The use of microform or digital surrogates is uncommon, though several repositories ensure that master negatives of microfilms and computer tapes are stored off-site. Although the overall impression is one of very little provision, the picture is not an entirely gloomy one. Progressive and innovative projects, some exploiting digital technology, have been undertaken by a number of repositories. Others have taken steps to implement professional standards and bench marks in this area: the Royal Botanical Gardens is seeking outside funding to develop a mechanism for annual reviews of its preservation policies.

Archives in need of conservation treatment

Some of the national institutions surveyed have excellent in-house facilities, as befits their status, and a few others rate their conservation facilities as excellent for the size of their holdings. However for most smaller repositories it is more appropriate to make use of the services of external conservators. Some send work to local authority conservation workshops. One repository benefits from having an assistant archivist who is also a qualified conservator. Another can call on the services of a paper conservator for three months every year. One or two are able to make use of seconded staff to undertake long-term projects, as the Parliamentary Archives has arranged with the British Library. These are, however, the exceptions. Although a number of respondents are able to secure funds for the treatment of specific items, lack of a designated conservation budget prevents the majority from implementing systematic conservation programmes. Of the repositories surveyed, 19% have in-house facilities, 45% have a conservation budget to cover expenditure on external conservation work, while many look to securing one-off funding when specific problems arise.

Conclusion

- **An investment in programmes of producing surrogates would help both to ensure long-term preservation and to increase public access.**
- **A pooling of resources at regional level or within regions could establish shared conservation facilities in areas where none are available.**

4.4 FINDING AIDS

Introduction

Archives remain inaccessible until they are arranged and listed and the resulting finding aids made widely available. This process, traditionally called cataloguing, is an essential pre-requisite for access, but has, ironically but inevitably, taken second place to satisfying the increasing demands for access

from current users. When catalogues are produced manually a further process of indexing by person, place and subject provides the ultimate tool to guide users to collections or individual items specifically relevant to their research. With the advent of word processing and database packages, indexing has become an integral part of the cataloguing process.

Cataloguing

The majority of repositories surveyed have backlogs of uncatalogued material. For most this is an inherited backlog, which has inexorably increased in recent years. Many have to make use of inadequate lists prepared many years ago. A few have only recently been established as archive services within their parent institutions and face very large accumulations of totally unprocessed records. Some respondents have undertaken surveys of uncatalogued materials and have schedules in place assigning priority to holdings likely to be of the greatest interest to current users. Allocating sufficient time on limited staffing to make significant inroads even into priority materials is, however, a perennial and widespread problem. Some repositories have no prospect of processing accessions beyond the first stage of appraising them; more only have box lists (that is rudimentary lists summarising the contents of holdings at box level).

One or two repositories have begun to tackle backlogs systematically. For example, the Royal Academy of Arts plans to complete an on-line catalogue by 2006. Others have been able, on a less ambitious scale, to take advantage of outside funding opportunities to recruit archivists on short-term contracts dedicated to cataloguing a part at least of the accumulated backlogs.

Indexing

The enquiry in the survey about indexing revealed wide variations. Those repositories which have introduced automated cataloguing can now provide keyword searching as part of the package. Very few repositories have comprehensive indexes, and many still rely on card indexes available only in-house, and covering only part of their holdings.

Use of Information & Communications Technology

Although computer software is increasingly used in specialist repositories, those on limited budgets cannot afford to purchase it. 14% of respondents use software (such as CALM 2000 or CAIRS) specifically designed for the management and cataloguing of archives, but more rely on off-the-shelf word processing and database packages. Typescript lists and handwritten index cards are still the norm in many repositories. Many of those who have introduced automation for current cataloguing have yet to tackle the not insignificant problems of editing earlier non-standard manual catalogues to conform to the minimum standards (ISAD(G)) necessary for conversion on-line.

General finding aids

Some repositories have produced general guides to their holdings or introductory information leaflets, but few of these are either comprehensive or up to date. Regular production of lists of accessions or annual reports for public use is uncommon, though many provide them for use within their parent institution.

Conclusion

All archivists recognise the fundamental importance of the production of catalogues, both as the means of managing the archives in their care and as resource discovery tools. Specialist repositories hold a significant proportion of the country's archival heritage, but the majority lack the resources of staff and funding to make them available through on-line catalogues.

- **Funding opportunities need to be provided to enable more specialist repositories both to reduce the accumulation of unprocessed materials and to convert existing catalogues into electronic format.**

4.5 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Introduction

Once regarded as an area of specialist knowledge, Information and Communications Technology has rapidly come to play a vital role in the care and exploitation of archives. For the professional archivist it provides a management tool and a means of producing and distributing not only finding aids but also surrogates of the documents themselves in digitised form. ICT has the potential to revolutionise access to archives, while at the same time making a major contribution to their preservation.

General strategy

Understandably the general ICT strategy of the parent organisation usually shapes, for good or ill, the use of ICT in the archive. Very few repositories report having their own archival ICT strategy in place. Some, especially those which are part of a business, a library or a museum, have access to and make full use of the excellent facilities of their parent body. It is, however, clear from the returns that some struggle to obtain such facilities and are thus effectively excluded from developments in the sector as a whole. It can be difficult to persuade parent organisations that investment in specialist archival systems is worthwhile. One reported '*It has taken over one year and the cost of £20K to get approval for the purchase of CALM from our IT department – a delay which has set us back considerably.*' While others often find themselves struggling to adapt inappropriate software to archive use, with mixed and often discouraging results.

Use of ICT

The larger specialist repositories make increasing use of ICT to manage cataloguing backlogs, to provide user information and to arrange the production of documents in the search room; but they are the exception. The majority of archivists, especially those working alone, find that the small scale of their operation is reckoned to rule out the introduction of expensive ICT applications. While ICT has had a considerable impact on the production of resource discovery tools, 26% of repositories regard their general ICT provision as below average.

The use of digitisation is spreading rapidly. One repository reported that its parent institution *'is prepared to fund digitisation programmes and sees this as important in increasing accessibility'*. Others look to external funds to achieve the same benefits: *'One project for which the staff have high hopes is the scanning of all the microfilm of the archives (covering most of the main classes) for remote access by computer in the UK and abroad, together with class lists and indexes. Funds are being actively sought.'* Digitisation is seen as particularly useful when, as is increasingly the case, images can be incorporated as an integral part of the on-line finding aids. For most repositories lack of funds for equipment and for training in its use, accompanied by inadequate staffing levels, remains the chief obstacle to progress. A number of repositories, despite having access to imaging technology, do not have the resources to use it to its full potential.

Internet

Although the overall picture of ICT provision in specialist repositories appears poor, 60% have a presence on the World Wide Web and a similar number has access to electronic mail. Details of a high proportion of the specialist repositories surveyed (whether or not they have a web presence) are available on-line through the electronic gateway to British archives (ARCHON) maintained by the Historical Manuscripts Commission and over fifty are listed in the associated A-Z of Business Repositories. Many have their own web site or feature in that of their parent organisation. These are being increasingly used to raise awareness of the archives and to publicise their services both internally and externally. The News International Record Office regularly provides archive material for inclusion in The Times Online, for comparison with current events. More and more information 'leaflets' and other promotional material are being published on the Internet. One repository reported a drop in the number of researchers who visit in person as a result of more material being made available on-line. However many see the making available of finding aids on-line as counter-productive unless accompanied by increased facilities in-house. One reported that they want *'an increased presence on the web to promote the archive – but this must be in line with the level of service we are able to supply due to staffing levels'*.

The relatively small number of repositories without staff access to the Internet are being encouraged to take advantage of the extension of Resource's 'Free modems for museums' scheme to archive repositories based in not-for-profit organisations with publicly accessible holdings.

Conclusion

- **The public benefit of increased access to the archives of specialist repositories should be recognised in the provision of funding opportunities for the automation of their finding aids in association with the digitisation of selected holdings.**

4.6 ELECTRONIC ARCHIVES

Introduction

In stark contrast to the increasing application of Information and Communication Technology to the management and care of paper archives, awareness of the need to develop mechanisms and strategies for the preservation of records created electronically is woefully lacking. Unless the problems are tackled and solutions found and implemented, records 'born digital' will be lost to future generations.

Use of electronic records

One comment that '*the parent body shows no interest in the future need for electronic record accessioning and storage*' sums up the problem in specialist repositories. Respondents confirm that although the majority of organisations are generating records in digital format, very few begin to understand what is needed to ensure their longevity, and to bring about their transfer from current records to historical archives. Most have no policy for dealing with electronic records.

Staff training

This bleak picture, by no means confined to the specialist repositories, is reinforced by the finding that only 13% have professional staff trained in the appraisal, selection and accessioning of electronic records. Most indicate that the need to provide such training 'in the next few years' is recognised, but that plans for funding this major transformation are vague in the extreme.

Storage of electronic archives

The special facilities required for the storage of electronic archives in line with the *British Standard for storage transportation and maintenance of media for use in data processing and information storage* (BS 4783:1988) are virtually non-existent. Plans to provide such storage are minimal, despite the perceived need for them. Checking of archives in their current medium and periodic transfer to new software do not take place, although a few repositories have begun, on their own initiative and without support from their parent body, to maintain back-up copies. No search rooms have facilities for accessing

electronic archives and provision for remote access is only beginning to be considered. The impact of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts is largely unrecognised.

Conclusion

- **In this, as in other parts of the archive sector, action is required to raise awareness of the needs of electronic records, to make provision for their preservation and accessibility and to train staff in their proper management.**

4.7 STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

In marked contrast to the 1998 survey of English local authority archive services (p. 53), where ‘many chief archivists consider the existing framework to be largely sufficient for the training of their staff’, many archivists in specialist repositories find it difficult to attend courses. Those based in the national institutions and in larger heritage organisations benefit from specialised in-house training and report that their employers give priority to staff development; but the majority, often working as lone archivists, sometimes only part-time, find it almost impossible to take time away from their repositories.

A heartening number of archivists nevertheless take advantage of the many courses provided by the Society of Archivists, in their own time and at their own expense. Self-help has also prompted the development in recent times of specialist interest groups, among them groups for Archivists in Independent Television, Charity Archivists and Records Managers, Historic Houses Archivists, Religious Archivists and Scientific Archivists and the Business Records Group of the Society of Archivists. The network of formal and informal support, training and advice provided by these groups is clearly invaluable to their members. The contacts they provide for archivists working in isolation is particularly important in a profession in process of adapting traditional skills to the electronic age.

Volunteers play a major role in some specialist repositories. Several returns also acknowledge their sterling work in preserving records, and in establishing and maintaining service while preparing the ground for the appointment of professionally trained staff. A recurring comment in the returns was that the ability to attend training courses is, like so many other aspects of work in specialist repositories, adversely affected by inadequate staffing levels. The underfunding of core activities is a concern throughout the archive sector, but the effects of under-staffing are particularly apparent in the smaller units which predominate among specialist repositories.

Conclusion

- **The work of special interest groups of archivists should be encouraged within the profession.**
- **Opportunities for professional development geared to archivists in small specialist repositories should be provided by the Society of Archivists.**
- **Volunteer and part-time staff should be encouraged to participate in training courses.**
- **Training in the management and preservation of electronic records is urgently required.**

4.8 CROSS-DOMAIN AND CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION

Introduction

Cross-domain working – between archives, museums and libraries – is being encouraged by Resource and other agencies, as a means of sharing best practice and expertise and of strengthening the heritage sector as a whole.

Cross-sectoral working

The returns reported many examples of co-operation and liaison between specialist repositories and local authority or higher education archives, for the most part aiming at improving service to users, coordinating collection development policies and avoiding duplication of effort. The most common practice was making microform copies more widely available than the originals. For example, copies of the Cecil papers at Hatfield House are housed in the British Library, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office, and the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC; copies of Longleat material are available at the British Library, the Bodleian Library and Cambridge University Library.

Transfers of original materials have been made when industries are privatised or businesses demerged. For example, the Post Office transferred telecommunications material to BT, Girobank material to Alliance & Leicester and films to the National Film & Television Archive and to the Imperial War Museum. Films in the Royal Naval Museum have been copied on to video by the Wessex Film & Sound Archive for use at the Museum and the originals are now cared for at the W.F. & S.A. Other specialist repositories share facilities and resources, St. Bartholomew's Hospital has a link with the web-site of the London Museums of Health and Medicine, while the Royal Free Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital have co-operative programmes.

Cross-domain working

Many specialist archive repositories are based in libraries or museums and thus ideally placed to make good use of opportunities for cross-domain cooperation, and to benefit from best practice in other areas of professional expertise. The Royal Academy of Arts is a good example of this, where the archive is part of an integrated service for books, paintings, sculpture and photographs.

Conclusion

Several specialist repositories are already involved in initiatives like the Access to Archives (A2A) national retrospective catalogue conversion project. Further co-operation will be developed through the Regional Archive Councils, the Regional Cultural Consortia, and the Single Regional Agencies and extend beyond libraries and museums to include English Heritage and the Arts Councils.

- **All these emerging agencies should be encouraged to involve specialist repositories in their developing strategies.**