



Archiving disaster support group records

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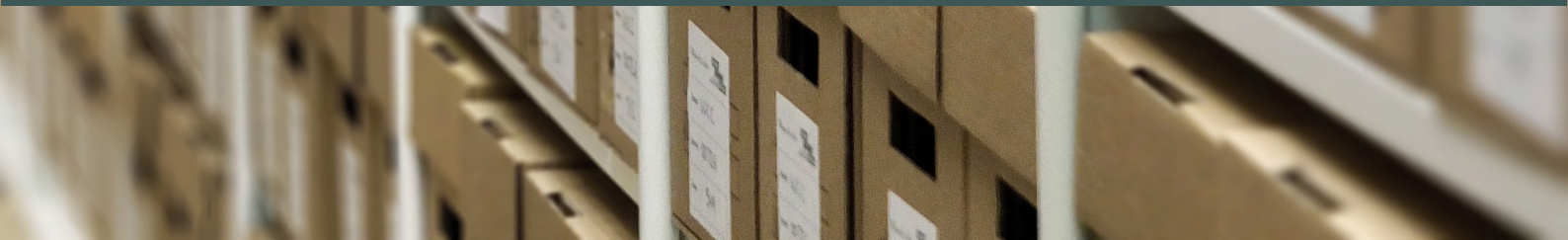


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Archiving disaster support group records: a guide for support groups and professionals

February 2023



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Introduction

Individuals affected by disaster often instinctively collect information and artefacts about the tragedy they have experienced. Some bereaved family members and survivors also join with others affected by the same or similar incidents go on to form support groups which in turn generate and organisational documents and records. These may include, for example, newspaper articles, video accounts, media reports, photographs, memorial or anniversary services sheets, campaign records and/or correspondence with politicians and others.

It is not unusual for individuals and support groups to continue to collect and retain such materials over time about the tragedy and connected events over time. The materials often hold huge personal and emotional, significance to their owners. The archives that develop can also become 'sacred' in the sense of holding huge personal and emotional, significance to their owners. They are often carefully gathered and stored and treated with special respect.

All these records and archives help to tell different stories – personal, organisational and societal. They can also be of social, historical, cultural and political interest, not only for those first owning and retaining them, but also to cultural, heritage and civic organisations interested in acquiring them. Such organisations face often a number of challenges, including building trust with the support group, defining the scope of a possible archive, and developing a sensitive practice of engaging with the group throughout the process.

This guide is the outcome of a relevant project. From January to August 2022, a team of collective trauma and heritage consultants and academic researchers worked with members of the September 11 UK Families Support Group (S11UKFSG) in understanding and articulating the motivations, aims, value, use and challenges of the formation of an archive of S11UKFSG's work. The guide is based on this experience and consists of two parts.

Part one provides advice for disaster support groups who are looking to deposit their archive with a public institution. By 'disaster support group' we mean a group of people affected by the same disaster or an umbrella group across disasters who support each other by sharing information, giving each other emotional and practical support and/or by focusing on issues important to them. The group can include bereaved family members, survivors and their families and others affected by the disaster. Disasters are major emergencies or collective trauma events occurring at a single place/time or impacting on a community or group of people over time. This can include long term or even generational trauma related to an incident or series of events.

Part two is aimed at archivists, museum and heritage professionals and academic researchers who are considering embarking on a collaborative journey of acquiring an archive related to a disaster or traumatic event.

This guide is a work in progress. Conversations are ongoing and further consultation is planned. The project team welcome feedback and suggestions for additional content you would find helpful.

Please contact Kostas Arvanitis at kostas.arvanitis@manchester.ac.uk if you'd like to discuss this work further.

Background to this guide/project

The September 11 UK Families Support Group was founded in 2002 by and for the UK families whose loved ones were lost in the terrorist attacks in the USA on September 11, 2001. The organisation's aim is to provide a forum for the mutual support of the UK 9/11 families.

In September 2021, and prompted by the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and relevant ongoing discussions among S11UFSG members, Jelena Watkins (Trustee of S11UKFSG and member of the Project's team) initiated a discussion with members of the Project team about the formation of an archive of the Group's history and activity. The group's archive features both individual and collective records, consisting of documents related to the formation and running of the group as well as cuttings, invitations, letters, documents and minutes, among others, regarding memorials and events.

This led to a Social Responsibility grant by the University of Manchester, which aimed to:

- Understand the motivations, aims, benefits and challenges of the formation, relevance, value, and use of personal, family, and community archives around traumatic events.
- Explore models of self- and group management of such archives, assist individuals and communities plan for such work, and identify the scope of cultural professional and psychological support that this work might require.
- Produce relevant guidance for key stakeholders including: those directly affected by disaster (bereaved people, survivors, associations and communities) and training material for professionals working with such groups (e.g. trauma therapists, disaster managers, and museum professionals and archivists).

This guide is based on the experiences and learnings from engaging with members of the S11UKFSG in 2022 by a project team of researchers and heritage and disaster professionals. It provides a summary of the stages of consultation and decision making that were required in advance of finding a permanent home for the archive material with a host organisation.

Project team

Dr Kostas Arvanitis, Senior Lecturer in Museology, University of Manchester. Kostas has been researching museum practices on collecting and documenting spontaneous memorials related to traumatic events, including the Manchester Arena attack (22nd May 2017).

Dr Anne Eyre and **Jelena Watkins**, Centre for Collective Trauma. Anne is a sociologist specialising in trauma and disaster management and Liaison Officer for Disaster Action; Jelena is Trustee of S11UKFSG and also psychotherapist specialising in disaster trauma.

Dr Andy Hardman, Belle Vue Productions. Andy is an academic (University of Manchester) and filmmaker. His company, Belle Vue Productions is a film and creative research company with experience in producing films of traumatic events.

Jen Kavanagh, independent curator and oral historian. Jen specialises in contemporary and community collecting and has delivered projects related to the July 7 2005 London bombings.

Examples of disaster support groups

The following are UK examples illustrating different types of disaster support groups. They have been selected to highlight the variations in type of 'disaster' (e.g. single/multiple incidents, and collective trauma events across time) and memberships (bereaved, survivors, mixed).

September 11 UK Families Support Group

An incident specific family association founded and made up of bereaved family members in the UK affected by the September 11 2001 terror attacks.

Disaster Action

A charity formed by and for survivors and bereaved people from UK and overseas disasters. Its members have personal experience of disasters, including rail, air and maritime as well as natural disasters and terrorist attacks in the UK and overseas.

FACK (Families against Corporate Killing)

Launched in 2006 by families of those killed by work. FACK offers information, support and advocacy to families bereaved through work-related death related to negligent employers.

Hillsborough Survivors Support Alliance

A support group formed by survivors of the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium Disaster to provide mutual support and friendship for all those who continue to suffer from their experiences of the tragedy and since.

Factor 8

A non-profit organisation wholly comprised of the victims and families impacted by the Contaminated Blood Scandal in the UK from the 1970s onwards.

MACSAS (Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors)

A support group for women and men from Christian backgrounds who have been sexually abused by Ministers or Clergy, as children or as adults.

COVID-19 Bereaved Families for Justice

A group of over 6000 people in the UK personally bereaved by Covid-19 campaigning for lessons to be learned in order to save lives of those impacted by current and future pandemics.

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Part 1: for disaster support groups and family associations

Why archiving may be a consideration for you

- **Disaster support groups and family associations may accumulate materials of historical and other significance**
- **You may wish to retain, preserve and hand material for future generations**
- **It can be hard knowing what to do or where to start**

Your group or family association may have accumulated significant materials over the years, which are likely to hold both personal and collective value for you. As disasters are public events that punctuate the timeline of a community or a nation, your materials also hold historical value in addition to the value for your group and future generations. An interest in archiving becomes apparent with significant anniversaries of the disaster, such as the 20th or 30th as there tends to be an awareness of a change of generations and a desire to preserve the legacy of the group's work. There can be a greater appreciation of the historical aspects of the material before it is lost or forgotten.

Archiving may come up as a topic of discussion time and time again in the group's ongoing work, mainly as you as members may have a general awareness of the need to preserve your materials. At the same time, you may also be unsure what to do about what it entails, how to separate out the personal from group elements and how to start identifying and addressing the public, communal, and national importance of the material.

Your 'boxes' may contain your correspondence, newsletters, notes of important events such as commemorative programmes, discussions around permanent memorials, records of legal processes, meetings with VIPs and so on. You may have a wish that either future generations in your and others' families will be able to retain materials and/or that other people interested in disasters (for example researchers, policy makers, writers or artists) may have access to these materials, for example so that they may share your stories and/or that lessons from your experiences are learnt for the future.

Understanding the emotional significance

- **Dealing with disaster-related materials can be a deeply emotional and symbolic experience**
- **Working with these materials –whether personally or professionally – requires patience, sensitivity and compassion**
- **Emotional preparation and support are important for these endeavours**

Records, documents and objects associated with disaster are more than physical things;

they are imbued with deep personal and symbolic significance. This is why thinking and taking about them, handling them sharing them with others and discussing what may happen to them is sensitive and requires great emotional sensitivity.

Archivists, museum professionals, and other cultural practitioners themselves are also learning how important it is to appreciate the sensitivity around disaster-related information and materials and to approach this work with empathy, respect and [emotional support](#) – both for those they work with, themselves and other staff.

Being asked or choosing to engage with personally sensitive and traumatising content around our own disaster is always emotional. Think about how you tend to handle your own material and what feelings, for example, opening boxes, reading letters and thinking about saying ‘goodbye’ to certain materials literally or symbolically does or might evoke for you.

You may find yourself putting the task of thinking about archiving off for a long time. Even when we are familiar with information and materials revisiting them can feel overwhelming and sometimes, we may not feel able to do so without additional emotional or peer support.

Be aware that this is a difficult task and try to be patient and compassionate towards yourself and your fellow group members as you try to sort your material. Sometimes it is helpful to set aside a short time slot for the archiving work and to have someone after that timeslot to ‘debrief’ with- what you found, what was evoked for you etc. Ideally it would be someone who ‘gets it’- who is familiar with the disaster, the way you have been affected and your involvement in the group activities in the years afterwards.

Who may be interested in your collection?

- **Think about who may be interested in your collection**
- **There may be a range of potential audiences**
- **Finding a home may not always be possible and may take time**

When it comes to the question of who would be interested in your archive, you may find it helpful to have the ‘end user’ in mind: who would be the person seeking to find your information about you and your disaster in the near future and further down a timeline? You may decide that the answer includes future researchers, academics, emergency professionals, politicians, psychotherapists, social workers etc. Having these potential audiences in mind may help you begin to think about and discuss possibilities in relation to existing archives and libraries as places for exploring depositing your materials.

Possible interested parties might include:

- **Family members**, whom you may wish to pass personal material on to as part of your family records for future generations. If so, you may also wish to discuss your thoughts with family members and consider what their wishes and preferences might be too.

- **A particular external group, organisation or community**, connected to the disaster and as a contribution to recording its local or national history and cultural heritage (e.g. based on geography, organisation, social group or as an educational/research setting). Again, conversations with local historians and/or community reps would be useful to gauge interest and opportunities.

- **A museum, library, archive or related cultural/heritage organisation**. While museums tend to collect 'things', archives are usually more about collecting documents and papers. Each organisation will most likely have a collecting or acquisition policy, which outlines what it acquires, why and how. This policy would directly relate to the organisation's mission statement. When considering who to approach to start a conversation about acquisition of your materials, you might find useful familiarising yourself with possible organisation's mission statements (which would be normally available on their website).

Also, having a look at what other collections they have, what exhibitions (if relevant) they do, and who they have worked with would contribute towards understanding whether this organisation might be a suitable host for your archive. The above applies if you are approached by a relevant organisation. You might find that there are not many cultural/heritage organisations that acquire disaster-related archival documents and/or collections of objects. It might, also, be the case that issues of funding, capacity and storage prevent organisations from adding to their collection. So, finding a home for your archive might take time and you should manage your own and others' expectations.

Example: Lending my Hillsborough archive to an exhibition

by Anne Eyre

I am a survivor of the [Hillsborough Stadium Disaster](#), 1989. I was approached by the curator of an exhibition on football and culture who asked to feature some of my Hillsborough materials. This included my ticket for the football match, the matchday programme, my Liverpool FC scarf, and many newspaper articles about the tragedy, aftermath and community support. The curator was very respectful and understood the sensitivity of my speaking about, let alone going through and then deciding to lend my materials.

Based on my experience this is what helped me:

- Getting to know the curator through Zoom calls and conversations (rather than just emails and just responding to information requests). I felt he really respected me and my experiences and this made it easier to trust that the exhibition would take care of my stuff.
- Going through my boxes of memories and materials with a purpose. Although the main purpose was for the exhibition it gave me a reason to review my collection more broadly – reflecting on what I have collected and kept, why, and what it all means for my past, present and future identity.
- Talking through and being in control over decisions such about what I may wish to share in the display, how it would be used and what messages it would be used to convey in the exhibition.
- Participating in the development of the exhibition's focus and place of my story within it. Originally, I was asked for a few pieces but through conversation the curator became more interested in expanding on my display and we built a narrative together. This opportunity was very empowering and validating.
- Being able and feeling comfortable with asking basic questions like 'what is a vitrine?' and 'what is the difference between a curator, an archivist' (I just called them all 'exhibitionists!')
- Feeling valued and being told my contribution was not 'just a small part' (as I once suggested) but a significant contribution, both for its content and emotion. The curator and exhibition team also demonstrated this in the way they treated me; for example I was given a fee and was invited as a guest at the exhibition's opening.
- Having a say in what other materials I felt comfortable/uncomfortable about featuring in the wider exhibition (e.g. they agreed not to use graphic images from the disaster, and to give accurate facts about what happened rather than relying on some historical myths).
- Being given helpful guidance on how to prepare my material for transport and storage (I was sent special envelopes, document wallets and archiving boxes), and knowing that the exhibition space was safe, secure and insured.
- Knowing how long my materials would be away from me for and what would happen to them at every stage of them being away from me.
- The whole process has helped me think about what I may ultimately do with my materials, and who I may pass them on to in the future. Knowing I have the ability to get through separation from the materials helps a lot with the emotional process of this journey.

What heritage organisations do and how they may help you

- Organisations interested in 'heritage' might be interested in your materials
- It may depend on their collection policies and practices
- A good first step may be to speak with an archivist or museum professional in a relevant organisation

Heritage organisations, including Archives, Libraries, Museums and Art Galleries, collect, document, preserve and engage the public with collections of objects and documents. Most of these organisations are managed by local authorities. Archivists, museum curators, and other professionals work in or with such organisations. Heritage organisations have in recent years put more emphasis in contemporary and community-based collecting. This means that they are interested in material that relates to experiences of local communities, including experiences around disaster or other traumatic events. For example, several Museums and Archives have embarked since 2020 on collecting people's experiences of COVID-19.

Example: Wealdstone Rail Crash – 70 Years On

In Oct/Nov 2022 Harrow Arts Centre displayed an exhibition commemorating 70 years since the Wealdstone Rail Crash. The disaster involved a three-train collision which killed 112 people and injured over 300 more.

As well as remembering lives lost and the heroes that took part in the initial emergency response, the exhibition included personal and community stories associated with the tragedy, its aftermath and its legacy. This included accounts and the opportunity to offer comments during the exhibition itself from the public; contributions included those from local families

and descendants of railway employees; over half of those who died were railway staff, both on the station and those travelling on the train to work that day.

The exhibition also highlighted the wider value of disaster-themed archives and exhibitions, and the opportunities they offer to cover social, cultural, organisational and political histories and perspectives. In the case the emergency response to the crash helped inspire the establishment of the paramedic service as a national and international feature of today's emergency management

A good first step is to speak with an archivist or museum professional in a relevant organisation. Reach out to your local library or museum to have a discussion with them about a possible host for your archive. If you are not sure about who to contact, you might find easier to talk to your local authority first, who should be able to arrange contact for you. You could also approach a local university, especially if you have a contact there. Many university researchers work closely with local museums and archives and not only they can help in putting you in touch with a relevant heritage organisation, but also can be a useful partner throughout the process. In the initial stages, heritage organisations,

local authorities or university researchers will wish to know about your group/association, its history and what materials you have in terms of content, type, format, amount and ownership.

An example of the type of information that may be requested can be seen in part 2 of this guide.

As you proceed to work with them, they will also wish to know your views about where you would like the materials to be ultimately stored and hosted. This is something you may not be clear about at the start or even know what the options are. This is understandable and to be expected. The process of discussing with your group members and the heritage professionals will help you understand and explore options and possibilities.

A heritage professional should be able to explain to you from their side what kinds of collections exist, how archives and museums operate and practical options in terms of organisations that may be interested in hosting materials. They should be able to explain what the requirements for depositing materials with an archive involves, how the process of depositing with a heritage organisation might work and what the implications would be in terms of timings and next steps.

Much of process that follows is dependent on the policies and practices of the particular host organisation. So, the key next step is identifying a host organisation and discussing with them the process of depositing the archive with them.

Advice and suggestions for embarking on this journey

- **Here we summarise practical advice to help you**
- **Suggestions include starting conversations, being consultative and taking your time**
- **Tips on 'opening the boxes' are offered to highlight key considerations**

1. **Getting started.** Before you engage in the process of approaching or talking with a heritage professional you will need to have discussions within your group or association about your general wishes and feelings around the material you have and what might happen to and with them. Once there is agreement on the general desire to look into archiving possibilities you are ready to approach a heritage professional/organisation and begin conversations. In the early stages, or once discussions develop, you may find that nominating a lead representative or spokesperson as liaison person within and between you as a group and external individuals and bodies as you proceed with the project over time is helpful for you.
2. **Developing a good relationship with heritage professionals** is very important. Introductory meetings are an essential starting point. Meeting heritage professionals for the first time and others who may be part of a project or team interested in exploring archiving with you is a key stage that requires thoughtful planning and the right environment. For both you,

your group and them making time to get to know each other and the project team leading the archiving process is critical. Meetings where everyone can introduce themselves and begin to ask questions or flag concerns is an important starting point. Providing a way for members of your group to ask follow-up questions, including on a one-to-one level and in a safe and confidential environment, will help to continue to build trust. You may wish to ask the heritage professionals to collect and share contact details in their team and will wish to be clear as to what everyone's role in the team and project is from the beginning. Building a trusting relationship with the professionals may take time and be slowly built over several meetings.

- 3. Acknowledge the sensitivity of subject matter.** Always have empathy, understanding and respect as the starting point for any conversations and decisions around disaster-related material. This is likely to be a given amongst members of your group or association, but others may need informing or reminding of this. Professionals may have varying levels of knowledge and experience with working with such sensitive materials and information as disaster-related records. While heritage professionals are the experts in relation to the procedural side of this work, you are the experts in understanding the emotional importance and value of your materials and having you at the heart should be the starting point for any discussions and processes.
- 4. Let everyone be heard and have their say.** Differences of opinion and strength of feeling is to be expected when working with such sensitive topics and material as your group's materials. The advantage of your group may be that you know each other and have already developed ways of working that allow for different opinions and feelings to be expressed and acknowledged. You may be able to guide the professionals on how best to have conversations and, if unsure, you may wish to consider asking or bringing in a facilitator (such as a counsellor or therapist) or heritage professional with experience in this area to advise and/or help structure emotionally supportive agendas and meeting environments for your conversations. Do ask the professional – or decide yourselves – to capture group feelings, views and wishes for when an approach to an archive is eventually made.
- 5. Understand the process and expect to ask questions.** It is quite possible that you and members of your group or association will not have worked with a heritage professional before or gone through any of the processes involved in archiving. So you may have many questions. It is important to feel you can ask any of these in order to understand the processes involved and then make informed choices and decisions. A good heritage professional will allow for and encourage you to ask any questions and flag any concerns you have at any stage. You may find it helpful to prepare for meetings by listing any questions or concerns you have and taking them to the meeting. Giving careful thought to who you might wish to be a minute-keeper or notetaker is helpful too.
- 6. Make sure you feel comfortable and trust those involved in dealing with your collection.** A good relationship between owners of material and heritage organisations really matters. Discussions around disaster-related content and subject matter is especially sensitive and likely to be experienced as a deeply personal process for you and those in your group/association. Taking time and feeling able to be open and honest with each other about trust and other feelings is an important part of any discussions around materials and archiving.

- 7. Take your time and do not rush this.** Making decisions around personal materials and disaster archives takes time. For you this may be because of the sensitivity and significance of your materials and their meaning, so making decisions should not be rushed and together you should only proceed when ready. It will be natural to have mixed feelings and feel ambiguous about decisions such as keeping materials and letting them go, and there may be differences within families as well as within and across your group or association. So, building in plenty of time to listen, develop opinions and share views is key. You will wish to have a discussion with heritage professionals about what everyone's expectations are around what may happen when and build in flexibility in timelines.
- 8. Be clear about ownership.** Knowing who owns what material and what authority they have to speak for both their own and the group's shared materials is essential. Group archive material is likely to involve multiple owners, and each of these individuals may have differing views about how their material is documented, stored and accessed by a potential host organisation. Determining whether the deposit to the host organisation is by the individual owners or as a collective group will also need to be decided.
- 9. Understand your rights and who has control of materials after handover.** As well as identifying who has and owns what, you will wish to be clear about whether there are copies of materials and who has the right to retain or give them away. You will wish to understand – and so should have discussions – about what control individuals can have on the material once deposited and what individuals will be able to have control over should they change their mind.
- 10. Consider access options after handover** - for once a collection is handed over to a host organisation. Handing over personal and sensitive information to a third party can be an overwhelming task. You may wish, and there may be opportunities, to impose restrictions on access to certain parts of the archive. If so, it is necessary for this to be clarified to those you work with and documented. You may be able to choose to exclude certain documents from public access, when a deposit to a host organisation is made but restrictions to access might not be guaranteed, so do check.

Opening the boxes: tips on managing the process

Opening boxes may feel emotionally challenging, especially if you may not have opened up your collection for some time. Opening up boxes of memories is both a physical and emotional process. If you are finding the idea or experience tough, you may wish to draw on the suggested method below. It is based on the sorts of exposure methods therapists use to help people confront and deal with significant memories and emotions.

1. Plan ahead and set aside a day and time when you will plan to open your collection or memory box. It can help to plan a fairly short start and end time to this activity (e.g. 1 hour) especially first time around. It may also be preferable to do this earlier in the day rather than later, and not too soon before bedtime.
2. Think about whether you wish to open your box alone or with a family member or friend with you. What may be the pros and cons of this for you? If so, who might you wish to ask?
3. It may help to spend time mentally preparing by thinking about the task ahead and even jot down some brief thoughts – what are your expectations, hopes, fears about what you may find and feel?
4. Where will you open the box? As well as practical considerations (e.g. making yourself comfortable; laying materials out on a table versus on the floor; avoiding hazards such as food and drinks), consider privacy. How might you feel about other people interrupting the process or toughing your materials? Be guided by your feelings.
5. Take enough time. When you do go through your materials you may wish to pause and reflect about particular objects or papers (if accompanied you may wish to talk about this, if on your own you may wish to make some notes). What is the origin of a particular article or artefact? What does it mean to you now and how does looking at it now make you feel? How might you feel about sharing it with others?
6. Expect strong emotions. Some artefacts may hold more significant meaning or emotions for you than others. Some may hold mixed feelings – both happy and sad. If feeling tearful it is ok to release tears. If feeling overwhelmed it may be a signal to pause, stop, take time out and/or reschedule the activity after a break.
7. Ending an activity such as opening and going through boxes is also a significant part of the process. Plan ahead not only when you will end it (e.g. after one hour) but also what you may do afterwards (e.g. ritually closing and replacing the box back in the place where you store it). Bear in mind that the experience can be emotional tiring so you may wish to plan something relaxing or uplifting for later in the day.
8. After opening and going through your collection you may find it helpful to actively reflect and/or talk about the experience – with someone you trust and who understands the emotional significance of the exercise. Alternatively, or in addition, you may wish to revisit your pre/during notes and reflect further: how did the experience and your feelings match up to what you expected? how you now feel after opening the box and reviewing the materials? How are you feeling now about sharing your materials with others?
9. In all of this process the most important thing is to be kind to yourself. Being attentive not only to what you are doing but also how it makes you feel is the starting point for self-care in all of this.
10. Remember to always go at your own pace. Not feeling ready or deciding to pause or stop at any stage is not failure; rather it is a positive sign of self-awareness and active self-care. Congratulate yourself on this!

2

Part 2: for archive and heritage professionals

Initial communication and consultation

- **Clear and open communication is an essential component to such projects**
- **Don't assume the group or individuals understand the heritage and archive sector and its processes**
- **Be clear about your expectations and what resource you can dedicate to this work**

When working in collaboration with the owners of a private archive, clear communication and open consultation is required throughout. Assumptions that the group may have a good understanding of the heritage sector and how archiving works should be dismissed, and clear and open dialogue should be entered from the beginning to build trust.

What follows is a summary of points for consideration when starting the journey of consultation with the private archive's owners.

Knowledge about archives and how they function

Those outside of the heritage sector have very little or no knowledge of how archives operate and what their requirements for depositing material with them would involve. An introduction on how the process of depositing with an archive might work and what the implications would be is essential. Allow the group time to ask any questions and flag any concerns they might have, ensuring these are captured for when an approach to an archive is eventually made.

Building trust and a relationship with the group

Archive material that involves sensitive content and subject matter requires a sensitive approach to engaging with those who own the content. The group may have faced challenges with other outsiders who they have encountered, including those not willing to listen to their concerns and give them the time and space needed to make decisions. Building trust with the group and allowing them to lead on the pace and process of working through their archive is important, as is understanding the relationships within the group. The dynamics and differences may impact on your work with them. Finding a gatekeeper or lead representative who can communicate to the wider group is also helpful.

Concerns regarding access

Handing over personal and sensitive information to a third party can be an overwhelming task. Understanding what restrictions the group might want to put on access to certain parts of the archive, and ensuring this is documented, can help to build trust further. Establishing what these restrictions might look like before approaching a host organisation can also help to manage expectations for all involved. If restrictions to access cannot be guaranteed, then the group may choose to exclude certain documents when a deposit is made.

Ownership and control

Group archive material will likely involve multiple owners, and these individuals may have differing views on how their material is documented, stored and accessed by a potential host organisation. Having discussions about what control the individuals can have on the material once deposited will help to again manage expectations on how ownership will work going forward, and what the individuals will be able to have control over should they change their mind. Determining whether the deposit to the host organisation is by the individual owners or as a collective group will also need to be decided.

Concerns regarding sensitive nature of the content

Being asked to engage with personally sensitive and traumatising content can be an overwhelming task and one that some individuals may not feel able to do without support. Who will access this material in the long-term also needs to be considered. The process of asking people to talk about and share this type of material needs to be done carefully, with room for discussion and flexibility over the timeframe and methods used.

Open communication

Getting to know the owners of the archive and giving space for them to get to know the project team leading the archiving process, is critical. Meetings where everyone can introduce themselves and begin to ask questions or flag concerns is an important starting point. Providing a way for the group to ask follow up questions, including on a one-to-one level and in a safe and confidential environment, will help to continue to build trust. Share contact details and be clear as to what everyone's role in the team is from the beginning.

Defining the archive

- **Fitting a personal archive into the definitions and parameters of an institution won't always be easy**
- **Be considerate when asking a group to communicate what their archives consist of**

Before an approach is made to a potential host organisation, an understanding of the content and scale of the private archive needs to be determined. The process of capturing this information, however, can be very challenging for the owners of the material. A number of stages need to be worked through, each with sensitivity and care.

Defining the scope and parameters of the archive

Private archives are not necessarily created with any archive intentions or aims in mind. They will grow and evolve over time, reflecting the experiences of the groups and people they represent. They will likely contain duplicates of material, with multiple group members

collecting and documenting the same events and stages of development. They may also feature gaps in content, which the group may wish to look to fill before depositing with a host archive.

For the S11UKFSG, defining the scope and parameters of their archive was an important step to help everyone involved understand what was to officially form their archive and what was personal content that would remain in their possession. Through discussion, a decision was made that the archive should be a record of the formation and evolution of the Support Group itself, rather than a record of the personal losses experienced by the individual members. Minutes from meetings or invitations to event would fall under the archive's scope, for example, whereas photographs or condolence cards would not.

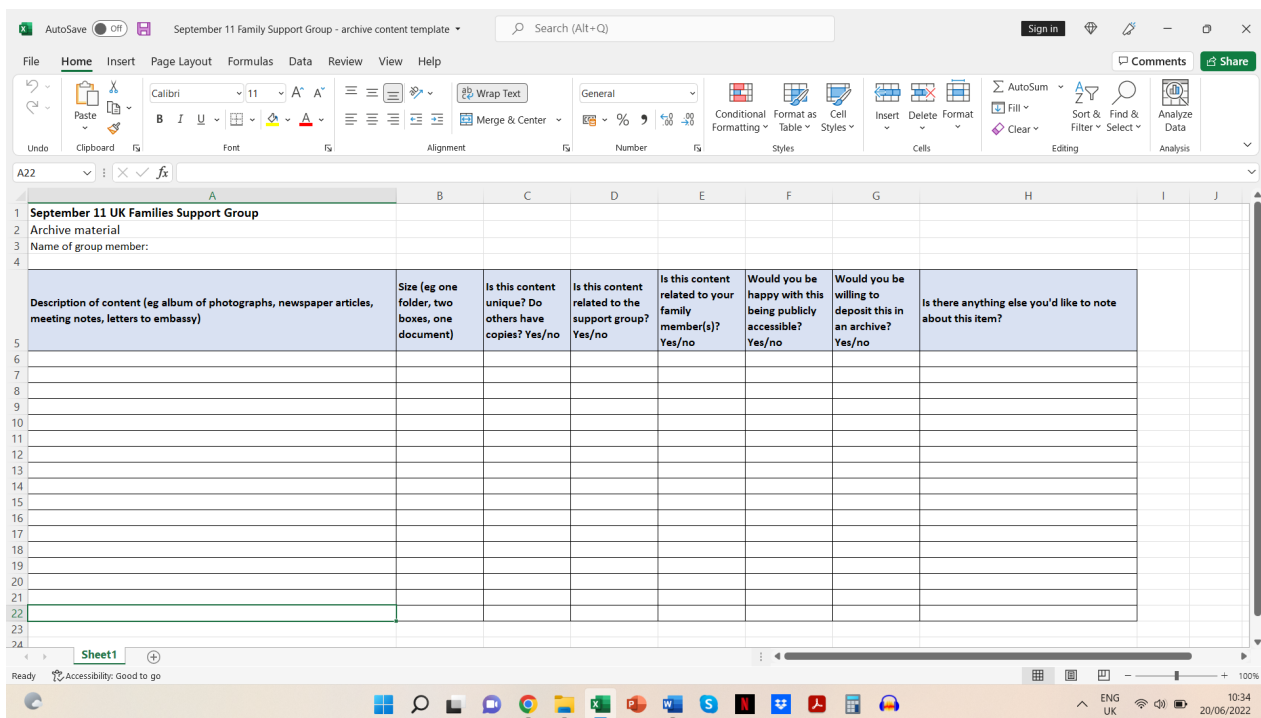
Auditing the archive

Asking a group to conduct a thorough audit of sensitive material without support should be avoided. The auditing process should be done in partnership with the host organisation, ensuring the correct and relevant information was captured and to allow for the process to be as open and collaborative as possible.

When the project team first engaged with the S11UKFSG, it was suggested that each member complete a spreadsheet that summarised the material they owned and were willing to submit for archiving with a host organisation. The spreadsheet consisted of the following headings:

- Description of content
- Size
- Is the content unique?
- Is the content related to the support group?
- Is the content related to your family?
- Would you be happy with this being publicly accessible?
- Would you be willing to deposit this in an archive?
- Is there else you'd like to note about the item?

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The group were given a month to complete their spreadsheets. During that period, only the group member who is also part of the project team, Jelena Watkins, filled in information about her personal collection. Other members chose not, either because it was too time-consuming, because there was a nervousness about opening boxes they had not engaged with in a long time, or because they still had a lot of questions about how the information they shared was going to be used.

Reassurances were given that there was no obligation to donate anything they did not want to, and that only very top-level information was needed at this stage, in case the task felt too overwhelming. This did not result in any further submissions. The project team felt that some details were needed in order to be able to approach a host organisation, but it was decided that the information Jelena shared would be sufficient and that further requests to the rest of the group should not be made at this stage of the project.

Pre-empting the host organisation's requirements

As well as the needs of the group being complex and requiring flexible and sensitive approaches to the ways in which any auditing of the archive material was conducted, the needs of the potential future host organisations were also unclear.

Each archive has its own aims, policies and parameters. Finding a host organisation that would align with the needs of the group was one challenge, but it was also difficult to

communicate to the group exactly what the process of depositing such a host organisation would involve. A guarantee over how access would be managed and whether restrictions could be placed on certain areas of the archive was impossible to make until the host organisation was on board.

At this stage of the process it is important to:

- Outline all possible options regarding access to the archive material once deposited with a host organisation to manage expectations
- Provide a range of options for the host organisation and what the pros/cons of each might be in how the archive material is documented and used
- Outline the range of information the host organisation might request so that the group are prepared for what details they might need to provide
- Give insight into how archives may be used in the future – research, display, online – again to manage expectations and to begin to consider restrictions to access

Finding a home

Identifying a suitable archive to deposit material in comes with many challenges. This component of the project is ongoing and as a result this section of the guide will be completed at a later date.

However, as insight into conversations being had, The National Archives were approached as a potential host organisation for the S11UKFSG archive. A summary of the archive, including its aims and the ambition of the group for finding a permanent home, was shared with archive staff. In response the following questions were sent to the project team to answer before a meeting was arranged:

- Are the collection/record(s) at risk – physical/intellectual harm and why?
- Where is the location of the record(s)/collection?
- What is the physical description of the collection/record(s) being considered?
- Are there more copies of the document /these records held elsewhere and if held elsewhere please state where?
- Provide a short description of the content of the collection/record(s) being considered
- Date range and format and volume of the collection/record(s) being considered
- Any commercial considerations/opportunities for the collection/record(s)?
- What is the copyright?
- How is the collection accessed (via catalogue list)?
- Does there appear to be any sensitive content of the documents – classification markings/topic/GDPR/FOI/EIR?

Further reading

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- Arvanitis, K. 2019. “The ‘Manchester Together Archive’: researching and developing a museum practice of spontaneous memorials”, *Museum and Society*, 17(3), 510-532
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- Community Archives and Heritage Group. 2017. Cataloguing guidelines for community archives, <https://www.communityarchives.org.uk/content/resource/cataloguing-guidelines>
- Disaster Action. Disaster Action was founded as a charity in 1991 by survivors and bereaved people from UK and overseas disasters. Its members have personal experience of over 30 disasters, including rail, air and maritime as well as natural disasters and terrorist attacks in the UK and overseas. It can offer support and advice around family support groups and experience of working with archivists, researchers and the media.
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- Maynor, A. R. (2016). “Response to the unthinkable: Collecting and archiving condolence and temporary memorial materials following public tragedies”. In E. M. Decker & J. A. Townes (Eds.), *Handbook of research on disaster management and contingency planning in modern libraries* (pp. 582–624). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.
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- September 11th Memorial and Museum. <https://www.911memorial.org/visit/museum>
- National Archives. “What’s an archivist?” <https://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archivist.html>
- Society of American Archivists. Documenting in Times of Crisis: A Resource Kit. <https://www2.archivists.org/advocacy/documenting-in-times-of-crisis-a-resource-kit>
- The National Archives. “What are archives?” <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/start-here/what-are-archives/>
- The National Archives. 2016. *Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists*, <https://cdn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>
- Watkins, J. 2012. “The value of disaster memorials and rituals”. *Mental Health Today*. <https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/the-value-of-disaster-memorials-and-rituals>.
- Whitton, S. 2018. “Post disaster temporary memorialising: psychosocial considerations for disaster managers”. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 33.

Appendix: Further areas for development

As a work in progress, the project team have already begun to identify additional content that could be added to this guide. This is summarised below but is not yet extensive. If you have any further suggestions, please contact Kostas Arvanitis at kostas.arvanitis@manchester.ac.uk.

Reference to and explanation of the practicality and complexity involved in thinking about the currency or not of disaster-related information

For example, when to start collecting information, how to manage it and when it may or not feel right to consider info/materials as 'archivable' or in the past. This is particularly significant when disaster-related processes (political, legal etc) are ongoing. Acknowledge it may be problematic to label responses to modern disasters an 'archive' as it implies that the disaster has been dealt with, has no further consequences, and has been consigned to history.

Information on archives and how they operate

Reference to and advice on thinking about the pros and cons of different archives. Suggestions and examples of when not to give the collection away/which organisations may be a bad fit. Explain that some archives may only want certain elements of a group's archive and that material may be split up to different homes.

How to cope with archives rejecting sensitive material or being unable to help

How organisations may communicate this to you, what it does and does not mean. Acknowledging that having your collection rejected from an archive can be personally difficult and traumatic for survivors of disasters, especially if they feel disenfranchised after being ignored by other social institutions besides archives or the disaster was caused by government mismanagement.

More information about what archivists realistically can and cannot do for their collections, especially in the face of current and increasing cuts. For example, sometimes it takes several years to get to processing a collection because archives are stretched and understaffed. Explanation that this does not mean materials' owners are personally being dismissed when things don't go as they might have hoped.

More explanation of audience and scope

For example, explaining the difference between individuals' and organisations' archives; the need to demonstrate value to potential host institutions. An example of value might be the way in which personal/family documents and correspondence show a different part of the story or side to formal records or bland, official documents. Materials might offer an opportunity to complement the picture or even show the more human side of official/government communication.

Document templates to help give context or support groups with contacting archives

Examples of collections policy (perhaps not just a cut and paste job but explain the content and rationale within such a policy from professionals' point of view and what this might mean for groups seeking to meet criteria).

Things to know, consider and seek advice on if the material is politically sensitive (eg government classifications ('secret'; 'sensitive'), practices around censorship or sealing records

Template emails to possible host organisations

Template agenda for an introductory meeting with a possible host organisation

Glossary of terms to help groups understand the heritage sector better

Including but not limited to:

- Archivist
- Curator
- Conservator
- Collection
- Collections policy
- Trauma-informed
- Cataloguing
- Permissions
- Access
- Freedom of Information
- GDPR

Funding advice Tips on where it may be possible to go for money; who to ask and how.