

# arc magazine

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October '23

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# SAVE THE DATE

FOR THE 2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF  
THE ARCHIVES & RECORDS ASSOCIATION

28 – 30 August, Birmingham, UK

We look forward to seeing you in  
Birmingham - a city beating at the heart  
of the country with a quiet confidence  
like no other.



Archives & Records  
Association  
UK & Ireland



# Welcome

## arc magazine

September & October 2023 edition

**W**elcome to the September/October edition of *ARC Magazine*.

Both the summer and the ARA Conference have now been and gone. This edition includes some highlights from the event in Belfast and a peek behind the scenes courtesy of Adrian Steel, Chair of the Conference Committee, who details the work involved in creating a successful conference experience. I hope all who attended had an excellent, enlightening time.

In our features, we tackle one of the biggest issues facing society: artificial intelligence. Mansoor Ahmed-Rengers discusses how to future-proof the profession in this new age, while Makiya Davis-Bramble looks at how technology can help improve archival engagement.

We also consider how to diversify recruitment in the sector, celebrate the positive impact of community archives and ask an unusual question: can a dog work in the archive?

Elsewhere, we showcase a new ARA training resource for embedding equality, diversity and inclusive practice and round up the latest news from across the sector.

Special thanks, as always, go to the contributors who have given their time and expertise.

In this edition, you will notice that we have introduced contributor bylines in news items for the first time. By crediting authors and incorporating a range of voices, we hope to create a more inclusive magazine. And there's nothing like seeing your name in "print"! If you have an idea for a feature or would like to share some news, please get in touch: [arceditors@archives.org.uk](mailto:arceditors@archives.org.uk).

Finally, it's the time of year for membership renewals. As Andrew Nicoll's update from the ARA Chair shows, there's lots happening inside the association and some great plans for the future. We hope that you will be part of that future and the ARA community. Renewals are due by 1st October and you can renew online [here](#).

Michael

**Michael Gallagher**  
ARC Magazine Joint Editor





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## How AI can help archives with engagement activities

Can AI help fill archival gaps and improve engagement? Makiya Davis-Bramble, curator and archivist, talks to ARA's Head of Communications, Deborah Mason.





# Opening lines

**Adrian Steel**, Chair of the ARA Conference Committee, gives an insight into the work involved in organising the Conference and creating the best possible experience for delegates.



**A**t the time of writing the ARA Conference in Belfast is fast approaching. The programme is made, venue arrangements are in place, evening events have been set up, a band selected, menus and ice cream flavours chosen, travel plans are laid and the culmination of a significant amount of work by a team of volunteers, ARA staff and conference organisers Opening Doors is reaching its climax. We all hope that, by the time you read this, a successful Conference has concluded and we are looking forward to next year.

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Focussing on enabling the best possible delegate experience is something that has to run through the whole of creating a Conference  
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As the Chair of the Conference Committee since the Autumn of 2021, I've tried to focus on two key things as guiding lights. The first is to deliver the best possible Conference content; the second is to create an environment in which delegates can have the best possible experience of their Conference whatever their standpoint, and leave enriched by their conference experience.

Much of our Conference content comes from our Call for Papers, an annual open call based on the theme chosen each year with the support of the Conference Committee, the theme being one designed within the context of our conference location and the key issues facing the record-keeping profession. It is a great strength of the Conference programme that anyone can make a submission to speak by responding to this open call. This year our call for papers, themed around 'Communities', was heavily oversubscribed for the speaking slots available, and even when we stretched our daily programme timetable and added an extra strand of sessions on one day, we still had great proposals that we've been unable to include. All the efforts respondents make to suggest Conference content are very much appreciated and help us make sure our delegates get the best, most coherent and comprehensive programme for the Conference. If you have not yet made a submission, do please consider it when the next call for papers for the 2024 Conference comes out in the next few months.

Focussing on enabling the best possible delegate experience is something that has to run through the whole of creating a Conference, from the selection of a



All images ARA Conference Chester 2022.  
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location and venue to the appointment of our professional Conference organisers; from ensuring that the full delegate experience from booking to attendance takes the whole range of delegate needs into account, to the preparation of a welcoming environment and culture among our organising group that thereby permeates the whole of the time we have together at the Conference itself. If this aspect of the role has worked well, I hope you will hardly notice it.

Conference week itself is always busy! There are often minor tweaks to the programme and timings of such an event as the days progress. I work on these and support the great team of volunteer session chairs who help ensure the smooth running of our panel sessions and our selection of excellent papers. Talking to delegates is a great privilege as part of the role, it is great to hear how delegates are experiencing the conference, and there is nothing like contemporary feedback – good and bad – to help us make positive changes in the future.

Earlier in 2023 we ran a survey about the future of our Conference and this will also help us make positive change going forward. The main area I will be involved in is leading the business planning for a Conference model that has a fully hybrid or hybrid/online element as an integral part. The Conference itself must at least break even to ensure its viability and, at the moment, key in-person elements of our Conference such as the revenue from our Information Marketplace exhibitors help support that. However, the conferencing industry is learning all the



time and changed a lot through the pandemic experience of greater remote interaction. As we make strides towards more online access, and in so doing remove some of the barriers to access to the conference in general, we will look to preserve what makes our Conference enjoyable and effective now, while meeting new needs and learning from others. I'm looking forward to playing my part.



# From the Chair



**Andrew Nicoll** reflects on some of ARA's recent achievements and looks to the future.

**L**et me first give a warm welcome to our new members of the ARA Board: Louise Blight, Adrian Gregson, Bill Stocking and Richard Wade. This is the first year in many that the Board has been at full strength and I know that the existing Board members are pleased to have the involvement of our new colleagues in delivering for ARA.

As a Board, we have various responsibilities under charity and company law, and we also have responsibilities to you as members. As well as directing the day-to-day activities of ARA, we have focussed in the last few years on ensuring that we are fit for purpose as an organisation. We have undertaken a review of our articles of association and by-laws which we hope will open up new avenues for expertise to join the board; our financial reserves and investments have been reviewed to ensure they are working in the best way for us; we have completed work on a partnership agreement with The UK National Archives to better understand responsibilities; we want to make sections, nations, regions and groups more effective and more manageable so undertook a review and implemented changes (we still need more volunteers!); our long journey on the equity, diversity and inclusion road has passed its first milestone with our strategic direction now in place; university course accreditation has been redefined, with a new way of working going forward; our competency framework is in the final stages of review and will be published shortly; the issue of risk, and how we manage it, has recently come to the fore, and we will be formulating our risk management policy shortly. The list goes on.

Along with all of the fundamentals outlined above, we continue to deliver for members.

Looking forward, we have more work in the pipeline. We are looking at leadership in the sector, and research will be commissioned to understand barriers and opportunities facing middle and senior career professionals in the workplace. We need to see record-keepers going further in organisations to further support and promote our colleagues.

Wellbeing is being pushed to the top of the agenda. We will look at spontaneous collecting after tragedies and major events, and how we support our members in that. One of our main challenges will be taking the analysis of the recent Workforce Survey and identifying the areas of need and change, then working to make that change happen. One of the most exciting things we have supported in this area is the introduction of the level 7 apprenticeship. Launching shortly, we will have helped deliver this new route in the sector which so many have called for. Our commitment to conservation colleagues continues with the review of the Conservation Training Certificate scheme. This is a unique scheme which we hope will continue to deliver for conservators going forward.

Finally, we are looking to undertake some major work in the area of strategic investment in our profession. We can't say much about this at the moment, but we are looking to bring together partners and funding to make a strategic investment in our people across the sector: to make a difference to how core activities and skills are developed. Watch this space.

All of this happens through the commitment and drive of a dedicated cohort of volunteers, with business ably led by our skilled and talented staff. We achieve huge amounts –



probably more than an organisation of our size would normally. But, we always need more people to step forward and offer to do something: to mentor, to serve on a committee, to give professional input to a project, to be part of our accreditation schemes, to be ambassadors for the work that we do. If you feel you might have some time to get involved, please contact any staff or officers throughout ARA.

I hope this gives you an idea of what is going on in ARA at the moment. Thank you to all who commit time and energy to making our professional association such a success.

“  
we have  
completed work  
on a partnership  
agreement with The  
UK National Archives  
to better understand  
responsibilities

”

# Stronger Together – ARA signs collaboration agreement with The UK National Archives

On 20th June 2023 the Archive and Records Association and The UK National Archives entered into a Collaboration Agreement for 2023 – 2025.

The UK National Archives and the Archive and Records Association are committed to archives, records and conservation, and to showing how the sector is innovating and engaging people with their collections and services, reinforcing why archives matter for individuals and society.

This Collaboration Agreement builds on the desire for cooperation and collaborative working between The UK National Archives and the Archives and Records Association. The agreement sets out the role of each organisation and describes how they will work together to achieve their separate and common goals and recognises that while both organisations have distinct roles, their strategic visions, programmes and aims reflect many areas of shared interest.

The agreement outlines how both organisations will continue to build on their relationship to date to ensure strong leadership and clarity for the archive, record-keeping and conservation sector. The agreement and its action plan reflect common values, goals and realities.

Read the full story on the ARA Website news pages [here](#).

## Diversity & Inclusion Allies blog series

We are about to celebrate the anniversary of our first Diversity & Inclusion Allies blog. This time last year we began a series of Decolonising the Archive blogs.

We are currently in the middle of a series of blogs looking at Accessibility and Archives, which consider the ways in which disabled people and disability are represented in archives (and some of the challenges attached to that), as well as issues facing our disabled colleagues today.

We are just at the start of a series of blogs on inclusive cataloguing.

You can find all the Diversity & Inclusion Allies blogs on our news page [here](#).



John Chambers, ARA,  
and Jeff James, The UK  
National Archives



# ARA Excellence Awards 2023

**The winners of the ARA Excellence Awards were announced at the Gala Dinner of the Archives and Records Association Conference in Belfast on the evening of Thursday 31st August 2023.**

The Archives and Records Association instituted the ARA Excellence Awards to recognise excellence and contributions by individuals and teams in the record-keeping sector. The work of the sector is vital in supporting democracy and human rights and in preserving and sharing the heritage of the UK and Ireland.

To celebrate the achievements of record-keeping professionals and their contribution to society, ARA has four special awards: Distinguished Service Award (DSA), Record-Keeper of the Year, Record-Keeping Service of the Year and New Professional of the Year Award. Aileen Ireland, President of ARA said:

“It is always good to find a reason to celebrate what is best about the record-keeping sector and to encourage us all to strive for excellence and the ARA Excellence Awards provide a perfect opportunity to do just that. The scope of the awards means that we are presenting them to people who have only just begun their careers and to people who have been working in the sector for decades. It was particularly heartening to see the increased public participation this year, showing that people really do care about their archive and record services.”

Three awards were voted on by the public and over 1000 votes were cast in all.

The nominees for Record-Keeping Service of the Year were:

- **Edge Hill University Archive and Special Collections**
- **Jersey Archives**
- **Wolverhampton City Archives**

The winner with 52 per cent of the vote was Jersey Archives.

Linda Romeril, Jersey Heritage’s Director of Archives & Collections, said:

“We are over the moon to have won this national award, especially as it is voted for by the public and shows their support for the service we provide at Jersey Archive. We always strive to do our very best for anyone who contacts or visits the Archive. I am very proud of my team and feel the award is testament to their knowledge and commitment to both the preservation and provision of access to the unique records that we care for. It is also a fantastic way to mark this year’s 30th anniversary of the Archive service being established.”

The nominees for Record Keeper of the Year were:

- **Erika Freyr**
- **Louise Neilson**
- **Joanne Shortland**

The winner with 37 per cent of the vote was Louise Neilson.

**Louise was nominated for her work at Lothian Health Service Archive (LHSA)** and particularly her work on Speaking Out, a project that catalogued and rehoused a collection from Lothian Gay and Lesbian Switchboard, the first operational gay switchboard in the UK and the first gay charity in Scotland. Her nominator wrote:

“The last 15 months have been incredibly significant for Louise’s career development, taking on a complex, challenging, yet extremely rewarding project of real and lasting significance to LHSA, the University of Edinburgh, and (most importantly) the LGBT+ community in Edinburgh and beyond. Throughout the project, Louise has acted as an ambassador for

her archive service, establishing new networks with organisations and individuals and responding to the needs of different groups of stakeholders. Some of the content of the Switchboard collection is extremely upsetting; Louise has not shied away from distressing material (creating anonymised summaries of the thousands of Switchboard calls represented in the collection to aid access decisions, for example), instead building strategies to manage its effects in her daily professional practice. Despite challenges like these, Louise's enthusiasm for and ownership of her role is immediately obvious, and she is the main driver behind the success of a project that will benefit a range of communities for years to come."

The nominees for New Professional of the Year were:

- **Fran Horner**
- **Kurt Jameson**
- **Eleanor McKenzie**

The winner, with 55 per cent of the vote was Fran Horner.

**Fran was nominated for her work as Assistant Archivist at Heritage Quay, the archive of the University of Huddersfield.** Her nominator for the award wrote:

"Fran threw herself into this role with determination and enthusiasm, whilst also finishing her archive qualification. Within a few months it was difficult to recall that she was not only relatively new to Heritage Quay but also a new professional. In the 16 months Fran worked with us, in addition to shouldering the day-to-day workload and responsibilities of this role, Fran also made exceptional contributions to the service."

Fran qualified as an Archivist in 2022 and also achieved Registered Membership of the Archives and Records Association in that year. She previously worked at the National Theatre Archive as their Archive Assistant.

The Distinguished Service Award recognises individual conservators, archivists or records managers for career-long achievement and/or outstanding work, e.g. successful management/implementation of a project; external fundraising that has transformed a resource or service; significant improvements to service delivery. Distinguished Service Awards were given to three people:

#### **Antony Oliver for Distinguished Service in Archive Conservation**

Antony began his archives career in 1979. In 1999 he moved to the Sheffield City Archive where he is responsible for the conservation and preservation of the collections pertaining to the city of Sheffield, and the collections that have county wide significance. In addition to providing a preservation packaging and conservation service for the local studies library, he provides an advisory service to the rest of the library wide departments within the city. Antony is also chair of the Archives and Records Association's Preservation and

Conservation Group and acts as external examiner for their Conservation Training Scheme.

#### **Sally McInnes for Distinguished Service in Archives**

Sally is currently Head of Unique and Contemporary Content at The National Library of Wales (NLW). Graduating in 1988, Sally joined the National Library of Wales in 1989. During her 34 years of service there, Sally has made an incredible contribution. Sally became fluent in the Welsh language and has worked effectively at all levels of the organisation using both languages. Her expertise and experience was crucial in the development of the partnership between the then National Assembly for Wales (now the Welsh Parliament) and the National Library of Wales, as a project was developed to fully scope and develop an action plan for the Assembly's management of current and semi-current records and for the long term archiving of the Assembly's records in the National Library.

In 2010 Sally was appointed Head of Collection Care and in 2015, took on the responsibility for the new department of Unique Collections and Collection Care which included the former Archives and Manuscripts section. Sally has led on the very important work of gaining and maintaining the National Library of Wales's Archive Service Accreditation, the UK standard for archive service, and has ensured that the work of archives has a strong voice in strategic decision making at the highest level of the organisation.

One of Sally's great achievements has been her work to support digital preservation capacity across Wales. Since creating the first policy on preserving electronic records for the NLW in 2000, she has been a staunch advocate for digital preservation.

#### **Vicki Wilkinson for Distinguished Service in Archives and Records Management**

Vicki has been a qualified records manager for more than 35 years and began her career at Bristol & West Building Society before moving onto the Bankers Trust, Save the Children, Barclays Bank, then settling into RBS in 1992.

Currently, she is the Records Management Lead across RBS, responsible for being the lead subject matter expert in major, enterprise wide transformation projects. From new ways of working such as O365 to leading thought - invoking discussion around Artificial Intelligence, Vicki raises the profile of Records Management at every level.

Full information on each winner's nomination, the criteria for each award and the history of the awards can be found [here](#).





Recordkeeping Service of the Year – Jersey Archive staff members: Laura Anderson, Catherine Porter and Harry Le Feuvre with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll. © Lost Lens Caps Photography



Distinguished Service Award winner Antony Oliver with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll. © Lost Lens Caps Photography



Record Keeper of the Year Louise Nielson with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll. © Lost Lens Caps Photography



Distinguished Service Award winner Sally McInnes with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll © Lost Lens Caps Photography



Distinguished Service Award winner Vicki Wilkinson with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll © Lost Lens Caps Photography



ARA Excellence Award winners with ARA President, Aideen Ireland and ARA Chair Andrew Nicoll. © Lost Lens Caps Photography

# ARA Conference 2023

As the lead professional body for archivists, archive conservators and records managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland an ARA Conference in Belfast is always going to be special with delegates coming from both sides of the border, as well as further afield. The 2023 conference which ran from 30th August to 1st September had a record number of delegates signed up, showing just how popular Belfast proved to be as a host venue.

As well as a packed programme with over 100 speakers across the three days, the conference provided an opportunity for delegates to connect informally at a number of social events. Those arriving early on the Tuesday evening attended a drinks reception in the Piano Bar of the Europa Hotel (the conference venue) and on Wednesday night visited the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) for a curry night plus tours of the stores and conservation areas and access to the Search and Reading Rooms. The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Ryan Murphy, was also present and welcomed ARA's delegates to the City. Thursday provided a gala dinner and the awards ceremony for the ARA Excellence Awards.

The theme of the conference was Communities and the three keynote speakers covered a very wide range of interpretations of the topic.

On Wednesday, Jayne Brady, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service presented on: 'Together, Building Inclusive Communities', saying: "... *The Archives and Records Association has chosen a wonderful theme this year with 'Communities' and as part of our wider work with communities I can't think of anywhere better than PRONI to explore the key themes of this day – how to work with different communities of users, stakeholders, colleagues and collaborators.*"

On Thursday, Emma Markiewicz, Director, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) was billed as the keynote for 'Switching the Lens: How we used our exhibition to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in everything we do'. However she chose to innovate and really take the theme forward by bringing a team of people who worked on the Unforgotten Lives exhibition to present on different aspects of it – highlighting the need to front and centre diversity both in the work and the presentation of it, respecting and involving the wide variety of communities that make up the population of London. In addition to Emma, the speakers from LMA were: Husna Marysm, Hannah Milton, Miskha Chisholm and Thomas Bower and their presentation centred around the current LMA exhibition which presents the stories of Londoners of African, Caribbean, Asian and Indigenous heritage who lived and worked in the city between 1560 and 1860 and are recorded in London's archives. It was moving to hear how exhibits closely connected the LMA staff with their own history and heritage and how they were able to use that heritage to ensure that, for example, religious artefacts were shown in their proper context.

On Friday, Dr Peter Crooks, Associate Professor/Senior Lecturer in Medieval History, Trinity College Dublin and Founding Director, 'Beyond 2022: Ireland's Virtual Record Treasury' spoke about the project and how many examples of words relating to community could be found in the early records. He explained that these communities (civil, religious, academic organisations) were often: "... *creators of many of our public records, but there is a tension in the term, right at the heart of it, because it takes us to the question of whose records these were and what community, and later on*



Peter Crooks – Friday's keynote © Lost Lens Caps Photography



PRONI Social – speakers left to right: Aideen Ireland, ARA President, Ryan Murphy, Lord Mayor of Belfast, David Huddleston, PRONI



LMA team. Left to right: Thomas Bower, Hannah Milton, Mishka Chisholm, Emma Markiewicz, Husna Marysm – Thursday's keynote. © D Mason

*what public, these records served? Archives and records we know, from the moment of their creation, as now, record information, of course, but they also encode or ascribe social meaning in the sense that they sometimes actively, sometimes passively, sometimes passive aggressively, extrude, omit, silence, forget and protect for the communities themselves certain privileges and power."*

Jayne Brady – Wednesday's keynote.  
© Lost Lens Caps Photography

A number of other sessions during the conference looked at this question including the standing room only session on 'Power, control and expertise: challenges at the heart of developing inclusive archive collections' from Jenny Shaw of the Wellcome Collection.

The conference had six different 'tracks' or themes: Archives and Records, Conservation, Recordkeeping Profession, Users and Communities, Digital, and Information Governance.

Highlights included Anne Gilliland on 'Recordkeeping, Borders and Community Resilience' which led off a number of presentations on work in Northern Ireland and Ireland including the celebration of PRONI's 100th anniversary.

In the conservation strand highlights included: Claire Hutchison's presentation on a newspaper conservation project at The National Library of Scotland, Saya Honda Miles on the environmental impact of archives with designated storage for photographic materials and Victoria Stevens on community conservation for wellbeing.

It was particularly encouraging to see conservators joined by archivists, records managers, and other interested professionals and certainly showed that 'community' is something the record-keeping profession understands. One conservation delegate was reported as saying that the ARA conference was different from others they attended in that all the conservation sessions were relevant and they also got to go to sessions on archives and recordkeeping and so better understand the people and organisations they were working with.

Woven throughout the conference was a strong theme of inclusivity, diversity, accessibility and equality and equity. Jenny Moran once again hosted the 'Is It Okay?' session – this time looking at accessibility,



'Is it OK?' panel. Left to right Sarah Trim-West, Jenny Moran, Delegates Visiting PRONI  
Iida Saarinen, Philip Milnes-Smith © D Mason © Lost Lens Caps Photography

and despite the timing at the end of a busy day it continued to be very popular with delegates. A key takeaway from this and other sessions was "Listen to the disabled person. What they need is what they say they need – not what you think they need." You can get a flavour of one of these sessions with our article from Sarah Trim-West on 'A Dog in the Archive' (page 28).

Also returning for another year, the ever popular Bruynzeel Ice Cream Break – no conference should be without one!

Despite several challenges (flight chaos due to the air traffic control computer crashing, a complete water outage in central Belfast on Thursday morning) the conference was a resounding success. Many

delegates really appreciated the conference app that helped to keep things running smoothly with live updates, reminders and easy tracking of sessions (plus biographies and abstracts when supplied) and also the help given by the conference organising team from Opening Doors and the staff at the Europa Hotel. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to the volunteer members of the Conference Committee, without them this event would not be possible.

Something that was much commented on was the incredible energy and buzz across the whole conference with one person saying: 'It was like Chester last year was the run up and now we are really powering ahead'. We hope you will join us in Birmingham in 2024 where with your input we can go further still.

TRAINING

# Professional Development News

## Embedding Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusive (EEDI) Practice in the UK Archive Sector

ARA has launched a new series of pre-recorded training on embedding EEDI practice across the UK archive sector. The training is divided into two modules. Module 1 introduces key issues and concepts. Module 2 builds on this knowledge, offering practical steps to embed inclusive practice in your workplace.

A series of seven, pre-recorded presentations allow you to move through training at your pace. A copy of the presentations is included as a separate download so you can access the links to additional content. Each session ends with quizzes and case studies to help embed/strengthen/enhance your learning.

### The trainer: Dr Kirsty Fife.

Kirsty has a background working in the UK archive sector (outreach, digitisation and project management), a MA in Archives and Records Management and a PhD in Information Studies from University College London. She is currently a Lecturer in Digital Information and Curatorial Practice at Manchester Metropolitan University's iSchool.

### Module 1: Introduction to Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the UK Archive Sector

This training is an introduction to equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion with specific focus on archive and records management services. The module assumes no (or little) existing knowledge and is accessible to workers at any level, including those looking to refresh their knowledge in this area. Participants are introduced to legal frameworks for equality, diversity and inclusion policy in the archive sector

and sector-specific schemes that have sought to have a positive impact in this area. The final module outlines resources and training opportunities to support improving practice, focusing on free/low budget options for further professional development.

The module is divided into three pre-recorded presentations which can be watched at the pace of participants. Each presentation concludes with either a link to an asynchronous quiz or a short self-directed task to test learning and/or encourage reflection.

### Learning outcomes: you will be able to:

- Understand definitions of a series of key terms and the background context for increased interest in equality, diversity and inclusion work
- Identify and understand relevant UK legislation and schemes in equality, diversity and inclusion (e.g. access to work, reasonable adjustments)
- Become more familiar with relevant archive sector policy and historical initiatives to take action in this area
- Identify opportunities for developing your knowledge through future development
- Feel empowered to discuss potential changes to service practice.

### Presentation 1: The external context of equality, equity, diversity and inclusion

Topics include: Definition of relevant terms (equality, equity, diversity, inclusion); a review of current legislation (Equality Act (2010), public service equality

duty); public and private sector equality frameworks ; common organisational equality, diversity and inclusion concerns/issues (identified in literature). Also discusses workforce demographics, pay gaps, unconscious bias, organisational culture, access to leadership and potential outcomes/responses (from published case studies), such as improved understanding of and reputation with specific communities.

### **Presentation 2: Exploring equality, equity, diversity and inclusion in the UK archive sector**

Topics include: Where do we stand right now? Why should workers in the sector build more knowledge? Which areas of archival practice are relevant to equality, diversity and inclusion? Contested histories; improving accessibility of public services; emphasis on building representative and diverse collections; increased emphasis on care/emotional labour in service delivery; post-COVID shifts in digital access (and digital inequity), including programming; current relevant policy/strategy and existing actions (programming, workforce development, strategy/policy and evaluations to date).

### **Presentation 3: Developing existing practice**

Topics include: identifying/learning from existing guidance available in record-keeping and allied sectors (e.g. museums); opportunities/recommendations for free/ low budget training to develop knowledge; existing sector networks and schemes (e.g. ARA diversity allies); reviewing your service's existing practice; identifying potential changes.

### **Module 2: Embedding inclusive practice in your service**

This training is aimed at participants who either have existing knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion in the sector or who have undertaken the previous training module: Introduction to Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the UK Archive Sector.

The workshop focuses on common functions within archive sector organisations and has a more practical focus than the previous introductory module. The training aims to leave participants equipped with better understanding of practical steps that can be taken to embed inclusive practice in workflows across their organisation.

#### **Learning outcomes: you will be able to:**

- Understand definitions of a series of key terms and their relevance in the archive sector
- Identify applications of inclusive practice in the archive sector
- Evaluate their applicability within your archive service

### **Presentation 1: Introduction and key terms**

Topics include: key terms (equality, equity, intersectionality); why inclusive practice in archives?; networks and opportunities for future development;

access and use of records (search room facilities, exhibitions, programming, training staff, user support, digital accessibility); standards relevant to access and use of records.

### **Presentation 2: Access and use of records**

Topics include: accessibility in the search room; facilities (e.g. toilets, cafes); training staff; user support; website accessibility; exhibitions; programming.

### **Presentation 3: Collections management and development**

Topics include: cataloguing (e.g. offensive terms in descriptions; participatory models of description; subject tagging); collections development (building representative collections through targeted collecting); digitisation (ethics-led approaches); deposit arrangements.

### **Presentation 4: Service management**

Topics include; workforce development (job descriptions, recruitment, traineeships); focused internal networks; policy and strategy; mentorship and leadership training; organisational culture.



# Future-Proofing Archives in the Age of AI & Potential Symbiosis Between the Two

In this article **Dr Mansoor Ahmed-Rengers**, founder of OpenOrigins and Frankli, explores the relationship between AI and archives and the opportunities and threats it offers to the record-keeping sector.



**T**he online world is changing. For the first time, synthetic and generated content is tipping past the uncanny valley, becoming often indistinguishable from real and human-generated content. This creates a new paradigm for archivists - how do we continue to preserve the past and accurately document the present in an online world that is quickly unravelling any shared sense of what is real?

An archivist has always been fundamental in the preservation of our shared history - but now more than ever, the job of an archivist is not only to preserve, but also to protect our past from manipulation. An archivist has become a guardian of collective knowledge, delineating what reality was really like and what exist in the real world today.

One of the largest contenders in the new media space is generative AI - new AI models that can effectively create realistic imagery from a short text prompt. This can lead to immense amounts of new synthetic content that can be deployed quickly, at scale, by anyone with a computer. However, generative AI does not mean the end of authentic and human archives. Instead, it offers an industry-wide opportunity by creating an entirely new revenue source that can effectively increase the value of archives exponentially.

Importantly, AI-created content increases the value of human-created content. An archivist now must contemplate how we categorise what is real and synthetic in the modern day.

To understand the concerns and opportunities of AI, let's break down three important questions we must answer to effectively archive content in the modern day.

1. How can we verify new media is human-created and authentic?
2. What are the new risks archivists must understand that come from AI?
3. How do AI models work and why do they desperately need robust archives to thrive?

First, let's consider the enhanced challenge of content authentication. For many years, smartphones have offered small windows into the lives of billions, creating a media waterfall that has given many unfettered access to a world through the eyes of billions. They have given us all the tools to become documentarians. This content inflow has allowed the world to shed light on issues that were previously in the dark, leading to citizen journalists and activists gaining a platform for change that was previously impossible. Of course, this tooling has been weaponised. Sophisticated disinformation has now become a unique attack vector for modern political campaigns. Deepfakes were the first visible sign of synthetic media playing a prominent role in distorting the fundamental truths of an image.

As an archivist, this information is immensely valuable but parsing the reality of this inflow from the fakes has become a nearly impossible task, with AI detection tools only being around 60 per cent accurate and human-eye detection being even less than that. Now we rely on lengthy forensic processes to determine the veracity of an image or scene.

The options become limited again. We can return to archive only what trusted sources deem is useful or we find tools that can proactively prove the bedrock truths of the images and videos they capture, at the point they are captured. This method is called proactive

verification. It ensures that our archives can retain their quality and the trust in the labels we create for each media item that we store. This guarantees that real human history is stored in perpetuity for future generations to study and explore. Proactive verification acts as an indisputable stamp of humanity on any image that is created.

New images are not the only thing at risk due to AI - what is currently in your archive is also at risk. Cybersecurity threats have always existed for archives. Now, the fear of a hack leading to data corruption is much more destructive. When sophisticated deepfakes and generated images reach a tipping point, a hack can act to populate your archives with fake photos and videos, leading to the distrust in all photos and videos. A new world attack that acts to destroy trust in the data conserved. Proactive “anchoring” of content becomes one of the only ways to ensure internally and prove externally that your archive remains uncorrupted and original.

The future of an archive's value will rely on the trust in that archive's media labels. Organisations and academics will require third-party guarantees that your archives are protected and secured from these threats.

We call this process archive anchoring. Archive anchoring is the act of cryptographically hashing every individual piece of data in your archive as it exists today. You can think of a cryptographic hash as a sort of provable summary of a file, this unique fingerprint is attached to a node on the blockchain, making it incorruptible. This gives each piece an indisputable stamp in history as being 'authentic on the day it was anchored'. This allows for your archive to retain trust in perpetuity. It is important to stress that this solution is time-bound. The further we move into the future, the less effective this solution becomes as trust cannot be backdated from the day it was anchored.

Artificial intelligence does not only offer risks to archives – as they become fundamentally more valuable and important in an age of AI. In a world where content is frequently synthetically generated, the need for human-content is increasingly important. Training AI models requires immense amounts of human-created data. An AI model trained on only a small fraction of synthetic content becomes degraded in its ability to perform. This means your provably 'human-created' content archives become immense assets to any AI model that

needs to be trained on specific image and video data sets. Imagine an AI model that looks to synthetically recreate the scenery of England in 1925. The only way it will be able to complete this challenge is if it has been trained on an immense repository of verified images from this time and place. An archivist acts as the guardian of history for humanity and acts as a fundamental gatekeeper of training data for AI companies. You hold the keys to the success of AI models and the massive markets they promise to unlock. An additional benefit, AI models' need for data increases the value of your archives, licensing your verified archive content directly to AI models gives you control and insight into how your archives are being used, and allows you to monetize them much more effectively.

With the appropriate measures, you can safeguard your archives from future threats and preserve the history of which you are the stewards. Excitingly, AI offers a unique opportunity for archives to claim a new value in a world that will be more prominently built with AI.

**Dr Mansoor Ahmed-Rengers** is the founder of OpenOrigins and Frankli having previously invented several cybersecurity and privacy preserving technologies as part of his PhD at the University of Cambridge. He continues to be a researcher at the University's Department of Computer Science and Technology helping to design the next generation of massively distributed systems. You can find out more about him [here](#).



# How AI can help archives with engagement activities

Can AI help fill archival gaps and improve engagement? **Makiya Davis-Bramble**, curator and archivist, talks to ARA's Head of Communications, **Deborah Mason**, about using technology to bring underrepresented histories to life.



## How did you get into using AI?

I was introduced to AI separately from my archive work. It was recommended to me by a 3D artist, as I had expressed that I wanted to find ways to develop different creative outputs within my work on Caribbean history. AI platforms can be used to create imagery and so this became my area of interest.

The platform I use is called Midjourney, which is a programme run on Discord. You are able to create different images and videos by inputting prompts, which are pieces of descriptive text. I used historical prompts and started to create images that filled in the gaps and absences present in Caribbean history archives, such as what we do not see represented in collections and the voices that are either lost or not dominant. I use AI as a way to help illuminate some of the important histories that are significant to the Global Ethnic Majority and to help these underrepresented histories come to life.

## You used AI for the 'Indo + Caribbean: The Creation of a Culture' exhibition at the Museum of London. Can you tell me a little bit about the exhibition and your role in it?

I saw an online call by the Museum of London, for the public to submit their ideas for the next display in the London, Sugar and Slavery Gallery. I put forward my idea of an exhibit detailing Indian indenture in the Caribbean and the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. After my proposal was selected, I became a Freelance Curator and worked alongside the Museum of London.

Many people in the UK, outside of the Caribbean community, do not know that Indo-Caribbean identity exists and how abolition was not the end of labour in the Caribbean. The Caribbean is an incredibly diverse world region racially, culturally and ethnically. As indenture wouldn't have taken place without the existence of transatlantic slavery, Indo + Caribbean helps to further



AI interpretation of a poster displaying Indo-Caribbean community, carnival culture and heritage © www.curatinghistory.co.uk

highlight that the legacies of transatlantic slavery cross cultures, races, and countries.

## Can you tell us more about the indenture system?

The indenture system operated between 1838 and 1917, and was composed of Indian migrants travelling to the British Caribbean to work on sugar plantations after the end of transatlantic slavery. With abolition taking effect in 1834, the British Government enacted an indenture system into law through a partnership with the Indian Government. Thousands of Indian citizens signed indenture contracts which set out a period of labour of initially up to ten years. People signed up through agents who were stationed in India and many people

Afro-Cuban local 'agro'  
market culture, c1990  
© www.curatinghistory.co.uk



were deceived into doing so. Migrants weren't told about working conditions or low pay - they weren't even told how far the Caribbean was - and so many undertook this three-month journey not knowing what would be awaiting them there. Unfortunately, the prospects of a new life were in fact filled with subjugation, trauma and violence. Through this system the Indo-Caribbean identity was created, which makes up a large part of the Caribbean today as the majority of migrants settled and made lives in the Caribbean.

#### How did AI come into this picture?

Just by visually looking at the exhibit you would not know that there has been any AI input. That is because I used AI in the planning and design process. When you create an archive or museum display, whether it's an online exhibit that an institution might have, something you are putting on for a local community, or a project that is just visually represented to the public, one of the key choices surrounds the questions "what does it look

like?", "what is the backdrop?" and "what components are we going to use?" Initially, you have a blank space. I started to use AI to help fill that blank space when coming up with ideas.

I would start off by jotting down the sort of things the audience might want to see. I would then create a flat 2D elevation of the display space. I would write particular prompts to create the exact images and designs that fit the story I was trying to tell within the space. I would then layer the imagery on top of the elevation to bring the design to life. This way, other people, designers, curators could see exactly what we were visualising and would be able to receive the ideas more clearly than solely having it explained, looking at a vision board, or it being drawn.

With AI you can create whatever you input, so I was able to create images that were much more fitting than an image search. Some did not appear on Google at all,

for example, watercolour purple sugarcane mixed with cutlasses. I was able to create several images with varied components so that colleagues were able to quickly see different design ideas. I think AI has a lot of capability to increase accessibility within creative interpretation, as through its use we must acknowledge that people visualise in different ways and we don't always visualise in the same way at the same time.

### **How do you combine the template with the AI programme?**

The 2D template of your display space can be created in Microsoft Word or on an online platform called Canva. Once you have created your template you can then begin to input your AI imagery. Using AI in this way is incredibly helpful to assist your team with visualising the space. This allows for a 'creative preview' and lets people decide on creative direction, by identifying things earlier, rather than later in the process.

AI can inform art, so when our display artist was going to create a watercolour backdrop composed of different components, such as sugarcane and Caribbean vegetation, I created a presentation full of AI imagery to show the different painting techniques I had envisioned in the display – dry on wet, wet on dry – without actually painting. This gave the artist an insight into our vision, before they created their amazing work.

### **So we are not cutting the artist out - just giving them a tighter brief?**

Yes, not only can AI help with a tighter brief, but it could also be useful when you are applying for funding – you can show the funding body what the end result could look like. Creating exhibition and archive briefs using AI makes it so much more accessible to show others what your proposal is. Someone could say "I can't really picture that", but with AI you are able to help envision it.

### **This must be really helpful when working collaboratively or dealing with partners and funding bodies, allowing you to create and share your vision 'in house'.**

Definitely, and it's a useful way to exercise a full creative licence for the vision of your organisation. It's also a great tool for collaboration and deepening partnerships, by increasing understanding with those you work with, both internal colleagues and external stakeholders.

### **We've talked about the benefits, but what issues do you think people need to be aware of?**

The major consideration is an ethical one – is it appropriate to use a tool that scours the internet to create imagery and even videos? Yes, AI can create a walkthrough through video of London in 1723, but there are issues around copyright and ownership. When an AI image is created the copyright now belongs to you, and if the image will be used in circumstances of profit the rights can be bought from Midjourney. The images

that are created are sometimes inspired by thousands of images or even real photographs that can be uploaded onto Midjourney with prompts then added to enhance and edit the photograph itself. It might draw on a range of references – for example, for an image of the Queen Nefertiti it might look at images or artefacts but also theatrical or film representations from the past and bring those features in. Some artists have taken a stand, acknowledging that AI is an unethical process because artists and photographers can't be compensated for their work.

In terms of the fallibility of AI itself, there are the same biases that exist in society. For example, if you put in the prompt 'British doctor in a medical ward in the 1950s', the chances are you will get an older white male. Just like many of our archive catalogues, through AI you can come across varied racial stereotypes, sexist tropes, and 'outdated' narratives. It is important to note that Midjourney does have its own safeguards – you can't put in discriminatory terms or inflammatory language and you cannot produce 'not suitable for work' prompts or imagery.

### **How can we address issues around bias?**

How we do that is by the policies set out in our archival practice and our archive principles and standards. Unfortunately, bias exists in all systems due to the pervasive nature of colonial and patriarchal ideologies and other standards of discrimination created globally. Heritage institutions can approach AI the way that we approach inclusion work – using tools and methods to tell more diverse stories – and there is a way to use AI so that it can benefit us by doing just that.

Many archives use social media platforms to engage new audiences, although there are many ethical concerns raised about the way various social channels are operated. It is still possible to produce something helpful and engaging from a platform that has inherent flaws, and AI art is an example of making that leap. As heritage institutions, we should not shy away from dialogues about ethical discussions in our day-to-day practices, especially conversations on how to navigate the systems and programs that we have access to.

### **You are a great example of someone who has trained as an archivist and shown you don't have to be a computer scientist to understand AI. Do you think this gives heritage professionals a better understanding of bias?**

For sure, using AI as heritage professionals means that we have a core understanding of bias patterns when they emerge and we have the platform to explore these within the history space. It is possible to play around with AI imagery and uncover that it can do a lot. I know it can be seen as just creating artwork or particular images, but there are invaluable ways these images can illuminate family histories, town hall records and

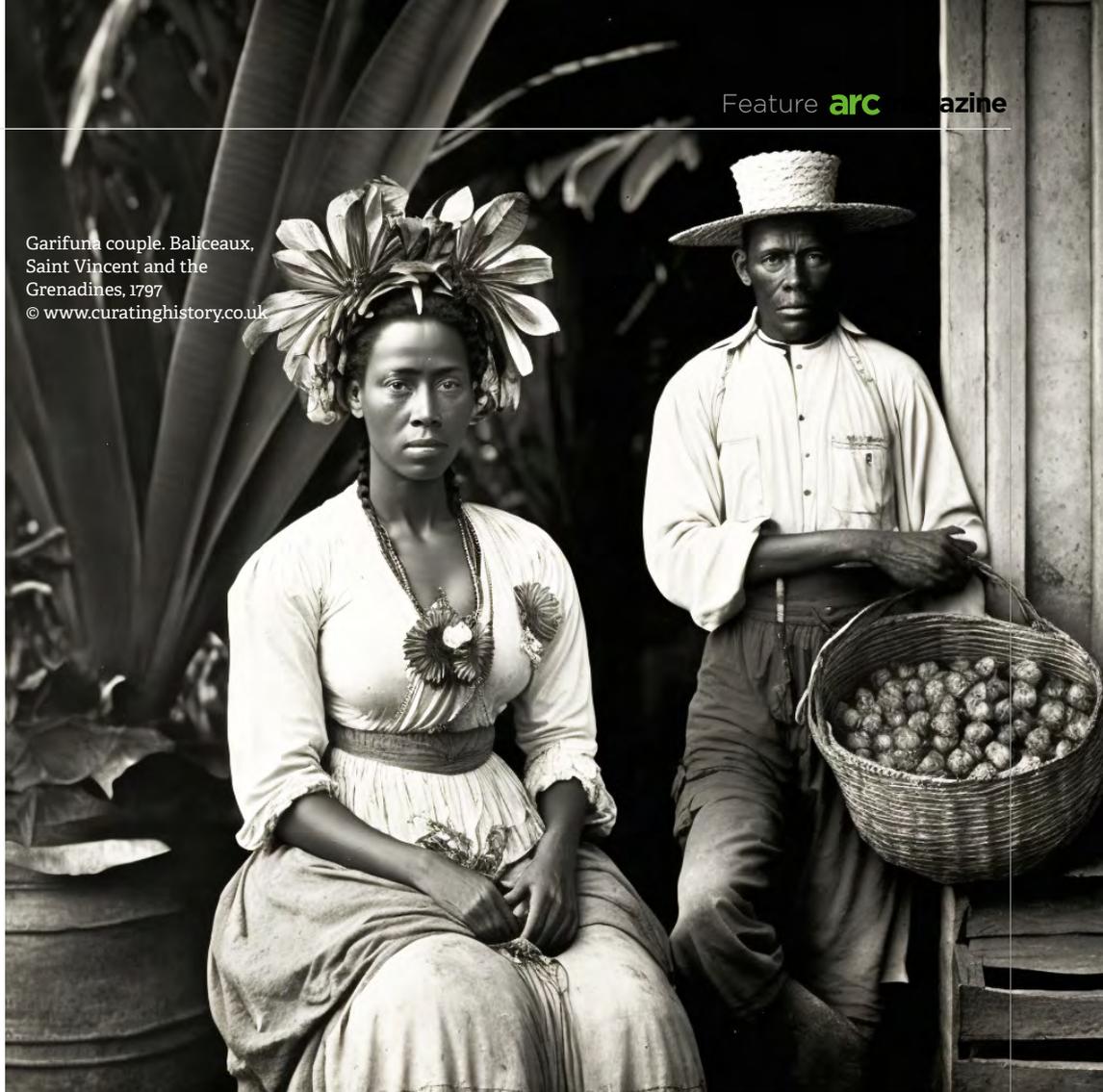
even oral histories! It facilitates people connecting to history in a different way.

**As long as people understand it is an illustration and not an original image, like creating an imagined reconstruction of an archaeological site based on a few burnt marks and some shards of pottery. Tools like these have been used for decades to help make history accessible.**

Exactly! AI is an innovative tool that can help us plan our displays and online offerings. It's a tool that can assist with encouraging new visitors into heritage spaces, and also helps us visualise workshops and audience engagement with history primarily at the centre – this in turn allows conversations around using AI and the considerations of ethics and authenticity when we do so.

Imagine using AI for archive feedback – people could put in prompts and generate a visualisation of their feedback which could in turn be displayed! AI can help develop our relationship with visitors through looking at history through a new lens. We just have to explore its capabilities.

Garifuna couple. Baliceaux, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 1797  
© www.curatinghistory.co.uk



Watercolour painting of purple sugarcane and a cutlass tool.  
© Makiya Davis-Bramble



# Diversifying recruitment practice

**Chris Sheridan**, ARA's Head of Professional Development and Standards talks with **Victoria Cranna** RMARA, Archivist & Records Manager at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) Archives Service, on her recent experiences in recruiting an archives assistant.



## What motivated you to change your approach to recruitment?

In 2020 the LSHTM Archives Service developed its [Decolonising the Archives Principles](#). They cover all areas of the service: cataloguing practice, archival practice, dissemination, education and inclusivity. This inclusivity drive led to a review of our recruitment practices. We sought knowledge and insight from archive discussion forums and reports such as 'Brick Walls and Tick Boxes: Experiences of Marginalised Workers in the UK Workforce' by Kirsty Fife and Hannah Henthorn, and the ARA's report 'Making the record keeping workforce representative: project and literature review' by Tola Dabiri. As hosts of a Bridging the Gap scheme trainee in 2018, we attended The UK National Archives recruitment training sessions.

## What were your next steps?

Our archives assistant post had been recruited with the view that the individual would want to become a qualified archivist. Evidence shows that this is not always the case, so we re-imagined the role to move away from offering a graduate trainee position. We are also open to different perspectives; for example, we benefited hugely from the discussion of our decolonisation principles with a volunteer who, despite their interest in this area, had no plans to become an archivist.

We also asked Creative and Cultural Skills (CC Skills) to help make our recruitment processes more inclusive. Traditional methods may disadvantage people from certain marginalised groups. Recognising that diversity includes ethnicity, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender and educational background, we then reviewed our recruitment documentation. We were surprised by how exclusive and prohibitive they were. For example, previously we had stated an assistant/



grade 3 post required a graduate degree, which was not necessary for the role. We replaced this with a requirement up to A level or equivalent. We had also asked for experience of working in higher education or a medical archive which, being quite specialised, could put prospective candidates off applying. We removed references to working in archives and focussed on core skills such as customer service, communication, organisation and IT skills.

CC Skills also advised us to simplify language, and to be aware that when creating job descriptions we often attempt to replicate who was there before, or our own vocational equivalents, rather than really thinking about

the skills needed for the role. As a result, we made some simple amendments, such as changing the emphasis of the selection criteria by moving education to the bottom rather than the top, and instead started with personal skills. CC Skills also encouraged us to think critically about where to advertise the position and think about advertising locally. We also accepted that attracting more candidates may mean the recruitment process takes longer to complete.

### What were the challenges and opportunities?

LSHTM's HR team had recently introduced anonymous shortlisting for professional services staff, so they were supportive of our new approach. However, opportunities were missed to increase the diversity of candidates. For example, CC Skills encouraged us to think critically about where to advertise the position, including advertising locally. HR did not follow up our request to do this.

We were very fortunate to receive 43 high quality applications. Our scoring system encouraged us to avoid awarding higher points to those who had archive experience. This helped ensure that we were being fair to those who met the criteria, but who did not have archive experience.

Additional challenges that arose from the HR team meant that the interview dates were moved at short notice. Some candidates could only attend on Zoom, and in future we will consider the difference between interviewing candidates in person and online. We had also planned to ask candidates to do a short, informal presentation on a historical object that means something to them. We found this useful in previous recruitment as it gave us a different view of the candidates and helped to relax them at the start of the interview. It was disappointing that HR did not ask the candidates to prepare a presentation.

### What did you learn from the recruitment process?

#### What would you do differently next time?

We would insist that the job was advertised more widely, such as Camden job centre and the equivalent online service as well as the usual places: jobs.ac.uk and Archives NRA list. We received 43 applicants and below is an analysis of where candidates saw the job. We had expected that the changes to our recruitment documents might diversify the candidate pool.

Where candidates heard about job	Number
Archives-NRA Jiscmail list	9
Indeed	6
Jobs.ac.uk	17
LSHTM website	8
Friend recommendation	1
ARA website	1
Did not say	1

Anonymous shortlisting meant we could not analyse who applied, apart from their educational background. Although we intended to diversify the candidate pool, this did not happen in terms of education, with 14 applicants having an undergraduate degree, nine having an Archive post-graduate qualification, 17 holding a Master qualification in related subjects and one with a PhD.

We made sure that none of the interview questions were based on working in an archive, focusing instead on core skills such as customer service and communication. It was difficult not to award higher points to those with experience in an archive, which the majority of those interviewed had. My colleague and I had honest conversations about the fact that it is easier to employ an assistant with archival experience. We had to remind ourselves during the whole process that other experience is just as valid. We also interviewed with a male team member from the Library, which was useful in terms of getting a non-archival opinion but, on reflection, we might have considered someone from outside the Library team.

### What advice would you offer to other employers about advertising a record-keeping position?

It is vital that the profession adopts inclusive recruitment practices. I would encourage other employers to review their own practices; some simple changes could include:

- Removing the requirement for a degree for an entry level post
- Removing the requirement for experience for an entry level post
- Widening where jobs are advertised, especially entry level jobs
- Thinking about the core skills that are required, and not solely what the previous role holder did
- Reviewing your documents every time you recruit and do not rely on previous versions
- Investigating different approaches to interviewing and learn from other sectors
- Considering asking someone from outside the department or institution to be on the interview panel
- Being aware of issues such as mirroring – employing people that fit into the team and are similar to existing team members, this can involve some difficult self-reflection
- Being prepared to devote more time to the recruitment
- Considering the Level 7 apprenticeship scheme when it is launched in 2023
- Remembering recruitment is just the start: we need to ensure that we are providing a welcoming environment for new staff from all backgrounds. This will help with staff retention.

# Why Community Archives Matter

In this article **Donna Maughan**, secretary of ARA's Community Archives and Heritage Group, sets out why community archives are an essential part of the record-keeping sector.



**T**he concept of a community archive can look very different in different places but they all have the same relevance: they collect their community's history and heritage.

Some people ask, "Why does this matter? What difference do these kinds of archives make to those in the mainstream? Why are they needed?" There is limited academic research into the advancement of community heritage and their archival resources, and the preservation of their contribution to the cultural historical narrative. However, the communities they serve understand what they mean to everyday lives and how they help place their stories within local historical narratives and strengthen their community connection.

The past ten years have seen a rise in the recognition both locally and nationally of this type of archive. Their importance is acknowledged as a significant contribution to communities' patchwork historical footprints. The work by the archive and its collection(s) within the community are significant in defining the identity of governments, groups, people, and communities. Further, they add to the official record of how people are documented and identified for generations to come. This is an important factor and needs to be fully understood: just how significant and important accessioned records within our archives actually are, because they impact how societies and communities are represented and how and who is seen within our historical records now and in the future. In turn this encourages more community members to contribute their experience and knowledge.

Modern society's growing interest in its own heritage has had a positive effect on enhancing the networks of community heritage collections.

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They add to the official record of how people are documented and identified for generations to come  
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Inside a community archive box. © Donna Maughan





CAHG Conference 2022 delegates at Oughterard Courthouse



Reusing archive boxes in the community © Donna Maughan

These collections' unique ability to create a sense of place and shape societal identity are what have made community heritage collections valuable and distinguishable from mainstream archives. Gerry Slater, in "Confessions of an Archivist" (*Journal of the Society of Archivists*, Vol 29 (2), (2008), p 144.) places community archives collections at the centre of being able to identify communities. This is a key statement of how to address the knowledge gap that exists within our records on marginalised communities, who have regularly not been added to the mainstream information that is captured within our records and archives.

The question of what sources and records are relevant for saving is continually changing. With the added innovation of technological advancements and a rise in the digitisation of items and virtual storage, the parameters of collection policies have changed in both mainstream and community archives. Although an archive is a neutral space for storage of historical data, mainstream archives have greater space limitation on what they can and cannot keep, unlike community archives, which tend to keep the more personal items and testimonials that can support the mainstream archives. This has been identified through reviews of the absences and gaps seen within the mainstream professional archives. Groups then feel the need to address this when they cannot identify themselves or see themselves within the established archives. We can see examples of this across the world within archive projects. An example of this can be found with the South Asian community. In Scotland, in 'Colourful Heritage' we see a representation of the impact of the South Asian and Muslim community within Scotland and across the waters in America. The creator of the 'South Asian American Digital Archive' (SAADA) was inspired by the need to see themselves represented in the archive. These are examples of one community, across the

world from each other, using the power of their own community to capture their heritage.

These identified gaps matter. There are recognised benefits of heritage interaction, showing positive effects on social connectivity and life satisfaction that can be seen to have an impact on social relationships and collective empowerment of the community as a whole. This is why community archives matter. They have an impact on an individual not only as a project or collection, but also in a wider effect on the community they are representing in the archive. Importantly, this also helps create a much fuller and well-rounded record of society, place, activity and diverse communities that will last long into the future.

The Community Archives and Heritage Group (CAHG) aims to support these archives to be the best they can possibly be. It is a vital resource to the ongoing community archive wave. Assisting community archives by supporting training and information and connecting networks is a vital support to these often less well-funded archives. CAHG also offers a bespoke mapping system on their website which helps these unsung archives within their community show who they are and where they are. This is a free offering to the archive sector that is an invaluable resource and continues to raise the flag for community archives.

**Donna Maughan** is a current research PhD student at the University of St Marks and St Johns, researching the effects of capturing communities' heritage within the archive setting and the effect on personal and community wellbeing. Donna also co-ordinates two community archives in Plymouth, Devon, as well as her role as the secretary of the Community Archives and Heritage Group.

# A dog in the archive

In this article **Sarah Trim-West** gives an insight into what working with a hearing dog in an archive is really like.



**A**s the Archive and Records Assistant at Brunel University, London, I would like to discuss my experience integrating my assistance dog, Poppy, within the archive. When my doctor first recommended that I may benefit from an assistance dog I balked. I could not see how I could possibly have a dog in the archives and maintain my responsibilities to the collections under my care. However, after two distressing incidents, my husband and I realised my health and safety should be our first priority and we needed to find a way to make it work.

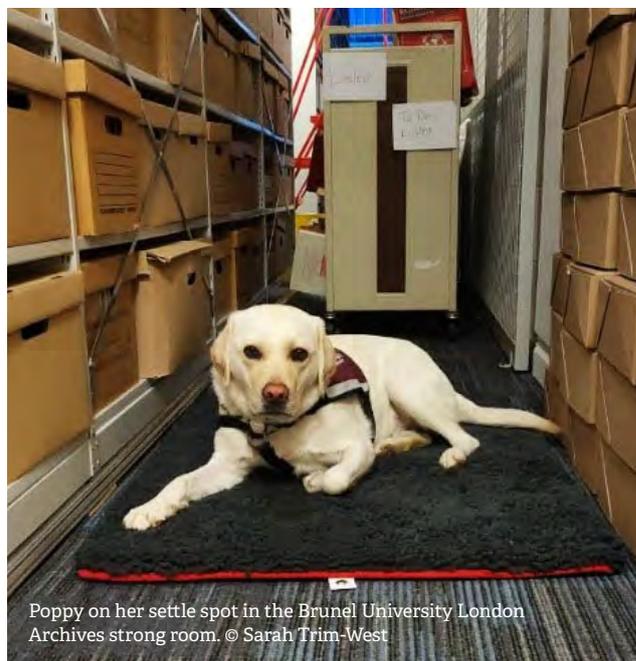
The final straw occurred after I had been working in the archive for just over a year following a trip to Whipsnade Zoo with my husband. While I was getting coffee, my husband stepped outside to take a phone call. While he was outside the fire alarm went off and I did not hear it. My husband got into a scuffle with a security guard trying to re-enter the building to find me, while I sat in the café blissfully unaware, reading a book. Thankfully it was a false alarm and everything was fine. However, the incident shook us so much that as soon as we got home we filled out an application for a hearing dog.

When I told my supervisor that I was applying for an assistance dog she had the same concerns as me, but committed to finding a way. However, I really struggled to find anything about having an assistance dog in the archives. The vast majority of the information I found was geared towards hospitality; there was little to no information for how to have a dog in an office, much less an archive.

Poppy has been a huge help in my day-to-day life but introducing an assistance dog to the office has not been without its ups and downs. Here are some of the issues I encountered and my solutions:

## 1. Poppy in the strong room:

Our biggest concern was having Poppy in the strong room. Clearly, I cannot lock her out when I am in the room, as she needs to have access to me at all times.



Poppy on her settle spot in the Brunel University London Archives strong room. © Sarah Trim-West

After discussions with the charity Hearing Dogs we established that as long as Poppy was in the same room and had free access to me (i.e. not tied up) she could still do her job. I also had concerns around Poppy getting injured if her toes caught in the tracks from our rolling shelves.

Following trial and error, Poppy now settles in her own spot beside the strong room door.

I was also forced to consider my own habits in the strong room including sitting between the shelves to rummage through boxes. I now use a trolley to put the boxes on, then roll the boxes near to Poppy where I can work instead. We also worked on having Poppy settle in the strong room for longer and longer periods to allow me to do more time-consuming tasks such as location listing.

## 2. Free access to water:

This issue was more difficult to overcome as I did not feel comfortable bringing water into the strong

room under any circumstances - no liquids being near the collections being a cardinal rule of archiving. My solution in the office was to introduce a "no spill" water bowl (which you can find on Amazon) but this didn't solve the problem for when Poppy was in the strong room.

In the end my solution was to go back to my desk at least every 30 minutes in order to allow Poppy to have a drink if she needed to. This also allows me to check my email and have a drink myself.

**3. Potential "mess":**

Even the best trained dog runs the risk of having an "accident" occasionally. As a result, this was one of our concerns when going through the risk assessment. The preventative solution is to take Poppy out frequently and she has learned how to ask to go out. However, in the event that, despite these precautions Poppy were still to have an accident, we have acquired several biohazard disposal packs. This is a pack about the size of a novel which includes PPE, powder to absorb any liquids, scoop to clean up mess, disinfectant spray and disposal bags.



**4. Having Poppy around researchers:**

Although I have a legal right to have Poppy with me anywhere the public may go, I am also aware that there are people with allergies and phobias. We inform all researchers that there is a dog on site, and ask if they are comfortable with her being present. No one has

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When I told my supervisor that I was applying for an assistance dog she had the same concerns as me, but committed to finding a way  
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replied adversely yet, but if they did we would adjust who sits with the researcher to ensure that Poppy is not in the room. When Poppy is in the reading room, she has learned to settle under the invigilator desk and sleep. For people who come without an appointment and those who use the study areas outside our office we have a sign to inform them a working dog is onsite and politely ask that she is not distracted.

Poppy has made a big difference to my life both personally and professionally. I truly believe that she makes me a better employee because I can focus on my work and not worry about unforeseeable incidents. Also, being the wonderful dog that she is, she helps reduce my anxieties and taking her for a walk during our lunch break has done wonders for my mental health. I appreciate the support of my manager and co-workers in not only going on this journey with me, but also standing up for my rights when challenged. I hope that in sharing my story this will help others in seeking the adjustments they need and support individuals with disabilities entering my profession.



Poppy with her miniature.  
© Tace West



Sarah and Poppy when they finished their training.  
© Hearing Dogs for the Deaf

## Build it up and they won't come: exploring digital and hybrid engagement strategies in the GLAMA sector

Between September 2022 and March 2023 the Academic Engagement team at the UK National Archives led on a targeted study into remote and hybrid engagement activities in the GLAMA (galleries, libraries, archives, museums, and academia) sector. They are delighted to be able to share the final report.



The report reflects the current state of remote and hybrid academic engagement activities in the GLAMA sector and captures the experiences of those involved in designing and coordinating remote and hybrid events and activities, with insights gathered through semi-structured interviews and two online workshops.

You can find the full report here: [Build it up and they won't come: Exploring digital and hybrid engagement strategies in the GLAMA sector](#)



## In Time and with Time: The National Library of Wales Decolonisation Project

In 2022 the Welsh Government released the Wales Anti-Racist plan after a lengthy period of consultation and engagement with various communities. This action plan was borne out of necessity, and it was set out to combat structural inequalities in order to make measurable changes in the lives of Black, Asian and other ethnicities in Wales, with the hope of achieving a Wales free of racism by 2030 through practical approaches.

At the start of 2023, the National Library of Wales began work in response to this challenge and after careful reflection embarked on various programmes to improve the representation of Black, Asian and other ethnicities in its collections, thus reflecting the diversity of Wales.

Among various projects and collaborations, the Library is currently developing a digital calendar that highlights various cultural, religious, awareness and diversity events globally but with relevance to Wales and items in the Library. This calendar will serve as a reference source, not just to its users within the Library but also to the public. Each event on the calendar contains links to various material in the Library's collections that are related to the events. This project



Miidong P. Daloeng, Archives Decolonisation Project Officer. © The National Library of Wales.

has brought to light what has been available but unexplored and, most importantly, has cast light on areas for improvement in the Library's collection development.

In the words of Eldridge Cleaver, "there is no more neutrality in the world. You are either part of the solution or you are going to be part of the problem." The Welsh Government has taken a stand and so has the Library, and we are hoping to make significant contributions towards an anti-racist Wales, one project at a time.

### Miidong P. Daloeng

Archives Decolonisation Project Officer  
The National Library of Wales



The National Library of Wales  
© The National Library of Wales

## Archive Service Accreditations

Congratulations to the following services who have, following a recent Archive Service Accreditation Panel, been awarded accreditation:

- Carmarthenshire Archives
- Institution of Engineering and Technology
- National Museum of the Royal Navy

Archive Service Accreditation is the UK-wide standard for archive services. By attaining accreditation, archive services demonstrate that they meet the standard for collections management and access to collections, showing resilience and the ability to manage changing circumstances successfully.

All accredited archive services must apply again for accreditation six years after their initial award to retain their accredited status. By achieving accreditation for a second time these archive services have demonstrated a commitment to continuing development of their service and the effective management of change. Congratulations also to the following archive services who were awarded accreditation for the second time at the same panel meeting:

- Anglesey Archives
- Berkshire Record Office
- Devon Archives and Local Studies
- History of Advertising Trust
- Pembrokeshire Archives (moved to provisional award)
- Rambert Archive
- Somerset Archives and Local Studies
- Westminster City Archives

Archive Service Accreditation is supported by a partnership of the Archives and Records Association (UK), Archives and Records Council Wales, National Records of Scotland, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Scottish Council on Archives, The UK National Archives, and the Welsh Government through its Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales division.

# Communicating collections – and conservation!

Conservation is all about improving access and providing ways for everyone to understand the materiality of written heritage items. Members of the archive and special collections teams at The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading, are always exploring new ways to communicate the items they care for in ways that allow everyone to enjoy the stories these incredible collections have to tell. To improve how the museum interprets collections and to widen possible audiences, I am working to introduce Makaton into the online descriptions of the work I do.

Makaton is a system of signs and symbols that can be combined with speech and the written word. It is highly visual and phonetic, providing an additional level of interpretation into discussions of objects, processes and actions. It also includes finger spelling. Through this, complex ideas are made more familiar and

understandable for a very broad audience. This is an initiative that has been successfully introduced into the interpretation of museum collections, such as the Natural History Museum at Tring and Barnsley Museums, but conservation is a new area for exploration.

Interpreting collections using Makaton signs and symbols will instantly open doors to better communication. I will complete my level 1 Makaton in August, and am really looking forward to putting it into practice across my work. If other services are interested in interpreting archive collections this way I would love to hear from you, with the aim of forming a collaborative group; drop me a line at [v.stevens@reading.ac.uk](mailto:v.stevens@reading.ac.uk).

### **Victoria Stevens ACR**

Library and archive conservator, University of Reading Museums and Special Collections



Makaton signs for 'Written heritage (history) is for everyone' © Victoria Stevens

# Helping communities help themselves

In 2022, the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) was awarded funding from the Outreach to Ownership (O2O) project, funded by Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). SCA's Everyone's Stories Matter project was motivated by concerns in the sector about the future of community archives, including vulnerability of community archives, physical and digital; inaccessibility; lack of support; lack of inclusivity; and lack of skills and knowledge.

SCA held workshops in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stornoway, providing some basic first steps advice on cataloguing and asking groups what the main challenges were around starting and/or maintaining a community archive. The groups all expressed a desire for bespoke training in areas such as cataloguing, storage, digital preservation, digitisation, copyright and making collections available online. SCA commissioned Dr Ellie Pridgeon to facilitate the workshops and produce a detailed report for the stakeholders and funders.

Additional funding was provided for phase two of the project in 2023,

which enabled SCA to recruit two archivists, Elspeth Reid and Jenny Duffy, to deliver one-to-one training for nine groups in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Grantown-on-Spey and the Isle of Lewis, and to develop a new online community archives toolkit.

The SCA Director, John Pelan and SCA Partnerships and

Engagement Manager, Audrey Wilson delivered a talk about the project at the ARA Annual Conference on 30th August. For a copy of the report produced by Ellie Pridgeon, email the SCA Director at [j.pelan@scottisharchives.org.uk](mailto:j.pelan@scottisharchives.org.uk)

**John Pelan**  
Director, Scottish Council on Archives



Community Archives workshop, Glasgow, August 2022 © SCA



Members of Stornoway Historical Society, O2O participants, May 2023 © SCA/Elspeth Reid

## Explore Your Archive - Focus week themes announced for 2023

Last year's campaign week once again built on the successes of previous years. Engagement across all the social media platforms put archives in front of over 20 million people last year!

- This year the themes are:
- Saturday 25th November - **Tradition**
  - Sunday 26th November - **Expeditions**
  - Monday 27th November - **Big**
  - Tuesday 28th November - **Small**
  - Wednesday 29th November - **Unique**
  - Thursday 30th November - **Art**
  - Friday 1st December - **Hobbies**
  - Saturday 2nd December - **Challenge**
  - Sunday 3rd December - **Your Archive**

## ARCHIVE EXPLORED

Keep an eye on campaign news [here](#) or follow on social media:  
 Twitter - [@ExploreArchives](#)  
 Facebook - [Explore Your Archive](#)  
 Instagram - [Explore Your Archive](#)  
 #ExploreYourArchive



# Community Archives and Heritage Group Awards 2023 '(CAHG)

The CAHG conference, on 19th July at UCL, celebrated 10 years of the CAHG awards and featured past award winners presenting on 'what happened next' and 'where they are now' in what turned out to be an incredibly inspiring day. The awards panel had the difficult job of selecting three winners from a field of 29 entries from all over the UK and Ireland.

Alan Butler, Chair of the Community Archives and Heritage Group said:

"There was an amazing array of groups entering this year's awards presenting a real variety of work. It made the work of the judging panel in choosing a winner quite difficult. In the end we felt that the overall winner - Dream Time Creative - exemplified what is best about community archives and heritage groups: bringing community together, gathering and preserving lost histories that help more people feel connected to where they live and celebrating their shared history. The other category winners also did this and Glenside Hospital Museum in Bristol, who are winners of the Wellbeing Award, are clearly making an impact with their community, as is Remembering The Past in North Tyneside. It's probably

clear from the number of highly commendeds and our awarding of a certificate of special achievement that if we could, we'd have made everyone a winner!"

The winners are:

- Overall winner and winner of Gathering and Preserving Heritage category: Dream Time Creative (Wakefield)
- Wellbeing Category: Glenside Hospital Museum (Bristol)
- Community Engagement: Remembering the Past (North Tyneside)

The judging panel also highly commended the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre, Sunny Bank Mills, Leyland Historical Society and Headford Lace.

They will also be awarding a Certificate of Special Achievement to the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre for sustained best practice.

Read the full story on the Community Archives and Heritage Group [website](#).



Sarah Cobham, near Wakefield town hall, with the blue plaque dedicated to Mary Francis Heaton; West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum, in 1818  
© Gary Carlton

# Backchat



**Michael Gallagher** chats to **Emily Overton**, aka Records Management Girl, about setting up her own business, flying the flag for records management and the joys of crafting.

## Can you tell me a bit about your career path so far and how you got into the sector?

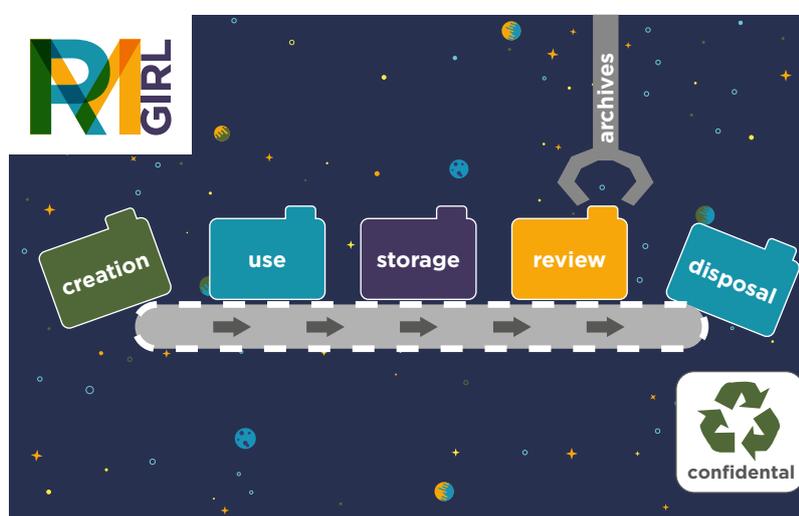
My career path is, quite frankly, rather chaotic! The main records management part all started with an email to mum. I'd been struggling with my current job as I was an overpaid filing and faxing clerk under the guise of Business Support Assistant. I needed to leave when a job came up for a Records Management Officer. I forwarded the job description to my mum and asked if it was a filing job and, if so, they could 'sod off'. My mum gave me the typical advice any parent would give but I went for the job and never looked back. It was the foundation of my career and I learnt everything on the job.

I also want to mention that it's fine if you didn't do very well at school, because neither did I! I started working as a Modern Apprentice and did NVQs and HNCs. I didn't go to university until I was a consultant and I only went because I wanted to prove that I could, and despite trying to leave 3 times, I eventually made it. It's harder to leave university than it is to quit a gym membership.

## What made you decide to start your own business?

Back in 2015, I was working full-time in records management and was approached for some assistance with a case that was being investigated by a regulator. The regulator needed my specialist advice on whether poor records management had a fatal impact. Word had gotten around that I was keen to provide records management advice and so it began. I couldn't be paid for the role in my public sector position and I also couldn't be represented by them. I was to make my own way in it and the ball started rolling.

I'd gathered 10 years' experience and been volunteering with the Information and Records



Management Society (IRMS). Initially I set up as a sole trader, which was fine, but the business kept getting bigger.

I checked with a couple of clients, asking whether they would be able to support me, as it would mean I could leave payroll and give them more hours. The same day that I left payroll, I moved to London. The stakes were high so it had to work!

## What advice would you give to someone considering going out on their own?

Firstly, do it.

Secondly, look at the worst-case scenario: you could become like me and become too feral to have a full-time job or you can just get another job if it doesn't work out.

In all seriousness, the biggest piece of advice I can give you is to invest in a decent brand by getting a design done professionally. Find a catchy name and buy the domain for it. Having an email that is @rmgirl.co.uk has always looked much more professional than, say, a free email provider.

RM Girl Belt  
Graphic  
© Records  
Management  
Girl



**What does a typical day look like?**

There is no typical day being RMGirl. A day can be a couple of meetings or it can be me beavering away behind my laptop. I can generally work around the clock, especially if I'm working internationally. Consultancy is very much a feast and famine type role. I used to joke that it's like taking the line between a nervous breakdown and having the best time ever and using it as a skipping rope.

**Looking ahead, what do you think the main challenges will be for the record-keeping sector over the next few years?**

The main challenges I think that we will have are the continual lack of legislation in England and Wales to keep selling ourselves as a role. If you're in Scotland reading this, please know that the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 is a piece of legislation that I idolise. At the beginning of my career, I decided I wanted to make records management sexy, and I've got just as hard a job now as I did back then. RM continues to slide up and down the political agenda and we need to keep it interesting and relevant. So, keep flying the records management flag because it's heavily needed.

**And finally, what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?**

I used to really suck at this question because I did records management in my spare time! If I wasn't doing something to do with RMGirl, I was doing IRMS work or on socials talking about records management. But, I can proudly say that I finally have a life! In my spare time I'm a crafter, sewing my own 50s skirts or doing something creative. I also enjoy puzzles and Lego. Lastly, I support my boyfriend with his comedy. You can look him up on socials as '[Phil Jerky](#).'



It's like taking the line between a nervous breakdown and having the best time ever and using it as a skipping rope.



Emily Overton,  
aka Records Management Girl  
© Emily Overton



# And finally arc magazine

Our next edition of the **ARC Magazine** is due out in November/December 2023 so look out for it in your inboxes. If you have any content suggestions for future editions, please email ARC Magazine [arceditors@archives.org.uk](mailto:arceditors@archives.org.uk)



All our back issues are now on our new TownsWeb hosting platform [here](#).

## aratoday

Meanwhile, ARA Today, our electronic members' bulletin which contains all the latest ARA and industry news, is circulated on the first Wednesday of each month. Please send any content suggestions for future editions of ARA Today to [deborah.mason@archives.org.uk](mailto:deborah.mason@archives.org.uk).



# SAVE THE DATE

FOR THE 2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF  
THE ARCHIVES & RECORDS ASSOCIATION

28 – 30 August, Birmingham, UK

We look forward to seeing you in  
Birmingham - a city beating at the heart  
of the country with a quiet confidence  
like no other.



**Archives & Records  
Association**  
UK & Ireland

