

# ARCHIVES UNLOCKED RELEASING THE POTENTIAL

**OGL**

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# RELEASING THE POTENTIAL OF ARCHIVES

## MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

**Archives sit at the heart of our collective understanding:** who we are, where we came from, and, indeed, where we are going.

**T**he materials that archives hold challenge, inspire and transform what we think we know of times, events and people, past and present. In this digital age, with so much focus on the management and security of data, archives and their collections make the national local and the local global.

In part, thanks to the opportunities of new technology, this is an exciting time for archives. For the people that experience and use them, and for those who are dedicated to developing and preserving their uniqueness.

So *Archives Unlocked* is an ambitious vision. It recognises and celebrates the value of archives within the wider cultural sector and across society. Digital transformation is at

its heart: the democratisation of information and knowledge, the boundless creativity and innovation made possible by archival material, and the confidence we can all share in exploring and using the record, supported by world-class archival practice.

Embracing these opportunities will allow archives to thrive and contribute fully to the wellbeing of our nation, culturally, economically, and intellectually. *Archives Unlocked* sees a future in which businesses, creative industries, arts organisations, academia, and communities can fully exploit archives.

The National Archives, as sector leader, will work with archives, partners and users to

make this ambition a reality, and rise to the challenges we face.

It is time to unlock the potential.

**THE RT HON MATT HANCOCK MP**  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DIGITAL  
AND CULTURE

## INTRODUCTION

**Imagine a world without archives.** Without records, we could not prove where and when we were born, or who owns the property we live in.

**W**e could not trace our ancestry, explore our collective and individual identities, or challenge established views of the past. Without this collective memory – the evidence store for our histories – we could not hold governments and organisations to account. The impact of archives is felt across society: inspiring art and literature; influencing product design and branding; enabling insightful and pioneering research; and informing decision-making in organisations of all types.

### IN SHORT: ARCHIVES MATTER.

Our collections need to be used to be useful. Until they are unlocked, archive records are just papers, images, or sequences of

bytes. Once revealed, they can tell us our stories, bringing alive the people, events and decisions that got us here today. Archives have the power to change people's lives.

The public's interest in archives and what they have to offer is growing, and digital technologies are opening up our archives like never before – to local, national and global audiences keen to learn and be inspired. We need an archives sector that can evolve and adapt to change. Working together, we can ensure that the benefits of archives are realised and enjoyed by future generations.

“ Without this collective memory – the evidence store for our histories – we could not hold governments and organisations to account.

# THE VISION ARCHIVES UNLOCKED

Archives will strengthen society through the trust they inspire, the enrichment they offer and their openness to all. We will be the home of world-leading archives, both digital and physical. People will be able to find and navigate collections, and have confidence that reliable archival evidence exists to support their research. Our collections will reflect all of society, so that, whether an individual, community or organisation, archives can tell us who we are and how we got here.

## THE AMBITIONS AT THE HEART OF THE VISION ARE

### TRUST

people and institutions trust in the authenticity of archive records, and how they are preserved and presented.

### ENRICHMENT

archives enhance and enrich our society intellectually, culturally and economically.

### OPENNESS

archives cultivate an open approach to knowledge and are accessible to all.

## WHAT'S DRIVING THE NEED FOR CHANGE?

Discussions with stakeholders have highlighted these key drivers of change:

### CONFIDENCE IN DATA AND INFORMATION

People need to have confidence in the integrity of institutions. Organisations need to be open and transparent, and high profile enquiries into the history and culture of public, corporate and charitable bodies have highlighted the evidential value of records.

### TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Digital technology has fundamentally changed what it means to be an archive. Archivists can help the IT and knowledge management communities by bringing professional archival practice to this digital world.

### USER EXPECTATIONS

Society is changing, opening up new uses for data and records, and posing new questions about what is collected now and in the future, in both paper-based documents and digital formats.

## ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This vision is the result of extensive consultation and development work within the archives sector, with our partners and beyond. Further details of those involved can be found at the end of the document.

The vision articulates three **ambitions** for the benefits which archives will deliver. Emerging from each of these is a set of outcomes which underpin our **action plan**. We have set out to keep the core of the vision very simple and concise, bringing its ambitions to life with **case studies** and **think-pieces**. The case studies showcase existing good practice and innovation in the archives sector. The think-pieces are from contributors both within and beyond the archives sector and seek to challenge existing practice and provoke new ideas about the future.

The document ends with a high-level overview of the action plan which articulates how our partnership of archive institutions and external partners, with support from The National Archives, will help the sector deliver the outcomes we have expressed.



## THINK-PIECE

### Collecting and the archive ecology

Over the past few decades, both the archival landscape and the role of archivists have changed fundamentally. There is now a wider definition of archives, which are being created in ways that are more varied, complex and (especially in the digital realm) less visible and tangible. There is also greater diversity in the ways in which archives are preserved and used. Archivists are no longer the sole focus of collecting, but are helping others to do the same. They have become participants in an archive ecology, rather than gatekeepers to it.

The term ecology suggests interdependence and organic development, with no single director or predetermined end point. We know that ecologies can be harmed in unpredictable ways by external factors and can benefit from interventions, if based on

a deep understanding, and supported by long-term, comprehensive and detailed information. We have seen the response of zoos, which have developed from being self-contained sub-sections of the natural world to multi-faceted participants in wildlife conservation. In short, ecologies can and should be nurtured.

We need an equally collective response for an archive ecology – a new vision, in several senses. This starts with an aspiration that it encompasses the entirety of potential archives now being created – as diverse and complex as the society they record. It also requires oversight and foresight: a comprehensive understanding of archives, now and in the future. We need to extend our field of vision and action to those records still at risk of being lost – either

because they are not preserved or not visible to potential users.

Archivists now share stewardship of archives, but retain a key collective responsibility in ensuring their survival and sustainability. To do that effectively, they need the support of policymakers, employers and funders. Together we need to know a lot more about the archive ecology and to be prepared to act on that knowledge.

**JUDY BURG**  
HEAD OF ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS  
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

# TRUST

People and institutions trust in the authenticity of archive records, and how they are preserved and presented.

- > **Democracy and society are strengthened** by scrutiny of the archival record, holding institutions and individuals to account.
- > Archive users **have confidence in the integrity and authenticity of records**, and in the professionals who support their research.
- > Services **embrace the opportunities of technological change**, ensuring confidence in both digital and physical records.



## CASE STUDY

Protecting our digital memory: E-ARK

**E**-ARK is a pioneering global research project, aimed at improving the technologies of digital archiving to **ensure that records and databases remain authentic and usable over time**. It has brought together international practice to develop the first ever end-to-end digital archive system. This single, scalable, robust system can be used by all memory institutions—public and private, large and small—to meet the challenge of born digital records. It has the potential to be truly transformative.

“The partnership approach makes best use of the existing expertise of each participating archive, and also supports them to learn new skills from each other.”

The project partnership of national archives from across Europe, Chile and the United States of America is supported by experts at the University of Brighton and the Digital Preservation Coalition. Discussing the biblical significance of the project name, project leader Professor Janet Delve points out that ‘never before in human history have we been **at risk of losing so much knowledge in one go**. If you’re careless with digital information, it’s gone forever.’

The partnership approach makes best use of the existing expertise of each participating archive, and also supports them in learning new skills from others. This provides a better service to users in the long term, and fosters consistent approaches on an international scale. In one example of the project’s work, The Danish

National Archives developed an open source tool that connects to live databases and migrates data to the appropriate preservation format. This vastly reduces the cost of getting material into archives, and opens up competition in the commercial sector to provide the best solutions.

### KEY LEARNING POINT

Janet concludes that the strong network of partners means the project is greater than the sum of its parts: ‘instead of each archive having a bit of expertise, every archive can have a whole system to share. **That means a massive improvement in terms of cost and skills.**’



## THINK-PIECE

Trust in the digital future

It’s exhilarating – perhaps the most exciting time to be an archivist that there’s ever been. The digital challenge for archives today is one of pace. The days of digitally simulating long-established archival practices devised for physical records are behind us. Snapchat, Google Docs, microservices, blockchains, neural networks – all disrupt how information is created, encoded and used. All disrupt archiving, requiring fundamentally new capabilities and approaches.

Ultimately, even in this digital age, it falls to archivists to create and sustain archives. Until now, how we do that—archival theory and practice—has tended to evolve quite gradually over the last 120 years (albeit with the occasional leap, thanks to archive theorists like Jenkinson or Schellenberg).

Today’s digital archivists must rapidly develop new archival practices, with and for each new generation of technology. The rub is that the digital challenge for archives can never be completely solved. This is not about moving from one relatively steady state of archival practice to a new steady state for digital. We are moving from relative stability to continual change. This raises an important question: as archives move more quickly, how do we retain the legitimacy we confer on the digital evidence we preserve?

Archival practice is key for rapidly evolving digital archives. The opportunity is to shift the basis of trust, from the authority of the archive as an institution to transparency of archival practice. This trust must be founded on the evidence we make available

about what we do in digital archives. Just like showing your workings in a school maths exam, trust in digital archives should mean demonstrating what we are doing in ways that others can see and verify. The digital archivist, equipped with hashing algorithms and cryptography as their tools of the trade, can remain trusted custodians in this digital future.

**JOHN SHERIDAN**  
DIGITAL DIRECTOR  
THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES



Archives aren't just about things already past; they will capture the histories of the present and the future. People need to trust that the record will be preserved, whether paper or digital, and made available to future generations.

**CASE STUDY** Finding the evidence: Independent Police Complaints Commission/Hillsborough investigation

In a devastating tragedy, 96 Liverpool supporters died due to overcrowding at Hillsborough football stadium on 15 April 1989. 27 years later, a jury found the victims had been unlawfully killed. This conclusion was the result of decades of campaigning by families of the deceased, **and highlighted that records are a powerful tool for accountability.**

The ruling was made possible by the release in 2012 of all the material relating to the incident – 450,000 documents from 85 sources. The Hillsborough Independent Panel had recommended that a 'Permanent Archive' be established. While physical records are largely split between Sheffield Archives, Liverpool Archives and The National Archives, digital copies of the material are all available on the panel's website.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) is now carrying out its first historic inquiry into the role of the police, both during and in the aftermath of the disaster. A significant amount of the evidence for the IPCC's investigation comes directly from the historical material, with managed access to the vast collection of records provided by a professional archivist. The archivist supports the needs of the investigative teams, and has introduced robust processes to support collection, collation, cataloguing and access. Managing the archive material in this way ensures its integrity and authenticity.

The investigation's work with the archive has underlined the importance of maintaining documents which could become vital in future investigations. It demonstrates the value of robust practice: both preserving

**“ The investigation's work with the archive has underlined the importance of maintaining documents which could become vital in future investigations.**

original records and keeping order in archives are vital. The power and importance of these records for holding individuals and organisations to account for their actions continues to be their lasting legacy.

**KEY LEARNING POINT**  
Archive Manager Rebekah Taylor says: 'Being able to demonstrate that an organisation like the IPCC is committed to preserving the quality and integrity of these important documents, **is key to accountability and public confidence.**'

**THINK-PIECE** Telling stories

When the journalist Joan Didion wrote 'we tell ourselves stories in order to live' (in *The White Album*, 1979), she was expressing a deep truth about how we construct meaning in our lives. Many of our stories come from those relics of the past that live in our archives, libraries and galleries. Some are newly minted; others retell and reframe the past to better understand the present. And the archive too is a story: whether creative fiction, careful scholarship or news journalism, any exploration of an archive must grapple with questions surrounding the collection itself – why and how was this material preserved? Is this all – or is there missing work that will change my perspective? How can this selection of past material have authority?

Part of the BBC Archive's value is that it is the creation of one institution over almost

a century, giving it cohesiveness even in its incompleteness. There is an ideology that permeates it—its contents were largely decided upon by the sort of people who work for the BBC—which researchers and users should at least note as they pass among the shelves and search the catalogues. While perhaps not always so apparent, we know that every collection was shaped in some way, and the story of that shaping must be part of our understanding and assessment of the authority of the finished product.

The ways we use archives to tell our stories has shifted with electronic collections as the sheer volume of available data increases exponentially, along with the capacity of our drives and tapes. Nothing is accessible without indexes and catalogues, and in the future we will value them as much as the archived object. The choices made as we

add metadata will embody the beliefs of the archivists as much as the choice of items to preserve, and we must remember this and expose it, as we tell stories on the backs of these new collections. We have told ourselves stories in order to live: we can use a greater understanding of the choices that shape an archive to build ourselves catalogues that will help us thrive.

**BILL THOMPSON**  
HEAD OF PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT  
**BBC ARCHIVE**

# ENRICHMENT

Archives enhance and enrich our society intellectually, economically and culturally.

- > Our **culture of knowledge and learning expands** through new ways to discover and use archive material.
- > **Value in businesses grows** through the use of archive material to support change, innovation and efficiency.
- > **People's lives are enhanced** through their engagement with archive collections.

## CASE STUDY

### Recovering our past: Barnardo's Archive

Established in 1867, Barnardo's works to transform the lives of the most vulnerable children across the UK. Once famous for its care homes, the charity now supports over 900 services, including fostering and adoption. Barnardo's Archive has changed the way in which former residents and their relatives access their personal records, recognising what it means for people to understand their past.

Open access to records began in 1995, predating the Data Protection Act, after a BBC documentary fuelled a spike in enquiries. The archive now meets the needs of former residents and their families by enabling access to records, and providing support through the difficult process of receiving what might be painful or confusing information.

**The way the archive works is now very user-focused.** Archive Manager, Martine King, says: 'It is a massive decision for people to contact us, as there is no assurance about what they might find and how it matches what they've previously been told.' The service gives people choice about how to research, either in the privacy of their home, or in the supportive environment of the charity.

Among developments to support users, the archive has invested £120,000 to digitise 500,000 photographs. In the absence of a family home, these photographs may be the only images people have of their own childhoods. Ease of use is paramount, so Barnardo's Archive is working with the Wellcome Trust to develop an archive catalogue and improve their finding aids.

Furthermore, the retention policy has now been changed to preserve more case files, recognising the enormous value of these files to the individuals involved and to their families.

### KEY LEARNING POINT

Martine concludes, 'We're helping lots of people to understand all variations of experience of being in care, and how important it is **to learn from our past, question and improve** the way we support and protect children today. Our ongoing legacy of duty to those who were in our care, our long experience of working with our former children, and of course the archive itself, are all powerful tools for informing that debate and recovering precious fragments from the past.'

## THINK-PIECE

### Are archives good for our wellbeing?

Archives give me a sense of joy, as they do for many others; the question, then, is 'why?'. At the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, we are looking at evidence of what can be done to improve wellbeing in the UK. There are clear benefits to this goal; we get ill less and recover more quickly, we are more creative, collaborative, and giving. We perform better at work; and have stronger social networks. So what evidence is there on wellbeing that is relevant to archives?

Archives make us think, and learning is one of the 'five ways to wellbeing'.\* Of these five ways, learning drops off most dramatically with age in the UK, which suggests a potential role for archives in an ageing population. An understanding of our personal and shared histories, and constructing an 'intergenerational sense of self', connects us with something much

larger than ourselves, giving us a sense of belonging. Perhaps surprisingly, governance and the trust in our collective institutions is a factor in our happiness, and archives are at the heart of this national accountability.

There are social benefits of archives too, providing another of the 'five ways'; the connections, trust and the sense of community that come from everyday interactions are vital for our wellbeing. Studies have suggested that the impact of unwanted social isolation—loneliness—may be as bad for health as smoking, and increases the risk of conditions including dementia. Sharing positive emotions, including the things we experience in an archive, such as feeling interested, engaged or having a sense of accomplishment, makes their effect on us stronger. This is important as we tend to notice negative feelings

more strongly than positive ones. A social environment that supports ease and choice in opportunities for interaction is also a magic formula for wellbeing.

Understanding the connection between things we value and our happiness will help us see how spending decisions can improve wellbeing in the UK. The challenge is for the archives sector to develop its understanding of these and other connections, and harness them to increase our happiness.

\* an evidence-based set of practical actions people can undertake in their everyday lives and that decision-makers can build into policy, along with 'give', 'connect', 'take notice' and 'be active'.

**NANCY HEY**  
DIRECTOR  
WHAT WORKS CENTRE FOR WELLBEING



The power of archives is in both their evidential and emotional impact. Whether revisiting national history or telling the story of your own family, they turn names into personalities, give us the arguments behind decisions and reveal the complexity of individuals, communities and societies.

## CASE STUDY

### The DNA of a business: John Lewis Partnership Archive

The 150th anniversary of retailer John Lewis, in 2014, provided the archive with an opportunity to demonstrate its value, and contribute to innovation. The archive was used to **reinforce the brand's history and values**, and to celebrate its unique partnership model. From the principle of 'never knowingly undersold', to its famous customer service, the company today remains closely connected to its past and actively uses this knowledge to inspire those working in business now and in the future.

“ Using John Lewis's comprehensive design archive, teams from across the business worked with long-standing suppliers to bring back fresh reinterpretations of iconic designs.

Using John Lewis's comprehensive design archive, teams from across the business worked with long-standing suppliers to bring back fresh reinterpretations of iconic designs. Limited edition items were launched, such as a Smeg fridge, Le Creuset ovenware and an updated version of a classic Silver Cross pram. One such product was the revival of a 'DaisyChain' design created by Pat Albeck in the 1960s, which was itself a homage to the work of British designer William Morris, emphasising the importance of heritage to the organisation.

The archive helped boost sales during the anniversary period. Furthermore, the work also reinforced the value which teams across the business derive from working with the archive. It highlights the **corporate memory which is in the DNA** of the John Lewis Partnership culture, as well as inspiring new

store designs, and supporting staff training and development.

In addition to the regular work undertaken by the archive team, the building is now open to the public one day a week. A programme of talks, team days, events and craft activities ensure that the archive is now the cultural heart of an international business.

#### KEY LEARNING POINT

Judy Faraday, John Lewis Partnership Archivist, says: **'The investment in the archive has undoubtedly released greater productivity and value** through an ability to offer a great service to the business. The archive is genuinely at the heart of the company, actively influencing its future.'



## THINK-PIECE

### Archives and economic growth

What do archives contribute towards economic growth or economic development? It's not a question that is very often considered, let alone the technicalities of how this would be measured. While it's undoubtedly a challenge, I'm sure that this is a missed opportunity.

Economic growth is typically discussed in terms of gross national product. That means increases in the total value of goods and services produced by a country in any one year, making it richer. But there are alternative measures, for example wellbeing or happiness. Experiences, feelings and values—such as discovery, education, justice and truth—all have worth to individuals and to society. All are different forms of richness that archives help deliver.

Returning to economic growth, as Chair of the Business Archives Council, I see many

interesting examples of firms benefitting from the use of their historic records. They can be used to develop new product lines based on heritage designs, or packaging might be given a retro theme. Similarly, advertising campaigns can draw upon archive material to help emphasise the history of a firm or to reinforce well-known brands.

Sales of new products, advertising, the attachment to a trusted brand – this all translates into consumer expenditure, into profits, into jobs and ultimately into growth. Whether that is a retailer selling clothes or cosmetics, or a financial institution's television advert resulting in more customers, it all contributes to the total value of goods and services produced.

Of course, archives have always been able to create these impacts. However, in the digital

world there is the opportunity to unlock even more data and information, and in ways that were not possible, or even imaginable, before. This offers even greater potential to promote growth. The challenge is not just to think about how this can be done, but demonstrate the impact. We know that, but we must convince others, and that means advocacy and evidence.

Meanwhile, I look forward to a day when I read the headline 'Archives Make Us Richer'.

**MIKE ANSON**  
ARCHIVIST  
BANK OF ENGLAND ARCHIVE

# OPENNESS

Archives cultivate an open approach to knowledge, and are accessible to all.

- > Archives deliver an excellent user experience, enabling people to find, access and interpret archive records, whether digital or physical.
- > The rich diversity of society is reflected in our archives' collections, users and workers.
- > Archives are networked globally to maintain excellent practice and open new possibilities for institutions and users.

ISLAND'S MI

BY PHIL



## CASE STUDY

Reaching new audiences: Archives+, Manchester

Archives + is a partnership of archive collections from across the region, and the home of Manchester's history and heritage services. The documents, photographs and films at the heart of the collection connect people with the story of the city: its industry, its communities, and its history of radical politics.

The redevelopment of Manchester Central Library provided the opportunity for Archives+ to **transform its relationship with local communities**. The centre handed the power to its partners, who jointly curated the striking new exhibition in the building's entrance, using their own collections. The goal was to reach new audiences, people who may never have used archives before, including young people and people from marginalised groups.

The city's reputation for radical thought is reflected in the council's engagement agenda. Through the Activation programme, the public themselves decide where the gaps in collections are, and use the archives to design and deliver their own heritage activities. Participants have included the Coalition of Disabled People, and black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, giving them a unique opportunity to curate a digital exhibition that appears in a library that has 1.4 million visitors a year, in addition to online access.

The development of collections now comes from proper engagement with communities who can work with many different archives. By working more effectively together, the archives also have a louder voice and bigger influence on the city's cultural programme.

“ The development of collections now comes from proper engagement with communities who can work with many different archives.

### KEY LEARNING POINT

Kevin Bolton, the archivist who designed and delivered the project, says: '**It's no longer always about us continuing to deliver projects**, however worthy. It's a big culture change for staff and partners to be willing to cede control to the community. But the rewards are worth the effort.'



## THINK-PIECE

Archiving 'journeys to belonging'

For newish migrant-settler communities, there is an accelerated interest in archiving their 'journeys to belonging' as full and valued citizens. For these communities, archives have become a site of struggle against social and political marginalisation and exclusion. There are implications for the professional archivist establishment. Archivists have a vital role in reparative history-making.

Among Caribbean, South Asian, and African migrant-settler communities, for example, from the last century until now, funding initiatives in support of heritage projects have often been piecemeal, with a tendency to flavour-of-the-moment tokenism. Notwithstanding the arrival on the scene of the Black Cultural Archives, currently, up and down the country, there

are groups from these same communities energetically discussing and devising new strategies to challenge that tired, debilitating narrative of inconsistent funding. Recognising that errors of omission in dominant heritage narratives result as much from ignorance as disregard, cultural activists from these communities aim to assist in, as well as demand, the plugging of the gaps.

Beyond the bold ambitions and demands coming out of these and other newer migrant-settler communities is the matter of obtaining the active and proactive assistance of established archives and archivists. This assistance will be needed to address major archival challenges in collecting, evaluating, conserving, interpreting and making records and

archival materials accessible and available to educators and cultural animators. Central to all this will be the acquisition of new archival skills by non-professionals, assisted by established professionals. Providing this assistance will bring new kinds of challenge to existing professional practice. These demands and difficulties coming from marginalised constituencies can be viewed as daunting, or, they can be grasped as exciting professional challenges for archivists.

**COLIN PRESCOD**  
CHAIR  
INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS



Archives are for everyone. Just as our language, our culture and our high streets reflect changes in society, our records should too. When future generations look back at today, they need to see the vibrancy of our society and the diversity of our experience.



## CASE STUDY

Seeing archives differently: Know Your Place, Bristol

**K**now Your Place is a digital mapping project which allows users to explore their local area online, placing local history and heritage at their fingertips. It is **more intuitive and flexible than a traditional archival catalogue**, recognising that when it comes to our streets, our towns and our countryside, it is often easiest to find things on a map.

Know Your Place is a collaboration between Bristol Archives and the city's planning team. The website uses historic maps and street views alongside the council's pin-point

“ The website can be freely used by individuals and groups, leading to exciting projects that build a sense of place.

mapping software, overlaid with digital surrogates from a wide range of collections. This can lead to bespoke interpretations; for the centenary of the First World War, new layers were added, plotting sites of significance for the conflict, such as munitions factories, military hospitals and memorials.

The website can be freely used by individuals and groups, leading to exciting projects that build a sense of place. It has been used by Bristol's LGBT+ community to map the shifting spaces important to their history. Through the map, you can listen to people's stories, view photographs, posters and flyers and explore places important to histories of both toleration and oppression.

A key project aim was to improve planning applications; by using screengrabs and prints from Know Your Place, users are now better

informed by evidence from the historic record. The archive has seen use of its collections greatly increase, and its success means the project is now expanding to the South West region with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

### KEY LEARNING POINT

City Archivist Julian Warren says, 'the mapping tool gives you so much data in one place, with such rich context, that would have normally taken ages to assemble in the search room. **It's a win-win for users, staff and the council.**'



## THINK-PIECE

The archivist of the future

**I**n periods of organisational change, archives remain constant. This is true for governments, companies, or, as we have recently experienced at the National Theatre (NT), a new artistic director. Since it was founded in 1963, the NT has had six artistic directors. Each brings their own leadership and vision, shaping the company in different ways; the archive has an important role in recording those shifts, demonstrating its integral part to play in business continuity and as the authoritative source on performance history.

In the future, digital expertise will become engrained in the traditional archive skillset; approaches to paper, born digital and collections of other media will need to merge. With the increasing levels of digitised archive content available online, the role of archivists will change. Instead of focusing

on digitisation, we will need to curate content and engage new audiences, as the NT has started to do using the opportunities afforded by new technologies such as the Google Cultural Institute, virtual reality and apps.

Preservation, conservation and access have always been the backbone of our sector, and so they will continue to be across different formats of materials. This broader outlook on collections should also encourage widespread and more sustained collaborations with libraries, museums, and the education sector to ensure cross-pollination of ideas and projects. The NT's involvement with students has allowed us to open up one of our collections to a much wider researcher base than we would have otherwise thought, not only improving our understanding and appreciation of

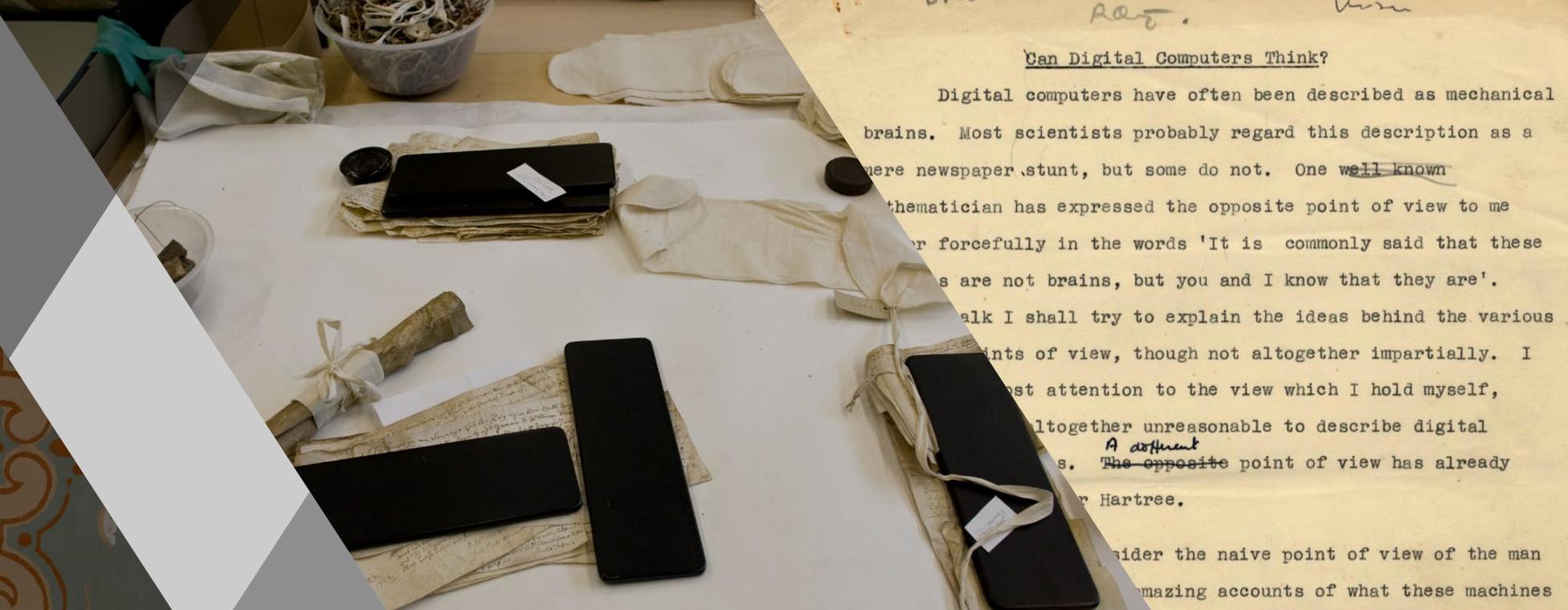
the materials but also disseminating the collection to wider audiences.

Just as the NT strives to represent the 'nation' it serves, our sector must focus on diversifying our workforce across all areas of the population to ensure that we are truly representative of our country. Fairer and more accessible routes into the profession are needed to enrich our sector with diverse skills and knowledge. The sector increasingly needs skills beyond the traditional, ensuring that we can meet the challenges of fundraising, outreach, increasing demand for content and growing enthusiasm for engagement with users.

**ERIN LEE**  
ARCHIVIST  
NATIONAL THEATRE

# ACTION PLAN

The National Archives is committed to realising this vision and we have developed an action plan to support it. The plan will be delivered in partnership with the whole archives sector, and partners from the wider cultural, digital, heritage and education spheres. We will revise the action plan on an annual basis.



To achieve our ambitions of trust, enrichment and openness, we must tackle the barriers to success. To do so, we need to meet the key challenges facing the sector, but also advocate for archives and ensure their value is understood. The action plan will address three vital themes: digital capacity, resilience and impact. The plan will:

- > Develop the **digital capacity** of the archives sector, to preserve digital records and increase discoverability of the paper and digital archive.
- > Build the sector's **resilience** to ensure more archives can meet and sustain the Archive Service Accreditation standard, open the sector to new skills and a more diverse workforce, increase income generation capacities, and support innovative service models.
- > Demonstrate the **impact** of archives by developing and expanding audiences, piloting approaches to using data and evidence, and influencing thinking in the IT, commercial and knowledge sectors.

To make the plan happen, The National Archives will be supported by a challenge panel comprising leading organisations within the sector, and partners from the wider cultural, digital and education spheres.

## CONSULTATION PROCESS AND WHO WE WORKED WITH

The National Archives leads and supports the sector of over 2,500 archives in England, and has statutory responsibilities for public records held by archive services in Wales, where we work in collaboration with the Welsh Government. While *Archives Unlocked* is focused on archives in England, we will continue to work with partners in the home nations and internationally, to address the challenges and opportunities of using archives in a digital world within a UK context, and to support research and innovation.

### HOW THIS DOCUMENT WAS PRODUCED

*Archives Unlocked* is the result of a process of co-creation. We consulted widely, listening to a very broad range of voices from across the archives sector: a range of funders and partners from the wider culture, heritage and information worlds, and archive users.

We ran four roundtables across England, attended by 179 people from across the archives sector, and conducted an online survey which received 235

responses. A public consultation and survey on the draft vision ran October 2016-January 2017 and we received a further 130 responses to this. We also held six expert panels with our key strategic partners to explore the draft vision in detail.

Throughout our consultation, we were supported by a **reference group** from across the archives sector. Reference group members were: Mike Anson (Bank of England), Rob Baker (Blind Veterans Association), Kevin Bolton (then at Archives +), Judy Burg (Durham University), Sam Johnston (Dorset History Centre), Alex Miller (Wigan Council), Chris Mumby (The National Archives), Arike Oke (Rambert Archive), Geoff Pick (London Metropolitan Archives), Gary Tuson (Norfolk County Council), Chris Webb (York University), and Simon Wilson (Hull History Centre).

**Expert Panel members** came from: Ancestry.com, Archives and Records Association, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Arts Council England, BBC, Borthwick Institute, British Library, Business Archives Council, Chief Archivists in Local

Government Group, CILIP, CIPFA, Community Archives & Heritage Group, Creative and Cultural Skills, Digital Preservation Coalition, FARMER, Find My Past, Gale Cengage, Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Houses Archivists Group, Imperial War Museum, Innovate UK, JISC, Local Government Association, London Metropolitan Archives, National Media Museum, National Theatre, Polonsky Digital Preservation Programme, Pilgrim Trust, Rambert Archive, Religious Archives Group, Research Libraries UK, Tate, University of London Computer Centre, Wellcome Trust and Zooniverse, in addition to academics and representatives from local archive services.



*Archives Unlocked* and the accompanying action plan were developed with the support of Activist Group.