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Rapid response collecting guidance

Deciding whether to collect in relation to unprecedented and unforeseen situations or events

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1.Introduction

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to this guidance

We wrote this guidance to help you decide whether to collect in relation to unprecedented or unforeseen situations and events.

We recognise that people reading this guidance may be in challenging circumstances. Please know that you are not alone. You can reach out to the Archive Sector Leadership Team through asl@nationalarchives.gov.uk. You may find the health and wellbeing guidance from the Archive and Records Association helpful.

We have drawn on existing resources and the experiences of people in the sector to help you to make the best decisions you can with the resources available and any time constraints.

A team of archives and conservation professionals and academics produced the guidance in 2024:
- Kostas Arvanitis, University of Manchester

- Hannah Jones, The National Archives

- David Morris, The National Archives

- Mike Rogers, The National Archives

- Victoria Stevens, conservation consultant

- Wendy Walker, West Sussex Record Office

- Sarah Wickham, archives consultant (editor)

Many others helped to develop it by providing case studies and other information. Our thanks go to all the contributors.

After this introduction, the guidance is organised into the following sections:

2 - factors to consider initially

3 – immediate priorities and issues (first few hours and days)

4 – in the short-term (first few days – weeks)

5 – in the medium to long-term (first few months and years)

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1.2 What is rapid response collecting?

This guidance uses the term "rapid response collecting" for collecting in response to unforeseen, sudden, unpredictable or unprecedented situations. Some examples of these may include

- community-organised/spontaneous protests
- accidents, disasters, mass violence or other events involving harm to or death of a person or people
- significant social events such as the death of a prominent person
- natural or man-made disasters.
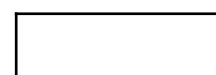
This list is not exhaustive or exclusive. It does not suggest that any one type of event is more significant than another.

"Disaster collecting", "crisis-based" and "contemporary collecting" are also terms used in the professional literature for rapid response collecting. There are other terms including rescue collecting and collecting spontaneous or grassroots memorials and/or shrines. Different people and situations may use different terms: none is better or worse than another. We use rapid response collecting in this guidance to encompass the general principles and issues which might apply in many different situations.

This guidance applies to both physical/analogue collecting and digital collecting. Rapid response collecting may often centre around particular location(s) chosen by a community such as protest sites and temporary memorials. You might collect physical material, or document sites without collecting original items. You might collect digitally from websites dedicated to an event, or more generally via existing platforms and media spaces (for example, via social media hashtags).

Archives might lead rapid response collecting initiatives, or collaborate with or support others.

This guidance aims to support people undertaking rapid response collecting. However, it is important to acknowledge that it might be right for you NOT to collect at the time of an unforeseen event.

1.3 Purpose and scope of this guidance

We aim to help people working in archives to explore the issues around rapid response collecting and to effectively manage these when responding to unforeseen situations. Such situations are unique, meaning that there is no single ideal response.

The guidance therefore offers prompts, options and approaches to enable you to make informed decisions. It includes organisational case studies, and signposts to other resources where more detailed or specialist information is available. It is not intended to be prescriptive. Please adapt the guidance to your own circumstances. We will update it as practice evolves.

Other guidance is available from The National Archives for planned collecting outside unforeseen events. These include pre-planned large cultural infrastructure projects and general collections development. The Oral History Society has guidance on planning oral history projects including those related to past events.

1.4 Why is specific guidance needed for archives?

Other organisations may also undertake rapid response collecting. But archives might have additional responsibilities for preserving the organisational archive or supporting records management for their parent body, which itself may play an active role in responding to the unforeseen event.

Some archive services may also be officially designated to preserve public or official records. Other bodies (for example, Coroner, hospital, or Court) may transfer records relating to the event to the archive service later. Archive services may be designated as:

- England and Wales: "Place of Deposit" for Public Records under the Public Records Act 1958. More information.

- Northern Ireland: Official Records must be transferred to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland under the Public Records Act (NI) 1923. More information.

- Scotland: "appropriate archive" under the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011. More information.

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2.Factors to consider initially

2.1 What has happened, where and when?

2.2 Who is involved?

2.3 Why might you (not) undertake rapid response collecting?

2.4 How could you collect ethically?

2.5 What resources are available to you?

2. Factors to consider initially

However you decide to respond, we suggest that you document factual information and your decision-making processes. As well as helping you keep track in the present, this will provide future administrative and provenance information for a rapid response collection.

We have identified the following as helpful issues to consider.

2.1 What has happened, where and when?

What is the nature and scale of an event?
What immediate impact(s) are there?
Has something similar occurred previously, whether locally or internationally?
How likely might something similar reoccur?

Is your parent body involved in co-ordinating or leading an emergency response?
Do you understand the procedures and people involved in this response?

- This introduction to civil emergency preparation and response from the Local Government Association gives a useful overview.

Are investigations, criminal or civil proceedings, inquests, or a public enquiry already taking place? Are they likely?

- Investigations, criminal proceedings and public enquiries may mean that there is public attention after the event for a significant period of time. Some proceedings may be delayed until others have been concluded. Featured case study: section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office.

Where are people responding?
Is this digitally/virtually (for example, using specific social media hashtags or on specific sites/platforms)?

- Crowdfunding sites and petitions may be set up, as well as any specific memorialising or campaigning websites.

Are any physical location(s) likely to be needed for their pre-existing purpose quickly (for example, station entrance, bridge, thoroughfare)?

- Some physical locations may be important for a community to "get back to normal" once any forensic investigation has concluded or damage to infrastructure repaired. Services have found that items may need to be removed quickly in these cases.

- Outdoor locations will be affected by the weather.

What responses are people making? Are they choosing particular symbols? How are these changing over time?

- Archives have found it can be helpful to be aware of any (changing) patterns of responses. Virginia Tech [found](#) that in the first few days a lot of food items were brought to the campus, which were distributed to students. Later, art and craft items like paintings and quilts and other items were left at spontaneous memorials. Many people may adopt particular symbols, such as the bee following the Manchester Arena attack, green hearts after the Grenfell Tower fire, or Paddington Bear soft toys following the death of Queen Elizabeth II.

2.2 Who is involved?

People to consider among those directly involved might include participants in or survivors of an event, first responders and the emergency services, and bereaved people (including families of origin, families of choice, and friends).

Bear in mind that everyone is different, in different circumstances. Where people have been harmed or have died, remember different individuals will have different relationships to them. For example, some people directly involved in the event may be estranged from their family of origin, or be in abusive relationships. You should therefore use inclusive language such as "bereaved people" (rather than "families") or "people that have been affected" (not "victims").

2.2.1 Awareness of overlapping aspects of identity ("intersectionality")

It is important to be sensitive to different aspects of identity, particularly of those directly affected or who have died. You could consider potential protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010) as well as socio-economic status. For example, being disabled, using a first language other than English, specific religious or cultural practices relating to burial, or availability of financial

resources, may shape how people respond to an event and also how they are treated by others.

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission has [information on protected characteristics](applies to England, Scotland and Wales).

- The Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission [says] "It is often hard to clearly define the many different 'groups' of people whose lives have been affected irreversibly by the events of 14 June 2017. Words and 'labels' often fail to do justice to how personal experience of the tragedy intersects in multiple ways. There are both shared and unique experiences among the affected individuals and families, just as every family and individual is different, and assumptions can't be made. There are also communities within larger communities… We know that the language we've used might not be what everyone would choose, but we've done our best to be as clear as we can."

2.2.2 How are people responding?

Are particular groups, either newly formed or existing, involved?

- It is important to engage with a broad array of stakeholders. Good engagement can start early, particularly if your service has pre-existing relationships with groups. However, be careful not to rely too heavily on or give undue precedence to individuals who may claim to be community leaders or representatives. Be aware of who might not be represented in your engagement. There will be a range of needs, responses and views and consensus may take time to build. The Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission [reports] describe engagement and consultation grounded in empathy and sensitivity, diversity and inclusion, and collaboration.

The [Australian Red Cross] says it is important to be aware that collective events may have wide reaching impacts.

- More people than those directly involved may feel affected by an event and wish to participate in responding to the event. Participating can be helpful for individual and community healing after crisis events. Participating might not suit everyone, but for those it does, it might be a powerful and potentially healing experience.

- Contributing online or to a physical temporary site or memorial may therefore bring together a range of people, with a range of emotional

experiences. People may find others who are experiencing similar feelings and emotions. This can normalise feelings like shock, sadness, anger, loss and grief, and can assist in (re)establishing feelings of social solidarity and belonging.
Some people may not have their own informal support networks, and draw upon the collective nature of temporary sites to seek support.

Participating in response to a specific call for collecting can be very helpful for some people. Many of those involved may want to tell their story to enhance the visibility of events and those affected. This may support people's recovery, as well as preserving knowledge and evidence for the future. It takes time and care to recruit people, build a trusting relationship and gain their informed consent, but this is an important part of working ethically and of preserving their contributions.
Featured case study: section 6.1 Lancaster University.

Whatever the scope of your rapid response collecting, it can be helpful to be aware that not everyone will feel the same way. Some people might respond in ways that might challenge, offend or harm others.

- Some archives have retained material with a wide spectrum of opinions in their rapid response collecting. However, they might limit the availability of material which may be offensive, to limit the potential for harm whilst still representing the range of responses to the event. More information about this in section 4.2.

Remember that you, and other people working in archives (both paid staff and volunteers) will also respond in different ways. More information about this in section 3.4.

2.2.3 What organisations or groups are involved?

Who might you need to engage with? What relationships might you need to manage? How might these change over time?

Those you might need to consider could include

- blue light services and other emergency responders, such as Fire & Rescue, Coastguard, Police, Ambulance, NHS crisis.
- voluntary services, such as British Red Cross, Royal Voluntary Service, St John Ambulance, Royal National Lifeboat Institution.
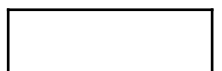
- emergency planning and response decision-makers, sometimes called "Gold Command". The local authority of the area impacted by an event will usually lead an emergency planning or disaster response.
The local authority will also usually be the lead agency for humanitarian assistance, even if it is not leading the overall response. The terms 'welfare response' and 'psychosocial support' may also be used.

- your governing/parent organisation.

- colleagues in your organisation working in external communications, customer service points, branch or community libraries.

- other cultural and heritage organisations including voluntary groups.

- print or broadcast media.

You may find it helpful to map all the people and organisations involved, and regularly revisit this stakeholder map during your rapid response collecting.

- Templates and information about stakeholder mapping from the Government Analysis Function.
Featured case study: section 6.1 Lancaster University.

- Remember that people directly involved in an event, and bereaved people, will have Family Liaison Officers (FLOs). You will usually communicate with them through a FLO.
Featured case study: section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office.

2.3 Why might you (not) undertake rapid response collecting?

A parent organisation might expect an archive to collect in relation to an event. External or political influences ("top-down") might be brought to bear.

There might (also) be public expectations ("bottom-up") on the archive service.

You might consider collecting and documenting an event part of your social responsibility, supporting affected people.

You should consider your service and wider organisation's purpose and policies. What does your collections development (or equivalent) policy say? What are your existing processes in relation to accessioning material either permanently or temporarily? What resources are available to you? (more information about
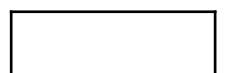
this in section 2.5). Does the event affect the running of your service more generally?

- You may decide not to undertake rapid response collecting. It may not be right for a number of reasons, including the nature and context of the event, lack of staff capacity or preparedness, or lack of resources. A decision not to collect at the time does not preclude collecting later. For example, you might encourage individuals and organisations to donate or deposit material later. You could undertake oral history projects in future. Organisational archives, research data and research project archives, or Public Records, may be transferred to the service later.
  Featured case study: section 6.1 Lancaster University.

- Some archives may provide short-term or temporary support in response to an event without creating a permanent, accessioned collection about it. Examples of this might involve storing material which bereaved people may take later, or providing space where material may be accessed temporarily.

- There may be other ways in which archives or individuals might offer support following an unforeseen event. There may be an appropriate role both in the immediate aftermath as well as in the longer term, for example, donating PPE from disaster kits, hosting donation stations or books of condolence, providing facilities for emergency responders, or supporting community groups to collect material.

- Organisational archives may focus on supporting information management and recordkeeping processes to ensure that institutional records are preserved for future accountability.
  Featured case study: section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office.
  This may include capturing website or social media announcements, for example about support or changes to services. Websites can be nominated for inclusion in the UK web archive if web archiving is not already in place.

- If the event has an impact on your wider service and existing collection, you should ensure the physical safety of people and your existing collection first.

It may be useful to consider other events and timeframes which may affect your capacity and resources (discussed in section 2.5).

2.4 How could you collect ethically?

Appropriate codes and frameworks for ethical practice should be followed, such as those from the International Council on Archives, or Archives and Records Association UK & Ireland. The Nolan Principles of Public Life may also apply as well as your organisational code of conduct (or equivalent).

Ethical rapid response collecting is likely to involve considering

- how people can find out about collecting, and how material will be used, processed, shared or disposed of.
- how people can give their informed consent to collecting or opt out, where necessary or possible.
- how people will be protected from harm, including those people working on the collection now or in the future.
- how people will be included and not marginalised through collecting.
- how you will process material and make it available ethically and legally (for example, in line with data protection, and for public sector organisations, with freedom of information legislation).
- how any selection or disposal decisions will be made, including recognising where a decision has been made by default (for example, exposure to weather, or focussing on physical rather than digital responses).
- how material will be preserved sustainably.
- what social or civic role the archive service might play in relation to the event.

This is not an exhaustive list. More information on processing, selection and disposal in sections 4.2 and 4.3. More information on minimising harm to people working on the collection in section 3.4.

Ethical collecting will also depend on general ethical considerations such as:

- respecting people's safety, privacy, dignity and rights.
- how you will act in the best interests of people affected, and avoid harm.
- being honest and trustworthy.
- behaving appropriately towards others.
- respecting people's right to make their own decisions.
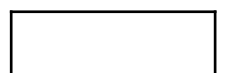
- being aware of and setting aside your own biases and opinions.

- understanding different aspects of identity and ensuring people are not marginalised.

- enabling people to participate if they choose to, either now or later.

You will also need to consider statutory requirements such as safeguarding children and adults at risk, public liability insurance, and health and safety. Your organisation may have policies and procedures including rules for procurement or using volunteers which you must follow. Depending on the event you may need to consider whether there is the possibility of encountering human remains in your rapid response collecting. If so, you will need to liaise very closely with emergency responders and others at all stages (see section 2.2.3).

We suggest you discuss and document these ethical issues so that there is an agreed set of standards for a team to work to, and can take responsibility for decisions and actions, ensuring transparency and accountability. Featured case studies: section 6.1 Lancaster University, Section 6.5 University of Leeds.

Depending on the circumstances you may need to get permission from the owner of the property where items are located to ensure that you are undertaking rapid response collecting lawfully.

2.5 What resources are available to you?

2.5.1 People

What skills and capacity do people already working in your service (both paid staff and volunteers) have? Might they (not) be emotionally ready to undertake rapid response collecting?

What support might people need from within the service and from outside (remember the service manager)? How will you support them? How will you get support?

- Rapid response collecting may be demanding, difficult and disturbing. It may also be rewarding and positive. People may have a range of emotions and reactions at different times, and everyone is different. There is no one way to behave, think or feel.
  People may be affected, both now and in the future, whether they are working on the rapid response collection directly or not. More information in section 3.4.

- [Health and wellbeing guidance](#) is available from the Archives and Records Association.
ARA commissioned a further report published late in 2024: Arvanitis, K. and Kavanagh, J. *The impact of collecting after sudden, unforeseen or violent events on the mental wellbeing of the record-keeping workforce. A Report for Archives & Records Association UK and Ireland*.

If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment.

It's important to know that support services are available for you to access, whatever you're going through.

Call 999 or go to A&E now if:

- someone's life is at risk.
- you do not feel you can keep yourself or someone else safe.

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

Get urgent advice from [111 online](#) or call 111 and select the mental health option.

Ask for an urgent GP appointment.

Free listening services offer confidential support from trained volunteers. You can talk about anything that's troubling you, no matter how difficult:

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email: jo@samaritans.org for a reply within 24 hours.
Text "SHOUT" to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line, or text "YM" if you're under 19.
The mental health charity Mind has [information on ways to help yourself cope during a crisis](#).

Does your organisation have occupational health support, an employee assistance programme? coaching/mentoring schemes, peer support groups, Mental Health First Aiders, counselling or other schemes?

Could you draw on colleagues from other areas of your organisation, or on professional colleagues in other organisations? What skills or resources do they have that you do not (for example, communications, quarantine space)? Could existing volunteer groups undertake specific tasks (for example, sorting and washing soft toys)?

If they will be supporting you in working with collections, what training or support might people need so that they can be effective? Would you have capacity to recruit, train and support new volunteers?

-   If you do not already have a volunteering programme in place, as a minimum you should consider how you will coordinate and manage volunteers, induct and train them, keep them safe, and support them. You must have employer's liability insurance or public liability insurance that explicitly covers volunteers. Remember that volunteers are not cost free because you will need to manage them. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations provides detailed resources.

Featured case studies: section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office, Section 6.3 Manchester Together Archive.

2.5.2 Space

What space might be available to house physical materials in the short- and long-term? Space for quarantining, drying out or freezing, cleaning and sorting may be needed quickly. Are there other areas in your organisation, or facilities in your local area?

–   Some services have had the use of temporary storage facilities donated by local businesses.

What resources are available for meeting conservation needs of physical materials? These might include quarantine space, working and processing space, space to store boxes and packaging materials, as well as facilities for freezing material or treating mould.

Section 4.5 covers the urgent conservation treatment of physical materials.
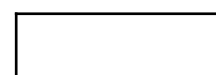
If collecting digital formats, what storage space is available?

Additional space may be needed

- on your web server, if you are accepting submissions through a web form
- in networked storage if you are collecting directly (for example, by web scraping or collecting social media hashtags, rather than asking people to submit material to you).
- in mailboxes, if accepting submissions by email.

However you collect digitally you are likely to need additional quarantine space so that material can be scanned for viruses and malware, and additional space in backups. You may need to talk to your ICT provider at an early stage.

- If you are unable to collect digital formats directly, you could consider nominating any dedicated or significant websites for the [UK web archive](.).

2.5.3 Financial

What budget is available immediately for preservation or other supplies (for example, boxes or PPE)? for emergency preservation actions (for example, freezing material, treating mould)? for logistics (for example, hiring a van, purchasing equipment)?

Will people need travel and subsistence expenses, overtime or other payments?

Will additional physical or digital storage space, or processing capabilities, be needed in the short-term? How could these be resourced?

2.5.4 Time

What time constraints might need to be considered, including planned commitments, leave or service closure? How will you manage these?

How might these constraints change as time goes on? What will need to be replanned?

How often will you need to revisit these initial plans, and when will you next do this?

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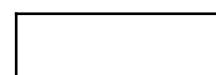
3.Immediate priorities and issues (first few hours & days)

3.1 Keeping abreast of the situation and making decisions

3.2 Being sensitive towards evolving physical sites

3.3 Forming a team

3.4 Managing potential impact on people's wellbeing

3.5 Communicating about rapid response collecting

3.6 Developing a collecting plan

3.7 Removing physical items from sites

3. Immediate priorities and issues (first few hours and days)

3.1 Keeping abreast of the situation and making decisions

You should monitor how events unfold. It is important to obtain accurate information as it is not uncommon for disinformation to be circulated about events.

You should carefully consider and revisit the factors in section 2 of this guidance which will affect your rapid response collecting activities.

You should be clear about how decisions will be made and parameters affecting your rapid response collecting. This may include whether you are leading the activity or being involved with other partners. In some cases, rapid response collecting might be prompted or led by local communities. Section 2.2.3 includes stakeholders you may need to consider.

If you are leading rapid response collecting activities you should consider:

- working with others to form a post-event task force to manage immediate rapid response collecting activities.
- forming longer-term partnerships with other organisations to manage the rapid response collection in the longer-term. This could include dividing material among different organisations on the basis of their collecting scope and expertise.
- contacting other people that have undertaken similar work before. Some relevant case studies are included in section 6.

Where possible and appropriate, you should involve people who have been affected by the event. Remember that everyone's response will be different - sections 2.2.2 and 5.5 include more information about this.

3.2 Being sensitive towards evolving physical sites

A physical site may represent the event you want to document (for example, a protest or occupation). You should respect those who have created or may be present at a site.
Featured case study: section 6.5 University of Leeds.

After some events, physical memorials might appear in the first few hours or days. These might be in one or more sites, possibly the location of an event or nearby, or other open-air public areas such as squares and monuments. Many spontaneous memorials will evolve over time. Many people find these meaningful as they attempt to express a sense of belonging, resilience and solidarity over a shared traumatic experience. However not everyone will be interested in participating (see section 2.2.2).

Leaving memorials to grow means people who want to participate are able to. However, there may be instances where those leading the emergency response will need to sensitively intervene by

- providing more space for public events such as a vigil or commemoration.
- quickly returning a memorial site such as an entrance or thoroughfare to its pre-existing purpose.
- letting people know that memorialisation is supported, and where and how to leave items safely. For example, you could provide a sanded area for candles near to points of access and with enough space to move around safely.
- suggesting people remove cellophane and flower food packets before laying flowers, and providing blunt-ended scissors and disposal bins to help with this.
- tactfully encouraging people to avoid leaving items which may be problematic, (for example, food which may attract rodents).
- managing access and flow of people to ensure safe and equitable access to memorials.
- using QR codes and other signage to signpost people to where they can donate money, what will happen to memorial items, and other relevant information.
- assigning space for local, national or international media which does not interfere with people accessing memorials.
- photographing memorials as they grow. The Spontaneous Memorials Network provides useful [guidance](#) on photographing memorials.
- providing shelter from the weather.
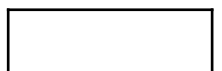
- regularly removing high-risk items (such as food or flammable materials).

Early mornings may be a quieter time to intervene, as more people might visit later after work or school.

Featured case studies: [section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office](#), [Section 6.3 Manchester Together Archive](#).

Volunteer groups may be able to assist in advising and supporting visitors to memorial sites. Services have worked with existing local groups such as Keep Britain Tidy and open spaces friends groups, as well as branches of national groups such as Lions Clubs, Red Cross, Rotary, Women's Royal Voluntary Service, Women's Institute and uniformed organisations.

3.3 Forming a team

You should carefully consider the factors in section 2 of this guidance which will affect your rapid response collecting activities, particularly your resources (section 2.5).

A team of people rather than a single individual is better for rapid response collecting, even if you plan to collect on a limited scale. Consider how you will manage and communicate with team members, train the people involved, and process or quality check any work they produce (for example, importing lists from spreadsheets compiled by volunteers into your collections management system).

You must ensure that appropriate insurance cover is in place, and that you have considered the implications of health and safety and safeguarding of children and adults at risk legislation. You may need to take specialist advice.

Remember everyone's response to unforeseen events will be different and not everyone might want to be involved. As well as resources, consider the possible emotional burden of rapid response collecting on people, both in the short- and longer-term. The [health and wellbeing guidance](#) from the Archives and Records Association may be useful, and there is more information at section 2.2.2 and 5.5.

Featured case studies: [section 6.1 Lancaster University](#), [Section 6.4 University of Stirling](#).
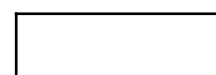
3.4 Managing potential impact on people's wellbeing

Depending on the nature of the unforeseen event, rapid response collecting may have an impact on the wellbeing of those involved at the time or later. Many people may not have experienced collecting events which may be traumatic and which can be complex. Even if people have previous experience, they may be affected differently and their responses may change from day to day. Engaging in rapid response collecting can be a positive experience, but it also presents the risk of secondary trauma.

It is important to ensure that those involved are not in unsafe situations, are able to take regular breaks, and their physical welfare is provided for with refreshments and comfort facilities.

Whatever the scope of your rapid response collecting, be aware that not everyone will feel the same way and that they may feel differently from day to day. There is more information in section 2.2.

You may find the health and wellbeing guidance from the Archive and Records Association helpful. The Manchester Together Archive produced a case study on emotional support for volunteers.

Featured case study: section 6.4 University of Stirling.

If you need help for a mental health crisis or emergency, you should get immediate expert advice and assessment.

It's important to know that support services are available for you to access, whatever you're going through.

Call 999 or go to A&E now if:

- someone's life is at risk.
- you do not feel you can keep yourself or someone else safe.

A mental health emergency should be taken as seriously as a physical one. You will not be wasting anyone's time.

Get urgent advice from 111 online or call 111 and select the mental health option.

Ask for an urgent GP appointment.

Free listening services offer confidential support from trained volunteers. You can talk about anything that's troubling you, no matter how difficult:

Call 116 123 to talk to Samaritans, or email: jo@samaritans.org for a reply within 24 hours.
Text "SHOUT" to 85258 to contact the Shout Crisis Text Line, or text "YM" if you're under 19.
The mental health charity Mind has information on ways to help yourself cope during a crisis.

3.5 Communicating about rapid response collecting

Generally, you should use as many types and platforms of communication as are available. These might include websites, social media, physical flyers and notices. If you only share information once, through one medium, not everyone will be able to receive it and they may not understand it in a busy or overwhelming time. You could use QR codes on signs to direct people to additional information.

Deliver essential or important information quickly, clearly and transparently. Featured case studies: section 6.1 Lancaster University, Section 6.5 University of Leeds.

External communications may need to be issued as part of central communications. Depending on your situation, it may be possible to provide limited messages about collecting activities. You may need to work closely with others to coordinate and disseminate information about your activities and plans.

Be prepared to continue to communicate after the immediate response to the event is over. Transparency about how material which has been collected is being handled and its future is important.

3.6 Developing a collecting plan

Your existing collecting policies and procedures may already cover rapid response collecting. Even if they do, you should make an initial plan which reflects the purpose of your archive and your ethical considerations. See sections 2.3 and 2.4 for more information. As described in section 2, you should document your evolving thinking and the decisions you have made. This is part of the provenance of the rapid response collecting. It will help you and others understand the scope, aims and impact of different practices in rapid response collecting. Section 4 includes more detailed information about documenting, selecting or appraising material, disposing of material and preservation and conservation actions. You may need to add to your plans as time goes on, but your initial plan may simply capture that you will need to decide soon in these areas.

If you make a flexible plan early on you will have some basic parameters for what you will collect, why, how and with whom. This will be useful in the early stages, particularly if you are involved with stakeholders and other partners. It will also help you plan for the resources and capacity you will need in the longer-term. You should include your assessment of risks and any permissions, insurance or relevant other matters. For example, staff at the Orange County Regional History Center developed a short collecting plan in the first few days after a mass shooting event in Florida.

If you are calling for contributions as part of your rapid response collecting, you should consider how to secure informed consent from your contributors which covers future use by the archive service. You could also consider whether items can be anonymised on submission rather than applying a blanket closure under data protection legislation later. These activities can be very time-consuming to

undertake retrospectively so it is better to build this into how you call for contributions.
Featured case studies: , .

3.7 Removing physical items from sites

You should keep abreast of changes in the weather as well as other factors which affect sites from which you plan to collect. These include decisions to restore a site's primary purpose (for example, an entrance or thoroughfare). The weather is likely to be a key factor in removing physical items from outdoor locations, and you may need to respond quickly. Depending on the event, investigatory proceedings may affect the site.
Featured case study: .

Where possible you should consult with the people affected by the event or at least inform them about when items will be removed.

You may or may not be directly involved in removing items from sites. Regardless, you should plan for removing material sensitively but safely and work with others if necessary to carry this out. Issues include:

- how items will be lifted and moved from the ground or taken down from surfaces. You should consider the removal of items from spontaneous memorials as a stage in the memorialisation process. You should therefore ensure that this is respectful. For example, move items by hand and use crates (not rubbish bags).

- how people working to remove items will be protected and their welfare provided for. You will need to carry out a risk assessment.
They may need PPE, including stout gloves to avoid thorns on roses.
Temporary facilities for washing, toilets, and breaks or refreshments may be needed.
Shelter from rain, and first aiders may be needed.

- when items will be removed and how long this might take.

- where items will be taken. Will items be moved to a temporary location for processing away from the site? Will initial processing of items be done at the site? This is likely to depend on the number of items as well as practical considerations including weather and space.
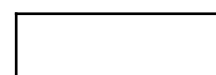
More information about processing in section 4 including preservation and conservation.

- how you will keep track of what has been removed and where it has been taken.

During the removal of items you should use signs giving information about what is happening, and ensure that people are clearly identified. For example, Brussels Archives staff wore t-shirts and posted signs which informed people that they were removing items to preserve them. It can be helpful to have people on site dedicated to communications so that enquiries can be handled well whilst others are removing items. For example, employees of Manchester City Council spoke with bystanders about memorial items being removed to save them from the upcoming bad weather. More information about communications in section 3.5.

You should coordinate closely with other stakeholders and provide guidance on the safe handling of material and other matters (see section 4) if you are not directly involved in the removal or if others will be undertaking some of the processing of items. For example, volunteers alone provided 1,000+ hours to one organisation assisting in the removal and sorting of items left at a very large memorial site, working in morning and afternoon shifts of up to 40 people over one week.

If you are able to input into how sites are managed, archives have found that gentle but proactive management of sites which are in place for a period can be helpful when it is time for items to be removed – see section 3.2.

4.In the short-term (first few days/weeks)

4.1 Documenting material

4.2 Selecting or appraising material

4.3 Disposing of material

4.4 Preserving and conserving digital materials

4.5 Preserving and conserving physical materials

4. In the short-term (first few days-weeks)

Having decided to collect you will need to continue to keep abreast of the situation.

You will also need to consider the following issues as well as any immediate actions to remove physical material from sites (section 3.7).

4.1 Documenting material

Documenting decisions helps to keep track of them. In a fast-moving situation you may make decisions by email, SMS, WhatsApp or other channels as well as verbally. It is helpful to record key decisions, date (and channel) in a single running log, referring to the more detailed background and rationale held in other channels or documents if needed. This information will also inform the provenance, administrative history and processing of any future collection. It will help everyone involved understand decisions.

A decision log can also be useful for communications, and provides evidence and information to enable collecting to be ethical and transparent. Depending on the situation, a list of actions recording what is planned to be done, when and who by might be kept separately from the decision log (what has already been done).

Consider documenting the following kinds of information:

- Aims of collecting – see section 2.3.

- Contacts made with emergency response co-ordinators, family liaison etc – see section 2.2.

- Communications such as call-outs for submissions of material – see section 3.5.

- Welfare of people working, such as the outcome of risk assessments, managing breaks, rest and comfort facilities – see section 3.4.

- Priorities for collecting – see section 2.1.

- Activating colleagues or volunteers – see section 2.5.

- Procedures/changes to procedures, for example, managing permissions, accepting submissions – see section 2.4.

- Use of financial resources– see section 2.5.

- Temporary or additional storage locations – see section 2.5.

- Selection criteria – see section 4.2.

- Appraisal activities – see section 4.3.

- Disposal activities – see section 4.3.

This is not an exhaustive list and not all of these will apply in every situation.

You should also consider how you will document items collected as part of your rapid response activities. Your existing collections documentation processes are likely to be suitable here. You will need to keep track of items removed from physical sites, or temporarily transferred (for example, for freeze drying or washing).

4.2 Selecting or appraising material

This may depend on factors such as the event itself, the scale and format of the response including physical and digital responses, the nature of relevant material, and resources available in the short, medium and longer term.

Document your selection principles and criteria, or any requests for specific material you receive (more about this in section 5.5).

You may find it helpful to consider the following either for all material together, or for categories:

- Context. When and where were materials created and collected? Who by? Why? How did they intend the materials to be used, and by whom? How do items document the event, response or wider social context? What evidential, informational, aesthetic, affective or symbolic value do they provide? How might they support collective or personal memory? Who is being included and who is not included?

- Content. How could material be used in the future to provide insight into events, social developments, changes? What evidence of people's responses and activities does it provide? Does material contain personal information? Does material provide a range of perspectives? Are these available elsewhere?

- Uniqueness. How complete is the picture of the event the material represents? How likely is the material to be available elsewhere?

- Condition. How might the organisation, format or condition of the material affect your ability to preserve or provide access to it? Could any material be hazardous or dangerous to people? Could other collections you hold be put at risk by mould or pests? Has material deteriorated so it would be inaccessible to users? Can the same information, emotion or other purpose be made accessible from other formats or materials in better condition or with more contextual information?

- Sustainability. Does the material meet collecting policies and goals and warrant the resources required to maintain it? Could you justify potential conservation and digital preservation measures? Do you have adequate physical and/or server space to store physical and digital material?

4.2.1 Specific categories of material

You should photograph or video record perishable and organic items such as food and flowers (keep cards and other written items accompanying these).

You should photograph and dispose of balloons and highly flammable items such as candles and lamps. More information about high-risk items in section 4.5.1.

You should transfer memorial items which are addressed to specific individuals if they want them – see section 5.5.

Depending on scale, you could consider sampling and develop criteria for this. This may be through public engagement or in conjunction with community representatives. Record your sampling criteria and their rationale, as well as the numbers of items or volume of material disposed of and retained. For example, Virginia Tech developed 15 criteria for selecting representative items from the over 100,000 items received, ultimately retaining around 7,000 physical items and 7,000 digital representations in its memorial archive.
Featured case study: section 6.5 University of Leeds.

Consider whether you will keep materials which some people may find controversial, offensive or objectionable. What might they contribute to the context, content and uniqueness of the collection? How might they be used by future generations?

Cash donations and gift cards should be accounted for, held securely and distributed appropriately - for example, to specific and relevant causes, or to emergency responders. Do not give cash or gift cards to individuals (unless specifically addressed to them), nor to organisations which are not registered

charities nor to unauthorised fundraisers. You should include information in your communications about what has happened to monetary donations. You may need to examine and retain envelopes and covering letters accompanying donations so that donors could be thanked later. Check your organisation's financial and other regulations and seek advice if necessary.

Remember that this work may have an impact on those who carry it out – see section 3.4.

4.3 Disposing of material

If material is not to be retained past the short-term you should dispose of it sensitively, ideally in discussion with those affected by the event, and with those who may be part of the disposal process. You may wish to consult on possible options more widely. It can be helpful to communicate about decisions and timescales - this may include making information available at physical sites as well as through your communication channels – see section 3.5.

- Flowers and appropriate organic materials can be composted. Know that cellophane wrappings, elastic bands, and packets of flower food should be removed before composting can take place. Composting may take a year or longer to complete, and appropriate facilities are required to store and manage the composting process. The finished compost could be used in an appropriate place (for example, a park where tributes have been left, or a dedicated memorial garden).

- Clothing and soft toys which are not unique or distinctive or without specific dedication could be washed and donated to appropriate charities, as in [Manchester](#).

- Candles could be melted together to form symbolic candles. These might be given to bereaved people, or used in memorial events.
  Note that LED and battery-operated candles may need specialist recycling.

- Remember that any items containing personal data which are not to be retained should be securely disposed of.

- Very large quantities of materials which are not retained may be specially cremated and the remains incorporated into a future memorial or disposed of symbolically as part of future anniversary or other remembrance activities. For example, the community of Newtown, Connecticut, created 'sacred soil' in this way which was incorporated into the permanent Sandy Hook Memorial.

Partner organisations may work with you in specific areas. You may have identified these early on, as outlined in section 2.2.3. You could approach additional organisations with specific requests: for example, voluntary organisations may assist with washing and distributing clothing and soft toys. Be aware of and sensitive to who is being approached: for example, it may be appropriate to approach all the faith-based organisations in the area through a local inter-faith forum rather than individual groups directly.

You should communicate clearly where disposals will be made over the longer-term so that people are aware of what is happening or will happen. You should track and manage material held in temporary storage locations, particularly when the use of space or other facilities is donated. This may include proactively maintaining relationships with supporters to avoid needing to find alternative storage at short notice.

Remember that this work may have an impact on those who carry it out – see section 3.4.

4.4 Preserving and conserving digital materials

Check digital materials as promptly as possible after receiving them. As a minimum, scan for viruses and malware, and undertake spot checks that file formats, titles and content are as you expect. If you have called out for submissions, this will enable you to follow up where possible with those submitting material if there are problems.

You may wish to establish naming conventions recognising your collecting practices, or to enable rights and permissions information to be more easily applied in future. These should be documented.
Featured case study: [section 6.4 University of Stirling](#).

If you do not already have established digital preservation procedures and systems, The National Archives [digital preservation workflows](#) provide useful information and checklists.

4.5 Preserving and conserving physical materials

The conservation and preservation implications of rapid response collecting may be extensive where items have been outdoors, or a collection is composed of a wide variety of materials or large number of items.

There are distinct phases to managing the conservation and ongoing preservation of a rapid response collection:

- Protection and collection. This phase includes planning, information and equipment gathering, and is covered in section 4.5.1.

- Triage and quarantine. This phase includes initial collection decisions, drying of sensitive items for transportation and moving the items to quarantine, and is covered in section 4.5.2 and 4.5.3.

- Drying and cleaning affected items. As the collection may have been created in conditions where there was little or no control over the exposure to pests and conditions likely to encourage mould growth, continued quarantine measures are essential when initial drying and cleaning operations are taking place. Covered in section 4.5.4 and 4.5.5.

- Conservation of the collection. This phase may take significant time, and involves maintaining the integrity and ethical sensitivities of rapid response collections. Covered in section 4.5.6.

- Housing and collection storage. Covered in section 4.5.7.

4.5.1 Protection and collection:

Protection and transportation: relating to both collection and staff
If possible, protect outdoor sites to slow and manage deterioration of items. Use a gazebo or marquee as temporary shelter for items and staff. See section 4.5.7 for useful equipment and materials.

Photography at site/on entry
Make as comprehensive a photographic record of the site as possible to manage the conservation of items later. The wider context forms part of the archival record and will also inform conservation planning and initial decisions.

You will also be able to highlight potential and visible condition or materiality implications of the items, including qualifying and quantifying conservation risk factors. These factors include damage, materiality, pest risk or activity, active

mould and items already in an advanced state of decomposition. These factors can contribute to selection decisions (see section 4.2).

Disposal of high-risk items

Certain items pose unacceptably high levels of risk if kept:

- food and drink items.

- flowers and plants.

- woollen textiles.

- certain unstable plastics, rigid foams and rubber items, including balloons.

- wooden items.

- items containing batteries.

- highly flammable materials and items containing gas or petrol.

If possible, you should consult affected people when making decisions about conservation of items that will not be accessioned but which might be significant to them. You may be able to stabilise some items (for example, by removing the risk element like fuel or batteries) and give them to the people affected – more on this in section 5.5.

Conservation documentation

You should support photographic documentation with written documentation. Together these form an accurate record of the collection as you continue to process it. As a minimum we suggest:

- on site assessment documentation to quantify the collection, provide basic materiality information and assign initial stability and condition ratings.

- detailed conservation assessments for all items selected for preservation.

- treatment reports for all individual items conserved.

Transportation

Lidded plastic boxes or crates are best for temporary storage and protection, as well as for moving items. These should be lined with bubble wrap, bubble side facing in, and tissue sheets and packed with tissue puffs and rolls - Jane Henderson demonstrates making tissue puffs in this video. Do not overfill boxes. You should dry any wet item that has the potential to stick to packaging, such as

photographic material, before moving it, if possible. See section 4.5.7 for useful equipment and materials.

4.5.2 Triage

Managing teams and space

As with salvage situations, you should allocate distinct and targeted roles to individual team members. Depending on the size of the collection, roles include:

- a team leader to oversee the work, provide a central point of contact and direct the focus of activities where priorities may change rapidly.

- someone to liaise externally. If the collection is large or in a highly visible public space, this role will handle enquiries and communicate with people, allowing the team removing or processing items to work uninterrupted.

- someone to manage stores and equipment, to ensure people are well equipped and have all they need.

- retrieval team members to bring items to a triage area, whether this is on site or elsewhere.

- triage team members to assess items, record condition and stability and forward to the intervention team.

- intervention team members to begin conservation processes of basic cleaning, drying and housing.

Where the collection is small, the same individuals might fulfil multiple roles. You may need a larger team with individual roles for larger collections.

Team welfare is very important: incorporate the need for breaks into the triage schedule (see section 3.4).

Potential cultural sensitivities

Be mindful of the need for respect and sensitivity in handling and working with individual items, ideally in consultation with people affected. For example, people of specific genders may need to handle certain items, or you may need to avoid using particular types of conservation materials (see section 4.5.6).

Emergency interventions to protect collection

You may identify heightened risk factors to a rapid response collection including from:

- location, which may heighten the risk of items being destroyed or damaged beyond reasonable salvage.

- vandalism and theft, particularly where an event may be contested or divisive.

- adverse weather, which may destroy or significantly damage items.

You could create temporary protection by covering a site with polythene sheeting, weighted to prevent it from moving. However, you should consider this a temporary measure as condensation may form below the sheet, itself a risk. You could also use zip lock plastic bags to protect individual vulnerable items such as paper, again as a temporary measure. See section 4.5.7 for useful equipment and materials.

Expected contaminant and pest types

Contamination from environmental pollutants and insect and animal pests may be significant risks. These often depend on location: for example, items from sites next to roads may have oily contaminants.

You should assume that all items from an outdoor setting will be affected by surface water and possible animal pest excreta, and are therefore contaminated. Items may also be dirty with soil, staining from organic material such as decaying flowers, mud from human traffic and rain splashes which carry dissolved mud.
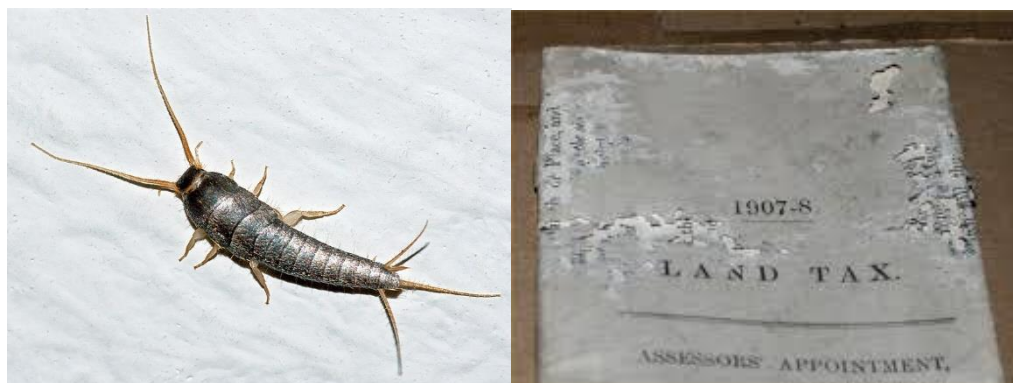
Left: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:LepismaSaccharina.jpg. Photo by Christian Fischer, used here under licence CC BY-SA 3.0.

Right: https://www.whatseatingyourcollection.com/identify?obj=318

Damp-loving pests such as silverfish are the main pest risks. Images show an example of a silverfish and the grazing damage to paper by silverfish. This is likely to occur rapidly when paper is left undisturbed, touching other items, and exposed to damp conditions.

Means and method of quarantine

Given the risk of contamination and infestation, you should quarantine a rapid response collection. If you do not have a separate quarantine space you can use clear, lidded boxes, lined with blotting paper. You will be able to see any pest activity or condensation through the clear box, and the seal on the boxes will keep pests contained. See section 4.5.7 for useful equipment and materials.

Ideally you should dry items before quarantining them - see section 4.5.4. If this is not possible, you can use large flat lidded boxes to contain items in a single depth between layers of blotter. Several layers of blotters may be used in one box. You should change the blotters frequently to reduce the risk of condensation and mould. You could include silica gel cassettes or pouches in a box to reduce the humidity and include a data logger to monitor how effectively the silica gel is working and determine when you can remove it. You should also include a sticky blunder insect trap in the box.

For small groups of materials or individual items, you can use a large 2.5-gallon freezer bag with a zip lock as quarantine housing.

You should quarantine items for at least two weeks. Check daily for signs of pest activity both visually and in the sticky trap. Signs include evidence of pest species themselves, frass (insect excreta), signs of pests eating (losses, holes) and dust from boring insects.

If you find insects, freeze items in an industrial freezer or blast freezer to minus 30°C for at least 72 hours. This should kill all insect species. It is important to get the core temperature of the material down to this temperature as quickly as possible. If only a domestic freezer is available, these can reach temperatures of minus 20°C, and you should freeze items in small batches for at least a week. The Canadian Conservation Institute provides useful [guidance](#).

4.5.3 Moving items on site

Items may be wet and possibly already starting to degrade. This means they are especially vulnerable to damage during handling and moving. See section 4.5.7 for useful equipment and materials.

Lift wet items by using supporting sheets to pick them up. This should prevent accidental tearing. For example, slip a piece of heavier weight paper or card below the item and lift it on that. For stacks of wet paper, you can use the static charge on the surface of sheets of Melinex to pick up wet papers. Pressing a

sheet of Melinex larger than the item causes the item to cling to the Melinex and enables you to lift it safely and in a supported way.

You may need a heavier weight support sheet to lift organic material such as floral tributes and textiles. Vivak™ is a flexible plastic sheet that you can easily cut and shape using heat (for example, from a hairdryer). Making supportive sheets and scoops from this would be a simple and easy way to handle delicate items.

Once collected, transfer all items to a transit box or tray lined with blotter before taking to the triage or quarantine area. Use zip lock freezer bags to transport bound items or objects, and also to house any items that have detached parts.

4.5.4 Drying

Drying is usually a multiple stage process. You can accelerate all drying procedures by circulating air. Create good ventilation with fans on a low-speed setting and with dehumidifiers in the drying space.

Do not use heat, to reduce the risk of mould.

If items are wet rather than damp you will need to change the drying medium several times to ensure good results. Begin by allowing any liquid water to drain off the surface of wet items where possible – but be aware that tipping damaged or fragile items may cause them to deteriorate further.

Next, place items in a single layer on sheets of newsprint to soak up the majority of the water, allowing them to air dry until damp. Do not stack the newsprint, but keep it in a single layer until items have dried to a damp state. You may need to change the newsprint.

You can place damp paper and photographic items on sheets of blotting paper in a single layer until they are dry. Then stack them between sheets of blotting paper. Ideally use a non-woven non-stick textile such as Bondina™ or silicone release paper for single sheet coated paper materials (for example, art prints), to prevent sticking.

Place bound items on their tail edge (lower edge) on blotters and fan them out. If the pages are stuck do not force them apart if they are unwilling to release. You can make an effective wind tunnel from tables covered with a polythene sheet and a fan on low speed at either end. Interleave wet books which have coated

paper text blocks (for example, art books) at each page with silicone release paper to prevent the pages sticking. Reshape the books as much as possible.

You can interleave damp bound material with sheets of blotting paper approximately every 25 pages and allow them to dry flat in a single layer. Do not over interleave the book so that the binding becomes overly distorted or damaged.

Special considerations:

Flowers

These may be already degraded and very fragile, and their colour may transfer. If you have decided to keep flowers (see section 4.2) it is important to stop them affecting other items. Isolate them in separate boxes and trays and dry in a single layer, which should prevent colour contamination.

Other materials (textiles, wax, objects)

In damp environments, metals can cause staining as well as degradation of paper materials in particular. Do not attempt to remove metal fastenings when objects are wet, but prioritise them for drying. You can remove them once dry.

Dry wax items using paper towels and then air dry on newsprint before storing separately. If wax is in contact with paper items it can cause staining, so isolate these items in mixed boxes.

Textiles can also have dyes which run, so you should isolate them when drying. Unfold items and, if clothing, lightly shape them with rolled up tissue paper balls to enable air to circulate through the layers.

Managing items that have stuck or fused together

Coated papers and photographs may easily become stuck to themselves or other items. You can peel these apart if there is no resistance, but you should be extremely careful. If they will not release with light pressure do not force them apart, but dry together using the most appropriate methods listed above.

Photographic material

Dry photographic prints and negatives with the image or emulsion side uppermost.

Managing highly sensitive ink

Inks from felt tip and fountain pens can be highly prone to deterioration in damp conditions. They can also be very sensitive to fading through prolonged

light exposure. You should identify items with highly sensitive ink that require additional protection as a priority at the collecting site.

If ink is actively running or bleeding due to water you can use a hairdryer on a low heat setting to dry the item and prevent ink movement. Do not blot, which may spread the problem. Place items flat and still on blotting paper to draw away the moisture and prevent running.

4.5.5 Cleaning and sanitising

Sanitisation methods

If items have been affected by foul water then you must arrange for chemical or irradiation sanitisation due to the risk of infection. This is a specialist task: use an expert company experienced in disaster recovery, cleaning and sanitisation including the irradiation of collections affected by mould, such as [Harwell Document Restoration Services](#).

You can manage wet surface dirt such as mud and soil at the site if you are careful. You could rinse loose mud and soil off the surface of wet paper and photographic prints using a dispensing bottle with a flexible nozzle. However, a conservator should oversee this due to the risk of puncture damage and the risk to the media. Dry treated items as per guidance in section 4.5.4.

Cleaning methods according to object type

Once items are dry, follow these cleaning procedures. Always start with the least interventive option before moving to additional steps.

1. Paper, photographic materials and textiles.
   Brush with a soft dry brush to remove loose surface dirt and debris. The most suitable type is a soft wash or mop brush – see suggested equipment in section 4.5.7.
2. Paper objects.
   Remove more persistent dirt with a latex sponge eraser, also known as a smoke sponge. Apply dry using a rolling motion (rather than rubbing) to lift the dirt from the surface of the paper. Only use vinyl erasers with extreme caution because they may be abrasive and leave residues.
3. Textiles.
   You can handwash modern textiles such as clothing or soft toys with more persistent dirt. Use a cold wash and unscented gentle detergent to prevent dye removal and fading. Avoid removing significant markings such as handwriting in these cases.

4.5.6 Repair

Level of repair: maintaining integrity of the collection

You should aim for a light conservation touch to maintain the integrity and meaning of rapid response collecting. The conserved state of items should reflect the way in which they were collected, and should not be overly visible or robust. Maintain the original intent of the donor at all costs as a key part of an object's significance.

See section 4.5.7 on storage to decide on the level of conservation. Consider designing storage and packaging which sufficiently supports the un-conserved or lightly conserved materials, and so reduce the level of intervention.

Cultural sensitivities for repair

Certain commonly used conservation materials, such as gelatine, leather and parchment, may not be suitable for the cultural or other expectations of people affected by the event (see section 2.2). You must check that materials are suitable before starting treatment.

4.5.7 Housing and storage

See section 4.5.8 for recommended materials.

Supportive housing for flat or single sheet items and photographic material

Using fascicules, folders, Melinex sleeves, paper and board support sheets and rigid plastic portfolios (visifiles) will enable you to manage the collection.

Fascicules are an excellent means of managing a large quantity of single sheet material. The items are hinged into soft guarded books with support sheets. This enables viewing and turning pages without the need to handle items.

Folders are part of standard archival practice. Separate items in small groups according to size and store them in bifold paper folders within the larger folders. Take care not to allow smaller items to impress themselves on larger items – you can insert interleaving support boards in boxes where there are folders of mixed size items, to separate them and distribute weight. Avoid overfilling of folders and boxes.

Melinex sleeves come in an array of sizes and thickness grades. L-shaped sleeves are better for larger items, and you should support these with a sheet of paper or thin board to enable easy removal from the sleeve. Store photographic prints in Melinex pockets, and acetate negatives in paper folds.

Portfolios are excellent for storing items in plan chests, to separate groups of material and enable easy retrieval. Visifiles are a commercially made inert plastic product and provide an excellent solution for plan chest storage.

Bound volumes

Store in boxes, in stacks of no more than three volumes, depending on size, or in supportive three-flap wrappers. Use a supportive book shoe if the text block is thick. Wrap items in Tyvek if their condition means they are likely to shed material or discolour neighbouring items.

Objects

Wrap objects in Tyvek or tissue paper and store them in boxes. Use Tyvek for metals as tissue can cause them to tarnish and discolour.

You can create compartments to separate items in boxes using thin board so that items do not come into contact with each other or get damaged in transit. Fill any spaces in boxes with tissue paper balls and puffs.

Labelling

It is essential to label items effectively and clearly, including weight or trigger warnings if necessary. Consider labelling boxes or housing with any increased risks like breakage, fire or pests. This is particularly useful for items that are vulnerable to pest damage such as textiles or plants.

Use a soft 2B pencil for all labelling of paper and books. Label photographs on the back of the print using a soft 2B pencil or label the Melinex pocket.

Label objects with Tyvek labels attached with archive tape, which you can write on with a permanent marker.

4.5.8 Recommended equipment and materials

Material	Details	Area of use	Suggested products
Polythene sheeting	Clear, heavy gauge, 500+/125 microns	Material protection	
Gazebo	For staff use and to shelter removed materials for triage and on-site cleaning	Protection	
Clear lidded plastic boxes	For transportation, large shallow boxes are ideal	Removal, transportation quarantine and temporary storage	Really Useful Boxes – 33 litre clear stackable boxes are a good size
Blotter sheets	For lining boxes, drying procedures	Triage, drying	
Release materials	To prevent items from sticking to each other or paper	Drying	Bondina Roll, silicone release paper
Face masks		Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	
Nitrile gloves		PPE	
Disposable aprons		PPE	
Newsprint	For lining tables and absorbing water	Drying	
Zip lock bags	For isolating damp materials and for keeping items with detached	Quarantine, transportation, temporary storage	2.5 gallon/9.5 litre freezer bags with a zip lock

Material	Details	Area of use	Suggested products
	components together		
Folding tables	These should be sufficiently spacious and sturdy	Triage, quarantine, drying	
Tyvek	Available as sheets and labels	Housing, labelling	1443 is soft and useful for wrapping. 1082 is more paper-like and is good for housing framed items
Archive tape	Unbleached cotton tape	Housing	Use a reputable conservation supplier
Melinex	Available as rolls and formed pockets and sleeves	Transportation, triage, housing	Use a reputable conservation supplier
Latex sponge	Cleaning sponge - use dry	Cleaning and sanitisation, conservation	Use a reputable conservation supplier
Soft brushes	Available in a range of sizes	Cleaning and sanitisation, conservation	Artists' mop or wash brushes: example (sizes 14 and 20)
Visifiles	Available in a range of sizes - check they will fit plan chests	Transportation, storage	Visifile Transparent Matt A1 Landscape
Folders and envelopes	Look for the following certification:	Housing, transportation, separation within housing	Use a reputable conservation supplier

Material	Details	Area of use	Suggested products
	PAT (photographic activity test) compliant ISO 11108:1996 - Archival paper		
Box board	1625-micron board advised, look for certifications: PAT (photographic activity test) compliant ISO 11108:1996 - Archival paper	Triage, housing, transportation, separation within housing	Use a reputable conservation supplier
Vivak	Transparent flexible plastic that can easily be bent into shapes when warmed with a hairdryer	Triage, transportation. Can be used for lifting wet material, as thin enough to slip underneath (thickness between 0.5 – 3 mm)	Vivak Pet-G Polyester Plates
Hairdryer	For emergency control of bleeding or mobile media	Triage, drying	
Fans	For circulating air	Drying	
Permanent markers	Fine tip	Labelling (housing and Tyvek labels)	
Pencils	2B	Labelling (object)	

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5.In the medium-to-long term

5. In the medium to long term (first few months and years)

5.1 Reviewing the situation

You will need to continue to keep abreast of the situation. It might be helpful to revisit your initial thoughts – see section 2 – and the decisions made in the first few days and weeks – see section 3.

Depending on the event, collecting activities may initially be very intensive. In the very early days you may need to be very responsive to factors like the weather and subsequent or related events. As time goes on, continue to consider how people's responses to the event are changing, the use of resources (people, space, finance), lessons you have learned so far, and capacity, wellbeing and ethical considerations. At some point you will move from the immediate response, stop rapid response collecting, and move into a phase of dealing with what has been collected.

You may need to change a course of action as a result of your review, plan to stop doing something, or consider what business as usual will mean in the short and medium term. You could consider "natural" resetting or end points, such as the end of a protest, a public memorial event, or the end of a calendar/academic year. This does not necessarily mean that the event and related collecting activities are 'over', but may mark a different phase of your response. Featured case study: [section 6.4 University of Stirling](#).

You may find it helpful to review resources (see section 2.5) in the light of your experience. If you need to fundraise, make sure that this does not compete with or detract from other fundraising activities, for example, for people affected by the event.

As well as the issues below, you may need to continue to consider

- the different wishes and needs of the people involved, and how you will engage with them.

- how to communicate your actions and plans relating to the collection.

- how you brief and induct future staff or volunteers who are new to the collection.

Remember that even at a greater distance of time from an event, this work may impact on those who carry it out – see section 3.4. People, including staff and volunteers, may continue to experience a range of emotions in relation to the event. Engaging with a rapid response collection might not suit everyone, but for those it does, it might be a powerful and helpful experience. Remember that not everyone will feel the same way, and that this might vary from day to day.

5.2 Processing, storing and cataloguing collections.

If you have not already done this, you may need to document your decisions, develop selection or appraisal criteria, dispose of materials, or take conservation or preservation measures as part of processing a rapid response collection. See section 4.

You may need to develop longer-term plans for processing and storing materials. This may become part of business as usual, or additional resources such as people, space and finance may be needed. You may need to make a business case for internal investment or application for external funding, or to reprioritise other work over a significant period of time. For example, Virginia Tech had a dedicated programme of work for three years. Your rapid response collecting may also give greater impetus and profile to other strategic objectives such as digital preservation or organisational recordkeeping.
Featured case study: section 6.3 Manchester Together Archive.

You could also consider whether and how the collection will grow and be used. Archives have developed oral history projects or additional collecting areas, received transfers of Public Records or donations and deposits from individuals and organisations. For example, staff at the Orange County Regional History Center, Florida, conducted more than 200 oral histories which are now part of its collection.
Featured case study: section 6.1 Lancaster University.

Remember that processing work or additional collecting may have an impact on the people who carry it out. So, you may need to allow additional flexibility or longer timescales when planning projects, for example. Appropriate support should be provided: you may find ARA's health and wellbeing guidance helpful.

5.3 Using and displaying items sensitively

As with any collection, you should consider how to protect information which identifies living individuals when material is being used. This might include obscuring identifying information when you digitise. See guidance from The National Archives, including the Data Protection legislation toolkit which can assist with dealing with data protection issues arising from collections.

Some content from rapid response collecting could be emotionally upsetting. People may respond differently to material depending on what else is going on in their lives, as well as their own levels of emotional resilience, cultural background and life experiences. Using a content warning or content note, sometimes called a trigger warning, gives people information and enables them to choose whether to engage with content. It is important that these are framed in ways that normalise different responses – such as "some material could be emotionally upsetting" rather than "this material is traumatic".

You may need to continue to consult with people that have been affected, including bereaved people, about ways in which material is made available in general to other people, and to them specifically. People affected by an event may wish to be in separate spaces, or have private visits to view or use items. People might request to take items away, or you might decide to invite them to do so (for example, items dedicated to a specific individual or in a sealed envelope addressed to them). You should document the transfer of these items, and consider keeping a copy. See section 5.5.

You may undertake digitisation or dissemination of all or selected items in the collection. This might also include displaying or exhibiting them. You should engage with relevant stakeholders and communities, including people who have been affected, about the scope, aims and content of exhibitions and whether any restrictions on copying their content should be in place.

Featured case studies: section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office, Section 6.3 Manchester Together Archive.

You should consider how to make material accessible in an ethical way. This may include considering how:

- you will respect people's safety, privacy, dignity and rights.
- potential harm to people will be minimised.
- you are aware of and set aside your own biases and opinions.

- you will meet any statutory obligations. For example, if your archive is a public authority, information in and about material might only be closed if a Freedom of Information Act (2000) exemption applies. You may need to seek specialist advice about closing or withholding material from access.

There is more information about ethics at section 2.4.
Featured case studies: [section 6.1 Lancaster University](#), [Section 6.4 University of Stirling](#).

5.4 Marking significant milestones

Significant milestones may include events such as anniversaries, as well as the completion of a phase of an enquiry or the conclusion of criminal proceedings. Continue to monitor events and be aware that there may be heightened interest in a rapid response collection around them. It may be appropriate to link milestones in the processing of a collection with such milestone events, but do not draw focus or detract from the wider marking of the milestone. Such milestones might also bring back memories about the event for staff and volunteers that were involved in the rapid response activity. You should support your staff/volunteers and exercise self-care too.
Featured case study: [section 6.2 West Sussex Record Office](#).

The content of the collection may support how the event is remembered, including the creation of any permanent memorial and other legacy activities. Sometimes the collection may play an active role in supporting the people affected by the event, or engaging people with a campaign or issue. You should ensure that your efforts are coordinated.
Featured case study: [section 6.1 Lancaster University](#).

Bear in mind the limitations of the collection you hold: consider who is (not) represented, what is communicated via the collection, and the stories that could be told. Rapid response collections are usually a limited snapshot of responses to an event.
Featured case study: [section 6.5 University of Leeds](#).

5.5 Engaging with people who have been affected

Remember that all individuals are different, and may have different views about the scope, aims and outcomes of any rapid response collecting. They might be indifferent to it, or their interest might grow or decline over time. They will have different experiences and backgrounds, and relate differently to the events and to other people involved. See section 2.2.

Following events in which people have been injured or killed you may engage with survivors and bereaved people. This might take place at different stages of the rapid response activity, and initially through Family Liaison Officers. This may continue over time (for example, at anniversaries).

Be aware that people affected by an event may wish to be in separate spaces, or have private visits to view or use items from your rapid response collecting. People might request to take items away, or you might invite them to do this (for example, items dedicated to a specific individual or in a sealed envelope addressed to them).

Bereaved people should be able to have memorial items which are directed to specific individuals if they want them. Such items may need to be stored and managed separately from general items, sometimes over a period of time. People's wishes may vary: some may not want items immediately, or ever. You may need to be sensitive in how transfers of items are handled in the future, as people's circumstances change. You should therefore carefully document items and keep a record of any communications alongside them, not relying on the memory or the email account of any one individual currently working in the service.
Featured case study: section 6.3 Manchester Together Archive.

You should carefully consider how you engage with people. Engagement with people that have experienced a direct trauma may lead to secondary trauma for others. This might depend on the type, length and intensity of the interaction. You should acknowledge this risk and put in place support mechanisms for everyone involved. Where possible, you might identify a small team that will lead on this engagement.

5.6 Learning for the future

Depending on the event, you may find it helpful to review the lessons learned. You may need to update or change existing policies and procedures. You may have developed new relationships and partnerships as part of your rapid response collecting that you draw on in future. You may want to contribute to wider networks and learning in the sector, perhaps to a future edition of this guidance.

- The international [Network of Spontaneous Memorials](#) brings together individuals and organisations involved in creating, documenting and using archives of spontaneous memorials.
- The [Society of American Archivists Crisis, Disaster, and Tragedy Response Working Group](#) undertakes a range of activity and publishes a range of resources.

Commemorating your rapid response collecting, celebrating resilience, mourning or other ways of processing your emotional responses can be helpful. This may happen on a wider scale outside the archive, but it could be important to do this yourself, depending on the event.

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6.Case studies

6. Case studies

6.1 Lancaster University – How a changing team managed collecting from the 2011 Foot and Mouth crisis over a long period

Summary

Research data from a project at Lancaster University concerning the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease disaster was safeguarded for future use.

Background

The UK's 2001-2002 Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic was a profound crisis affecting rural areas, with lockdowns and extensive animal culls lasting almost one year, and economic and social effects lasting many more. In Cumbria, the worst hit area, 70% of farms were affected. As researchers, staff at Lancaster University undertook a large ethnographic study into the health and social effects of the disaster and processes of recovery. This received funding from the Department of Health under a time-critical funding route, and ethical approval from the regional NHS Research Ethics Committee.

Challenge

The team could see that the epidemic was being treated centrally as primarily an animal problem, ignoring the huge social consequences and human impacts such as loss of livelihoods or children not being able to attend school. Healthcare services in severely affected areas were not recording increased demand during the epidemic and subsequent months. This was taken to mean that the human health and social effects of the disaster were not significant. However voluntary local helplines and rural support groups were besieged with appeals for help, suggesting major impacts.

Approach

With their diverse steering group, the team identified six affected social groups based on occupation and residence. They recruited a panel of 54 individuals who represented these groupings. By the autumn of 2001, lifting of restrictions enabled us to meet with each group to explain the purpose of the study and obtain people's informed consent to participate. Everyone also gave an audio-recorded in-depth interview around this time. From December 2001 respondents then kept a weekly written diary in physical form. This began with simple questions about health and quality of life followed by a space for free text entries of any length. This became the most frequently and fully used space,

with participants writing between half a page and six pages each week over the 18 months of diary writing. Diaries were collected monthly, each researcher visiting on average 18 households. Periods of "holiday" from diary writing were negotiated.

The team collected 3,071 weekly diaries in total. In recognition of respondents' time and expertise, a small fee was paid on collection of the diaries. The team produced a regular newsletter to keep people in touch with the project. They held a round of further recorded group meetings towards the end to obtain feedback on initial analysis of the diaries, interviews and group discussions.

Intended aims

The team wanted to capture evidence about the impact of the disaster and processes of recovery from "on the ground" accounts collected over time. This provided a different, experiential perspective in comparison with the three official inquiries into the disaster which recruited 'professional' experts. As academic researchers, the team aimed to create knowledge about the human impacts of the epidemic and what forms of support people need both in disaster situations and in the recovery period.

Archiving the research data gathered by the project was not originally part of the study design and funding. However, as the project progressed they realised that a rich and powerful body of material was emerging. So after the diary writing had finished, steps were taken to revisit the consenting process in order to create digital and hard copy archives. The necessary focus of their final research report meant that they could not fully reflect the breadth of the huge data set collected. By archiving they could preserve the greatest possible amount of the research materials for the future.

Obstacles and issues

Seeking additional informed consent for archiving in addition to participants' existing consents required very careful thought. New information and consent forms were piloted for this, distinguishing between material to be included in the digital dataset held by the online data archive Qualidata, and material in hard copy to be held by the University.

Methods for longitudinal studies (over a lengthy period of time) and in particular, repeated visits, have ethical implications which are well recognised in sociological and health literatures. These include how to deal with different degrees of disclosure, the power relations within the research process and the difficulties of achieving informed consent. Overall, the team suggests the

duration and intensity of our study nurtured trust between researchers and respondents. They believe this lay behind the very high commitment of respondents: 50 out of 54 respondents completed 18 months of weekly diary keeping.

Preparing the original materials as an anonymised dataset for analysis and use, and for archiving, posed a number of challenges. Many of the respondents lived within close-knit rural communities so that geography, their jobs, and lifestyles might make them easily identifiable. For some respondents, participating in this project represented one way of giving voice to their experiences. Indeed, the team organised a large public conference to discuss their interim findings where some individuals gave very public and powerful testimonies. This attracted local and national media coverage, and some respondents later gave press interviews. The majority however were concerned about anonymity and confidentiality, not only for themselves but also for their immediate family, friends, work colleagues and wider community.

The team developed criteria for anonymising data, focusing on removing unwitting identification and information which may be deemed libellous or cause unnecessary distress. Scenarios include where a respondent named themselves or another person, which may be context-dependent (for example, group discussions). They also removed people named and associated with local contentious events, or local organisations spoken of detrimentally, confidential information or specific place names along with job information. Such anonymisation is complex and was very time consuming. Trying to strike a balance between protecting people and retaining useful context, particularly for later use, inevitably involved many ethical and methodological concerns.

Where the handwritten diaries were converted to digital text, anonymising these files was more straightforward than erasing or blocking out text in hard copy. For exhibition purposes, the team produced an 'audio montage' illustrating the study findings through a series of extracts from several individual interviews. Their collaborative archiving processes meant that they could accommodate individual respondent wishes. For example, one respondent chose to remove a portion of their diary, and another requested their voice to be digitally adjusted.

Actual outcomes and outputs

The anonymised [digital dataset](#) has been available since November 2006 (originally with Qualidata, subsequently the UK Data Service). It comprises transcripts of 42 individual interviews, 40 diaries, six focus groups and the audio

montage; these transcripts are available to any registered user of the UK Data Service. The collection also includes audio files from 42 individual interviews, seven focus groups and the audio montage; access to these is subject to permission from the depositor (the lead researcher). This digital dataset has subsequently been re-used by other researchers.

Lancaster University Archives and Special Collections has held the hard copy archive generated by the project since 2006. The Health and Social Consequences of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Epidemic in North Cumbria archive (12 boxes) contains all the original diaries kept by the participants, recordings of interviews and group sessions on CD, and project management records including consent information. Archives and Special Collections has subsequently collected other material relating to the activities of a charity during the epidemic, to reflect other contemporary perspectives and activities.

Lessons learned
Drawing on their experience of this project, the team have built in consent for archiving from the start in subsequent projects (for example, their work on flooding with children and young people), recognising that seeking consent retrospectively may create confusion and uncertainty. However, they learned that in disasters many people want to tell their story. Archiving is a way to enhance the visibility of events and those affected, and may support their recovery, as well as preserving knowledge and evidence for the future. It takes time and care to recruit people, build a trusting relationship and gain their informed consent, but this is an important part of working ethically and of preserving their contributions.

Because such a large number of people joined and stayed with the project, anonymising the very large dataset for use by other researchers was very time-consuming. It took several iterations for every item. The team were able to work closely with Qualidata, and draw on their expertise, particularly with digitisation, as part of this process.

For Lancaster's Archives and Special Collections, new legislation and new policies and procedures have come in since the hard copy archive was first transferred. The team have therefore recently updated the donation agreement to enable us to continue to manage the collection into the future.

Next steps
Archives and Special Collections aims to expand the existing box-list and to review data protection and other sensitivity risks, in preparation for the 25th

anniversary of the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic. The team are actively working on digital preservation, currently moving files from portable/physical media into dedicated storage, as well as other collections management activities. They are also developing strategies to collect research outputs from our academics in future.

Further information

Article about archiving the data by Cathy Bailey, Josephine Baxter, Maggie Mort and Ian Convery (2006) 'Community Experiences of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic in North Cumbria: An Archiving Story', *Methodological Innovations Online*, 1(2), 83-94

6.2 West Sussex Record Office – How the team supported the community to preserve memorial items following the fatal crash at the 2015 Shoreham Airshow

Summary

West Sussex Record Office (WSRO) preserves the "Shoreham Community Archive" of memorial items following the fatal crash at the 2015 Shoreham Airshow.

Background

After a crash at the Shoreham Airshow on 22nd August 2015 in which eleven people were fatally injured, the Shoreham Emergency Response Group was set up by West Sussex County Council. This Group oversaw daily activities during the immediate aftermath of the crash, and asked WSRO to assist. A group of local people had been working to remove and save the memorial items left at the site following ongoing heavy rain.

Challenge

The team at WSRO were asked to enable the "living memorial" of messages, photographs and cards left on the Shoreham Tollbridge to be preserved for those most closely affected by the incident, and for the wider community.

They needed to be able to react immediately, to navigate an unprecedented situation and a range of relationships with those affected over the first year following the incident.

Approach

Being led by the immediate conservation needs of the material and primarily by the wishes of those most closely related to the victims, the team committed to have the material preserved and available for the first anniversary. Their collections, conservation and digitisation staff and some of their volunteers all worked closely together on the archive. They also remained in contact with Family Liaison Officers, other Council departments and services during this time.

During the first year after the incident the team hosted private visits by several bereaved families to enable them to see what they were doing and to spend time with the memorial if they chose. They held two press and media days, one soon after receiving the material and another one year later. Staff also attended the memorial service in November 2015, providing information about the living memorial in a low-key way. Colleagues in County Libraries collected local newspaper coverage of the crash and its aftermath and transferred it to WSRO,

and one local newspaper donated copies of their relevant editions throughout the year.

Intended aims

The team wanted to ensure that they respected and took account of the sensitivities of those impacted by the disaster, whilst preserving a collection which reflected the community response in the immediate aftermath of the incident. By taking in the Shoreham Community Archive, they aimed to complement the official narrative in the public records and other archives eventually to be transferred to WSRO including by the Coroner, emergency services and their parent body, West Sussex County Council.

The team needed to ensure items were physically stable and had the best chance of surviving into the future. They also wanted to create catalogue records/metadata enabling items to be accessed physically in the search room or via digital images linked to the online catalogue records. These images have since been uploaded into the WSRO digital preservation system.

Obstacles and issues

When items first arrived at WSRO 3-4 weeks after the incident, most were very wet and in poor condition. Initially their conservator focussed on drying out and making the items stable. The team could then decide about their longer-term care and accessibility.

WSRO had initially been asked to assist in drying out and stabilising the items, but it was then agreed that WSRO should preserve and hold them in the long-term and provide a permanent home and future for the Shoreham Community Archive.

By consulting with the bereaved families through the Family Liaison Officers and in conjunction with staff the team developed parameters about which items should be made accessible and how this could be done. This included whether and which items should be made available online or in WSRO's search room. It was agreed that original items, images and metadata relating to items in which deceased individuals or their close families were personally identifiable would not be put online. The complete archive was made available in the search room but restrictions were placed on making copies.

Actual outcomes and outputs

The team had committed to doing no harm and being transparent about their work. They had to balance compassionate care of those most closely impacted

by the incident with their role in "collecting and preserving all kinds of records relating to the history, places and people of West Sussex." Carefully considering the differing needs of the bereaved families, and the feelings within the wider community meant that WSRO could be seen as a trustworthy and reliable service and the appropriate permanent home of the Shoreham Community Archive. This was also the case internally within the County Council, where the team had been asked to advise on effective recordkeeping for the immediate response co-ordination.

WSRO holds an accessible collection of around 1,900 items including books of condolence, and individual messages. This includes over 3,900 digital images, of which 1,942 were made publicly accessible online through their catalogue, with many records having more than one image. All items have received conservation treatment and are housed in archival-quality packaging to ensure their longevity. The team gave bereaved people a copy of the digitised items if they wanted this.

Lessons learned

Above all the team needed to deal compassionately with those most closely impacted by the incident, and to recognise that each person had individual responses and wishes. They were guided by what they thought was right, by the people and by the items, but it would have been helpful to have been able to draw on the experience of others in similar situations and have access to a wider body of guidance.

They also needed to acknowledge and support individual responses as WSRO staff and volunteers to the incident, the physical items and the work they were undertaking. Being able to use their professional skills and experience in preserving and making the Shoreham Community Archive available meant they could do something to help in response to a terrible incident, although staff found this difficult at times.

The team had to maintain an awareness of related events, such as the memorial service, investigations and other proceedings including the inquest; some of these were very prolonged.

Next steps

The team feel it is really important to continue to share their experiences to support other archives and museums facing unexpected tragic events. They are doing this through the Spontaneous Memorials Network and events, through this guidance, and support to individuals facing similar challenges.

The team do not anticipate undertaking further collections management work on the Shoreham Community Archive. After a permanent sculpture memorial was installed in 2019, and all investigatory, criminal and inquest proceedings completed in 2023, they hope to respond appropriately to any future commemorations of the incident. The Shoreham Airshow no longer takes place.

Further information
[Presentation](#) by Wendy Walker, County Archivist WSRO, to Spontaneous Memorials Network workshop, 2018

6.3 Manchester Art Gallery and Manchester Together – How the team took a family-first approach and provided emotional support for volunteers in forming the Manchester Together Archive after the 2017 Manchester Arena attack

Summary

Manchester Art Gallery cares for the people connected with the Manchester Together Archive, formed after the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing.

Background

On 22 May 2017 people were leaving an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester Arena when a homemade bomb was detonated in the foyer. Twenty-three people including the bomber were killed, and hundreds were injured.

Within hours of the attack, people began to leave flowers, candles, soft toys, balloons, written notes and other items in spontaneous memorials in St Ann's Square and other locations around the city. In June 2017, Manchester City Council tasked Manchester Art Gallery (MAG) to oversee the removal and consider the future of the spontaneous memorial items.

Challenge

The team did not have previous experience of collecting spontaneous memorials. Although others in the UK and abroad had done this, there were no standardised practices. They had to consider immediate issues including whether to collect, what and how much, practical concerns including short-term storage and conservation needs, and who would make decisions. The team were aware of medium and longer-term challenges from the start, including the needs and interests of the main stakeholders, and how a collection could be managed.

Approach

Initially the team aimed to collect a representative sample of items to send for freeze drying and conservation. However, it became clear that the team did not have collecting criteria for what was "representative". Every item felt important, from elaborate letters to a coffee receipt annotated '#westandtogether', from a single guitar to the dozens of pebbles painted with Manchester bees. The team decided to keep most of the non-organic items, which subsequently formed the basis of what was later called the Manchester Together Archive.

Initially a small group of MAG staff made collecting decisions with the help of external partners. Over time an Advisory Group was convened, involving MAG

staff, plus staff from Manchester's Archives+ service and from the University of Manchester. A dedicated Archivist was also appointed. The Advisory Group consulted with bereaved people, survivors and the broader public by organising visits to the collection, and running an online survey.

The conservation needs of the items largely defined the formation of the Manchester Together Archive. The team urgently needed to slow the deterioration of items after their removal from mostly outdoor sites. Sending them to Harwell Restoration enabled them to slow down the decision-making process and to plan for next steps, including refurbishing space at MAG.

Intended aims

MAG responded to the perceived urgent need to decide the future of the spontaneous memorials after their removal from public spaces. The idea of an archive, and its documentation, access and use, emerged as one problem was tackled at a time: no long-term plan was devised at the outset.

The questions "why and what to collect", "who is it for" and "what is it for" emerged quickly in the discussions about the collection. They are in many ways still present now. Early on, a "family-first" approach was proposed and adopted. This principle guided later decisions. For example, the space at MAG was refurbished as storage but also as somewhere to host and welcome small numbers of visitors privately. It included a sofa, armchairs and coffee table.

While the collection was at Harwell the team had more time to discuss its meaning, value and importance. They came to see the items as a single memorial: perhaps this retrospectively justified keeping most of the non-organic items deposited at the spontaneous memorial sites. An interest in researching the formation and purpose of the spontaneous memorials, and acknowledging that those items were material evidence of a collective and public response to the attack, led to development of plans to catalogue the collection. External funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and, subsequently, from The National Archives, was secured towards that goal.

Obstacles and Issues

The main obstacles and issues have been:

- lack of previous experience in collecting and documenting spontaneous memorials.

- material which was not covered by MAG's collecting policy.

- need to secure external funding for collections management.

- the (perceived) need to act urgently.

- conservation and storage needs of the material.

- importance of safeguarding staff and volunteer wellbeing. This was clear from the start and has become more prominent as the work with the MTA intensified and broadened. Early on staff accessed support from the Greater Manchester Resilience Hub set up following the attack. Later context-specific support was developed for the Archivist and the volunteers involved in cataloguing the collection.

Although the archive has been stored at MAG and is being catalogued, it sits outside the core collection. Questions about its longer-term storage, access and use are still being determined. A number of options are being considered including storing the collection off-site, limiting physical access to the time around anniversaries, and making it accessible digitally.

Actual outcomes and outputs

So far, the key outcomes of the project have been:

- developing a distinct collection of 10,000+ items, and articulating its value, significance and purpose for a variety of stakeholders. These include bereaved families, survivors, researchers, broader public, and heritage professionals.

- working towards making a dynamic collection continuously shaped by an evolving understanding of its value, aims and uses. A Collection Development Policy and Plan (2024-2027) have been developed, and the collection is being catalogued.

- developing a better understanding of MAG's own role, expectations and limitations, and its trauma-informed practice. As part of this work the team produced a guide to [Providing emotional support for archive volunteers](.).

- undertaking research including a collaborative PhD, presenting at conference and publishing jointly.

Lessons Learned

Although there was a perceived urgency in the early days, any collecting decisions translated to a long-term piece of work and commitment. The team learned that preparing a longer-term but flexible plan early on, including key

milestones, helped develop appropriate policies, practices and support structures for the people involved.

They decided to send most of the non-organic material to Harwell Restoration immediately. This influenced later thinking about the value and significance of the spontaneous memorial items, but did not completely define the longer-term outcomes.

Working in close collaboration with key partners including Archives+ and the University of Manchester, and drawing on support from professionals around the world facing similar challenges, helped enormously in navigating the uncharted territory of collecting and documenting the memorials.

Next Steps

The immediate priority is to complete cataloguing, which is key to providing sustainable and broader access to the collection. As a partnership the team would like to develop a better understanding of the longer-term significance and impact of spontaneous memorials, particularly on people who have been directly affected by the event.

Further Information

Publications and other information on the MTA website.

6.4 University of Stirling – How the Archives and Special Collections team called for contributors to record the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-2022

Summary

The University of Stirling Archives and Special Collections collected in several ways during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Background

When the Covid-19 pandemic caused national lockdown in March 2020, the University of Stirling Archives and Special Collections developed contemporary collecting projects around the theme of the pandemic.

Challenge

The team wanted to document this period for the future, making it easy for people to participate and to do this in ways which did not negatively affect their wellbeing. Originally, they aimed to represent the Forth Valley geographical area, but later focused more on the University of Stirling's own community as many staff and students participating lived outside the area.

Approach

The team undertook four focused calls for people to participate. In March 2020 they asked for photographs of how Covid-19 restrictions were manifesting in local communities, or images which people thought typified the period, and for videos of Thursday night "clap for carers/NHS/keyworkers". Photographs continued to be submitted into March 2022.

During academic year 2020/2021 the team ran a written response project within a wider student wellbeing initiative at the University. They gave out notebooks to students which they could use as diaries. These could (but did not have to) be submitted to the archives. They also facilitated a weekly online session to connect students writing diaries. There was a wider, more casual call out for diaries and creative writing running at the same time.

Beginning in academic year 2021/2022, the team ran an oral history project. The first phase focused on University staff. Interviews were conducted by a team including Archive staff, Art Collection staff and a lecturer in the Division of History, Heritage and Politics. The second phase involved training five student volunteers to interview other students. The team received a contribution from the University Vice Chancellor's Fund and Divisional support to create an end-of-project film.

Intended aims

The team wanted to complement the official University records in the institutional archive with contemporary, personal accounts, particularly student voices. They were particularly aware of the research gap posed by a lack of information on the 1918 Flu Pandemic in their existing medical archives.

The team wanted to enable people to contribute to the archive in way(s) that worked for them whilst enabling the use of their contributions in the future.

They also wanted to encourage engagement with our service when they were unable to open.

Obstacles and issues

Communications about contributing to the archive were primarily through University social media accounts and newsletters. This affected who responded, causing the team to reframe the project towards University staff and students. Even within the University's community, methods of engagement could have been more inclusive. For example, the team particularly wanted to include University keyworkers, such as catering and cleaning staff, but communications may not have reached them and the team may have been conducting interviews in a way that wasn't compatible with their schedules or practicable for them.

The team developed a donation/permissions process, originally by email and eventually using MS Forms. The team also communicated directly with individuals about how archive materials could be used and whether they wanted to restrict usage. It could be time-consuming to ensure that people were able to make an informed decision that was right for them. The team will have a small number of items which will need redaction before they can be used, but envisage this will be manageable.

Calls for participation were open-ended, so collecting ebbed and flowed. For example, running out of space in a physical diary made a natural end and prompted those who wanted to donate the diary to do this, but there was no equivalent for those keeping a diary digitally. The team therefore brought the written response project to an end when their collaborator left the University at the end of the academic year. Identifying an end point to collecting at the beginning could have helped the team to manage their capacity. Being clear in signposting these time parameters to others would have improved project management.

Although the team had suggested specific content to be submitted, they also received donations of other items including copies of Government communications about vaccination or official restrictions, facemasks, and a sanitary kit from the Glasgow climate conference COP26. Many of these came from oral history project participants. They also received some video content for which permissions were unclear. They did not anticipate receiving these additional items of content, but have been able to retain them. With greater capacity they might have specifically asked for such items.

Actual outcomes and outputs

An accessible [collection](#) is available for use, including around 200 digital photographs, around 20 other digital items such as student publications and digital diaries, a box of written responses, two boxes of ephemera, and oral history interviews with 21 students and 40 staff. Textual summaries of the interviews are being created, and creative responses including thematic montages arranged into an article and a [film,](#) which is intended to be the visual version of the article, enable oral histories to be accessed in different ways. The team aimed to have catalogued most of the collection by the time the film was screened in June 2024, and soft launched the archive with the film.

The oral history project enabled the team to connect with other staff across the University, often for the first time. They have been able to collaborate and engage with them subsequently which would not have been possible before.

Weekly opportunities to engage with student participants helped people to feel connected as well as supporting them in their different contributions. Involving student interviewers in the oral history interviews and summarising meant that [students developed](#) their skills and knowledge.

During the oral history project the team was approached by the national [Remembering Together](#) project in which all 32 local authorities in Scotland worked with artists to co-create local memorials to the pandemic. They were able to re-engage with some of their interviewees in a workshop for Stirlingshire. The team accessioned the archive of this national project in 2024.

Lessons learned

The team found having a network of people to talk to about their experiences and this collecting was helpful, even if they were not directly involved in the project. It was sometimes difficult to manage capacity as the team navigated the pandemic and different ways of working.

It was important to be aware of the wide range of experiences, emotions and reactions that people were experiencing, including ourselves. The team tried to make gentle requests for people's time or contributions, providing options for them to participate in ways that were right for them. They found that undertaking the oral history project helped to capture the recent past, as some memories and details had faded faster than might have been anticipated (for example, about particular restrictions). Whilst some participants found the oral history occasionally difficult, everyone was positive about being involved and many commented on how pleased they were that we had initiated the project. For some interviewers, additional opportunities to practice in advance could have ironed out some issues like background noise.

Taking the time to set more careful parameters about timescales or content would have been helpful in managing projects in times of overwhelm for staff, but this was difficult to do in light of uncertainties over when certain restrictions or even the pandemic itself would 'end'.

The team's donation and permission process took a little while to get right. It was worth taking time to design a form enabling people to give informed consent and to close content they wanted to.

Next steps
The University Art Collection will exhibit artwork from the Remembering Together project alongside the team's oral history film as part of the theme Year of Human Experience (2024/2025). They will complete cataloguing for their contemporary collecting projects before cataloguing the Remembering Together Archive.

Further information
Article (and film) about the oral history project by Stephen Bowman, Rosie Al-Mulla, Sarah Bromage, Katharina Pruente, Duncan Armstrong 'An Unusual Period of Unspecified Length': A Creative Oral History of the Covid-19 Pandemic (2024)

6.5 University of Leeds – How staff in Special Collections built relationships with students to document protests on campus in 2024

Summary
The University of Leeds documented student protests on campus.

Background

In October 2023 a student protest occupied part of a building shared by the library and galleries. A second, outdoor encampment took place in spring 2024.

Challenge

The team wanted to provide an opportunity for this aspect of student life to be documented in the University's archives, if people involved wanted this. The Occupation was organised as a collective, and those involved were not individually identifiable. The team aimed to collect items in a way that was acceptable and permitted by the people participating, to include the student experience in the archives.

Approach

The team was introduced to the indoor encampment by the University Librarian who had made personal contact with the people involved in the first days. The team spoke about how they aim to record the life of the University in all its aspects, and left hard copy flyers to enable people to circulate and discuss this if they wished.

Over the three weeks of the encampment, which took place in a building the team are based in, they regularly kept in touch. Later they were able to get permission to take pictures of the layout and how items were arranged. As the indoor encampment was ending, they were able to collect a selection of physical items and secure verbal permission to do this from those who were there. The team was also sent some audio anonymously.

When the second, outdoor encampment began the team again made contact. This encampment ended suddenly without any collecting possible.

Intended aims

The team wanted to make sure they continue to collect contemporary material on protest and activism at the University, and to record current events for posterity.

They wanted to document student protest ethically, securing permissions, being inclusive and transparent about what they were doing. It was important to emphasise the historical record rather than evidence-gathering for the University.

They aimed to co-create catalogue descriptions to reflect the participants' understandings and meanings rather than imposing these. The team also

wanted the items collected to be available for use as soon as possible, with file level catalogue records and some digitised content available to enable this.

Obstacles and issues

It was important to be trusted by those taking part in the Occupation. Staff were therefore always identifiable and sought permission to take photographs and to collect items. They agreed parameters such as not including people in photographs or blurring their faces, and which items could be collected.

The team relied on their previous communications and seeking verbal permission when they collected material. The team found it beneficial to see whether staff members with connections to student groups, or students who had worked with them previously, might be intermediaries.

Whilst the team were able to document the messages and presentation of the indoor occupation, how those involved organised themselves and the activities which took place could not be documented - this probably took place through private social media groups. It will therefore be important to be clear in the collections description that the items collected are a partial record of the indoor occupation and protest.

The team had less capacity to keep in regular contact with the outdoor encampment and were unaware when it was ending, so were unable to collect items from it. There was also less documentation because there were fewer opportunities for the participants to display posters and other material. The weather was also a factor.

The team aim to co-create catalogue descriptions with the group, who wanted to be involved in co-curation. As the team have a limited number of contacts, many of the group are anonymous, and some have now graduated, there are some practical challenges in organising this.

Actual outcomes and outputs

An accessible [collection](#) of around 100 individual items from the indoor encampment, along with over 100 photographs taken, documenting its layout and appearance.

Lessons learned

It was important to develop a clear initial message quickly about the team's interest in collecting and that participants in the encampment retained control

and agency over whether and what items may become part of the permanent University archive.

It was helpful to maintain as frequent contact with the encampments as possible, to build a trusting relationship and to secure items as the indoor encampment ended. The team could also have encouraged the participants to consider documenting the organisation and activities of the encampment as well as the message and creative expressions of protest.

It was important to communicate with the participants in ways that suited them, and remember preserving of content was a lesser priority than the aims of the protests. For example, the team found ways to secure permission to collect which did not require written forms. Digital items could be transferred anonymously using WeTransfer. The team tried to communicate using intermediaries as the situation was sensitive, and they wanted to ensure that they were reaching the students who were actually involved.

The team wanted to focus on items produced by our students, rather than external organisations (which contributed many items to the encampment), so they emphasised this in our communications with the participants.

Next steps

The team plan to expand catalogue descriptions, ideally through co-creation with the student participants if they are able to overcome practical challenges of communication with those who remain at the University, and ensure that the correct terminology is used. They plan to collect any further student protests and events in future, when resource allows.