



Essex Record Office. © Essex County Council.

HOW TO TAKE THINGS FURTHER

To become an archivist you need an undergraduate degree (subject not strictly relevant) and a postgraduate qualification recognised by the Society of Archivists. There are courses currently offered by:

- University of Wales, Aberystwyth
- University College Dublin
- University of Dundee
- University of Glasgow
- University of Liverpool
- University College London

Most of these courses are offered full or part time, with opportunities for distance learning currently provided by the University of Wales and the University of Dundee.

School children using archives.
© Hampshire Record Office.

Competition for places on these courses is fierce, however, and substantial practical paid or voluntary experience is required for applications to be successful. Lists of work experience placements are kept by the Society. In addition many local archives are prepared to accommodate volunteers interested in a career in archives.

Once qualified, archivists are encouraged to undertake the Society of Archivists' Registration Scheme, which demonstrates a commitment to continuing professional development and improves career prospects.

For the most up-to-date details on a career in archives and a list of currently accredited courses, see <http://www.archives.org.uk/careerdevelopment/startingout/postgraduatecourses.html>



Viewing archives on CD-ROM. © University of Sheffield Hartlib Papers Project.



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A Career in Archives

THE JOB

In the course of business lots of organisations and people accumulate archives. These include government agencies, local authorities, universities, hospitals, museums, businesses, charities, professional organisations and families and individuals.

Archives may be books or papers, maps or plans, photographs or prints, films or videos, or computer generated records. Archives are intended to be kept permanently, to preserve the past and allow others to discover it.

It is the job of the archivist to preserve and exploit this archival heritage and the information contained within it. This includes assisting users and answering enquiries, promotional work including exhibitions, presentations or media work, as well as the curatorial skills of selecting, arranging and cataloguing archives. In addition, archivists at a more senior level will also carry out management tasks as they take control of budgets, staff and strategy.

Archivists can gain immense job satisfaction from the variety of tasks they are involved in; handling items hundreds of years old and widening access to heritage. For further details of what the job entails see <http://www.archives.org.uk/content.asp?id269> for a selection of real life case studies.



A selection of archives from the Bank of England.
© Bank of England



Archive Search Room. © Essex County Council.

THE SKILLS

To work as an archivist you must be committed to customer service as well as heritage and information management. Archivists also need to be:

- **good with people:** archivists meet and work with many different people and need the ability to relate to and encourage them all
- **forward thinking:** our demands for and use of information are constantly changing; archivists need to be able to anticipate these changes and to prepare to meet the new challenges they bring
- **logical:** archives need identifying and sorting before they can be effectively interpreted or used
- **able to undertake research:** archivists are not researchers but may occasionally need to research in order to interpret archives; an understanding of research skills is also helpful for advising users. An interest in history is often advantageous, although many archivists possess degrees in other disciplines



Sound Archive. © Essex County Council.

- **committed to professional development:** archivists need to be prepared to continue their development after qualification, acquiring management skills and skills which enable them to play a full part in the development of the heritage sector
- **comfortable with new technology:** you will need to demonstrate the ability to use and adapt to rapidly evolving ICT (Information Communication Technology) packages and systems.



Grant of Title from Charles I, 1628. © Nottinghamshire Archives.

THE MARKET

Just under half the archivists in the UK and Ireland are employed in local government by county or unitary councils. The other principal employment sectors are national archives or museums, universities, businesses and charities. Although very few archivists are self-employed, opportunities for this are growing.

Most jobs are advertised through the Society of Archivists recruitment publication, which is sent to all members of the Society and available later to non-members through the Society's website. Jobs are also advertised occasionally in the national and local press and on the archives-nra email discussion list (join through www.jiscmail.ac.uk).