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"I have spent a lot of my life persuading people that if you want to understand about now — say being British — you need to understand about then."

Professor Simon Schama CBE, historian and broadcaster.

No matter who you are or where you live, you and your community have a story. Collecting and sharing the history of a place can have a huge impact on the lives of its people, helping them to come together to make sense of where they live and work.

Over 130 local authorities provide archive services, local studies and local history libraries. The collections of unique records in their care document a community’s identity. They celebrate the people, places and events that have shaped a village, town, city or region.

There are over one million visits to local authority archives each year. Many books, magazines, plays, films, television, radio and websites rely on information from archives — much of it in the care of local authorities. Online use of archives continues to grow rapidly — over 84 million documents from The National Archives’ collection were downloaded in 2007-08. Family history is one of the top ten uses of the internet.

All over England, people are enjoying archives. This leaflet aims to help elected members and non-specialist staff in local authorities to capitalise on their archival assets. It highlights the ways that archives can enrich the lives of local residents, and how archivists are already developing exciting new ways to help people use them.
Your archives can be breath-taking in their power to speak out to us across the centuries. I have never forgotten my fascination at seeing and handling the oldest document in Worcester Archives, a charter of King Stephen.”

Dame Stella Rimington, former archivist, former director-general MI5 and author

Archives are so much more than vaults of old files. Just think what your personal archives mean to you. Your family photographs are precious memories, frozen in time. Your birth certificate and passport are official documents that confirm who you are. Powerful symbols of national identity, the archives of a state are the authentic history of its people.

Local authorities have a legal responsibility to look after their records, charged by the local government acts to ‘make proper arrangements’ for them.

Local authorities hold records of national and international importance. These include the official records that underpin democracy and the records of the lives of ordinary people, businesses and local life that add colour and texture to the official record.

“A thrill for the children, and a great way for them to learn!”

Parent
And its not just paper and parchment. Most local authority collections contain photographs, maps, plans, prints, drawings, sound recordings, moving images, microfilm and digital records. Together these unique records provide sources of inspiration, enjoyment and learning. They are the key to unlocking and understanding the past.

Creatively used, working in partnership with a range of services, archives can help local authorities tackle key issues. As part of learning programmes and community outreach they can help combat social exclusion and support educational achievement. Through regeneration, they can contribute to improving local economies and place-shaping. Together with records management, archives can deliver business and administrative efficiencies.

Typical Records
HELD BY LOCAL AUTHORITY ARCHIVES:

- records of county, borough & local administration
- records of local authority departments
- registers of baptisms, marriages, burials
- records of businesses & local industry
- papers of private individuals, families & estates
- records of quarter sessions, magistrates & coroners courts
- records of societies, charities & local organisations
- manorial & tithe records
- records of churches & chapels
- records of enquiries & public consultations
- maps & planning information
- prison records
- hospital records
- regimental records
Challenges & opportunities for archives

“Councils are the means of engaging and involving communities, they are the forum through which local needs and ambitions are given a voice, and the democratic means by which all local services should be made accountable to citizens.”

Sir Simon Milton, 2008
Former, leader Westminster City Council and chair LGA

Local authorities are vital when it comes to supporting culture in the UK. In fact, when it comes to archives, they are on the front line, providing access to archives in over 150 service points in England. Local authorities are essential in funding the infrastructure and nurturing new ideas.

Many local authority archive services are facing external pressures which have a huge impact on their work. Changes in lifestyles of consumers and expectations mean that the public now expect more online delivery of information, and demand greater flexibility in the services and products on offer.

Surveys of local authority archives by The National Archives show that there is a high correlation between the size of service and how effectively they can respond to challenges and opportunities. Combining archive services across local authority boundaries can create larger, more cost effective units, with an increased range of public services. Establishing partnerships with other cultural services can also bring benefits.

At Woodhorn, in Northumberland, the local authority has created a world-class visitor attraction, bringing together the county archives, an industrial museum and a country park, offering a great family day out.

Embracing technology brings benefits. In St Helens, the Open Doors project gave people the chance to explore the extensive local archives, making the catalogues of around two million items held by St Helens council’s Local History and Archives Service accessible for the first time on the web.

Volunteers offer opportunities to build links with communities and develop the service. In Carlisle, the Cumbria Archives Service has promoted volunteering as a core part of its new record office. It has attracted a significant number of Carlisle residents and aims to involve people from the deprived ward in which the new building is situated.

As the role of local authorities in providing public services is evolving, archive services are rising to the challenge to provide high-quality, responsive services.
The demand for archives

The modern Berkshire record office offers a fascinating insight into the history of Royal Berkshire and is very useful for people looking to trace their family tree, and to local communities who are researching the history of their villages.”

Pamela Bale, West Berkshire executive councillor for leisure and culture, 2008

In recent years, more and more people have been exploring their roots, seeking an understanding of the present by referencing the past. Over the course of a decade, there has been a 50 per cent increase in reader visits to local authority archives in England. Digital access has revolutionised the opportunities for people to explore archives, as catalogues and images are made available online, and websites such as those for census records, receive millions of hits each year.

Who Do You Think You Are?, the BBC’s flagship factual programme, is one of most watched and talked about television series, with over six million viewers per episode, demonstrating the public’s appetite for family history and the thrill of discovery.

Citizens have legal rights under legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Data Protection Act to access information created by those whom we trust to govern us. To comply with requests for information, local authorities must manage the data they hold effectively. Across local authorities, archivists and records managers are working together to manage archives and current records. The Constitution Unit estimated that over 80,000 Freedom of Information requests were received by local authorities in 2007.

People enjoy using archives, and surveys indicate high satisfaction rates amongst users. People are using archives to discover their family tree, for academic research, legal searches, proving rights, business use and formal and informal learning. Research also indicates that people place a high value on archive and heritage services being available should they need them and that this contingent value exceeds the cost of providing such services.

Archives offer a great opportunity to capture life today, creating living history. People want to make and leave their mark. Over a million people in England are engaged in community archiving activities. Over 89 per cent of visitors to archives believe they contribute to society by strengthening family and community identity.
“People have been inspired to bring their own memories, documents and objects together to share and enjoy memories and local treasures from the past, and the resulting publicity has encouraged people to deposit original records with us”.

County archivist Anne Rowe
even things you and your archives can do to raise your profile, engage your communities and deliver services more effectively.

1. **Make your archive collection work for you.** Archives contain fascinating and often hidden information. Create positive news items and stories for your local media. Celebrate anniversaries, notable local events, dates and people. Get involved in the Archive Awareness campaign (www.archiveawareness.com).

2. **Involve the community.** Use your archives to celebrate the uniqueness of your area with residents and visitors, and work locally to collect and create new archives. In Kent, Local History Day is taking collections into the heart of the community and helping people strengthen ties with their neighbours.

3. **Create volunteering opportunities.** Volunteers across archives help index and catalogue collections and assist in delivering outreach programmes. Lancashire Record Office’s team of ‘will flatteners’ (who have been smoothing out crumpled paper wills) have helped conserve over 600,000 documents and volunteers across the country are developing new skills as they support their local archive.

4. **Forge better links between your archive service and current records management team.** This can improve the way a local authority manages information, making it more effective and efficient and ultimately improving services for local residents.

5. **Join services together to deliver more effectively.** Some authorities have combined their archives with those in neighbouring authorities, while others have brought together ‘collections services’ - museums, archives, libraries, and archaeological services - into one building. In Southampton, a collections review found three million heritage items on twelve sites across the city and the local authority is now planning to consolidate collections at key larger sites. By ensuring that your archive service has adequate buildings it will transform the quality of the services you can provide.
6. **Take advantage of revenue and retail opportunities.** New premises offer the opportunity to include retail and catering facilities. Archives that provide records management services can generate extra income and create partnerships with museums, higher education and private sector organisations. In London, the London Metropolitan Archives has entered into a partnership with Ancestry.co.uk to preserve and host online information about their historical record collections.

7. **Find out more about how your archives can help your authority to tackle key issues.** As part of learning programmes and community outreach, they can help combat social exclusion and support educational achievement. Through regeneration, they can contribute to improving local economies and place-shaping. Together with records management, archives can deliver business and administrative efficiencies.
Archives at the heart of communities

“Friendly, funny and informative. Brings the place alive for me!”
visitor to Dig This Exhibition, Bury St Edmunds record office

Archives play an important part in the lives of many local people. Working creatively with public and private sector agencies, archives can have a huge impact on their locality. Cultural services including archives can be key partners in Local Area Agreements.

As part of regeneration or re-building programmes, archives and local studies can contribute to transforming the environment as has been seen in Hull, Norfolk, Brighton, Essex, and Carlisle. As part of the planning process, contributions from developers can be used to benefit archive services. Destinations in their own right, archives also support the wider tourist economy and contribute to a locality’s economic prosperity.

Safer, stronger communities
Archives can help reduce the risk of social exclusion. East Sussex Record Office has been working with young people in care, exploring what life was like for looked-after children in the past.

Using original archives relating to children in care over the last three centuries, young people receive one-to-one support. The children have created letters, diaries, poetry and role-plays of young people in Victorian times. The work directly contributes to delivery of the Every child matters: change for children agenda.
Elizabeth Hughes, county archivist says “the outside-school activities proved to be enriching, and contributed overall to the young people’s emotional, physical and intellectual development, addressing the needs of looked-after children, who have often missed out on educational opportunities”.

**Health and well-being**

Archives can support work to improve the quality of life for the whole community. Surrey History Centre has developed a pioneering relationship with a local mental health charity that brings together former and current patients, staff, and the public to use archive material in new ways, to improve community life for all. The programme’s emphasis is on understanding, recording and making heard the memories and experiences of those most closely involved in mental health care in Surrey. Contributors are actively supported in contributing to, and interpreting the archive.

Woking MIND says “the events have enabled people to learn about mental illness, the hidden communities of mental health, and promoted equality of opportunity, self-reliance and preventative approaches”.

**Children and young people**

Chelsea Football Club and Westminster Archives

*Education through football* initiative uses materials provided by the archives to understand how Britain has changed since 1948.

The project kicked off with pupils from nine Westminster schools reading *Billy the Kid*, a wartime story about a boy who plays for Chelsea FC. This was followed by creative writing and illustration classes. The pupils also met Chelsea FC’s current and former players and had their work exhibited at Stamford Bridge stadium. “A thrill for the children, and a great way for them to learn!” says one parent.

**Opportunities for older people**

Archives are a great way to give voices to those in the community who are disadvantaged or disenfranchised in some way. *Try to Remember* is part of the *Partnership for Older People’s* project in Gloucestershire, which aims to provide a service for older people experiencing memory loss. The service is offered to people from the local community as part of the dementia pathway.

The programme involves meeting people experiencing memory loss on a one-to-one basis to gather information inspired by their own reminiscences, then facilitating the use of this to support their care. “People are encouraged to explore music, creative writing and digital storytelling. This is aimed at improving wellbeing by focusing on the ‘person’ rather than the ‘patient’, giving a voice to people who sometimes cannot be heard”, says county archivist Heather Forbes.
Building communities
The ‘people-oriented’ nature of archive services can make a substantial contribution to developing communities. The Kendal record office has supported a thriving community archive in the rural village of Crosby Ravensworth. Run by enthusiastic volunteers, a reading room has been established in the village and the collection includes copies of catalogues and local archives. County archivist Anne Rowe explains, “People have been inspired to bring their own memories, documents and objects together to share and enjoy memories and local treasures from the past, and the resulting publicity has encouraged people to deposit original records with us”.

Tameside Local Studies and Archives Centre has made a positive commitment to collecting records which give perspectives on Black and Asian history, recording the memories of people who came to Tameside from the Indian sub-continent in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The result is over one hundred and fifty tape-recorded interviews in various languages, but all transcribed in English. The tapes are in the archive collection and can be consulted at the Local Studies and Archives Centre. The collection also includes other tapes in the oral history collection which relate to the experiences of migrants to this area.

Promoting regional and local identity and celebrating history
Documenting the Workshop of the World is an exciting programme that brings to life industrial and business archive collections from the four Black Country archive services of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

The project focuses on the digitisation of over 10,000 historic images and cataloguing archives of businesses across the region charting the development of the Industrial Revolution in the Black Country. Over 60 collections have been identified, ranging from coal mining to iron and steel making; leather manufacture to a Punjabi credit union.

A spokesperson for the Black Country Archives says: “Our archives are not just about the official record. Our collection includes the records of the millions of people and businesses that make up the history and stories of our region”.

The project includes a series of public events to raise awareness of the archive services and encourage people to discover more of the fascinating history of their part of the Black Country, promoting the region.

Transforming the environment and supporting the local economy
“Regeneration led by culture can be the most successful and durable, unlocking new investment. This is why it is important to sustain investment in culture and the arts”. Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport 2008

With imagination, archives can play a key part in regeneration and neighbourhood renewal. The Hull History Centre project is a joint venture between Hull City Council and the University of Hull. Martin Taylor, the new service head explains “We are bringing together 700 years of the region’s heritage with the resources of the archives service, local studies library and Hull University Archive. We will create a fantastic new service for the people of Hull, the region and the research community”.

The new centre will have exciting facilities for exhibitions, talks, community events, schools, and study, together with state-of-the-art storage and conservation for the collections. The centre is the heart of the city’s ‘cultural quarter’. The most striking feature of the building is a public arcade, housing a café and exhibitions, facing onto a new open park. The centre will open in autumn 2009.
Better business: efficient, effective services
Wirral Council holds a rich set of records, and recognised the need to improve its archives service. At the same time, the council also identified that improvements were needed in the way it managed its current information. It made a decision to invest in centralised new archives and records storage facilities to support both the public archive service, and the management of modern corporate records.

Shared resources offer the potential to reduce costs, and offer clear benefits for both public and corporate users. The emphasis in Wirral is on a high-quality records management service. This supports the information needs of front-line business units through information sharing and swift retrieval and delivery services. Removing the need to enlist third party services has also reduced any potential risks to council information. This was created in tandem with an improved public archive service, offering direct public access to Wirral’s heritage.

Ava Wieclaw ska, records manager says “Consolidation of Wirral’s information service programme has proved a rewarding strategy, delivering much coveted efficiency savings and improved provision.”
“An Aladdin’s cave to be explored” visitor to an archive during the Archive Awareness campaign, 2008

Everyone has a story to tell, and archives allow communities to tell stories on their own terms. As consumers become more sophisticated in their information needs, archives must respond and innovate. Archives should work in partnership with educational agencies to provide inspiration and fuel the thirst for knowledge and learning. Supporting healthcare professionals, archive resources can stimulate the mind and help keep people active.

The thrill of contact with the original and authentic record that speaks across the years cannot be underestimated. The public want to see, touch and feel the ‘real thing’.

Yet, the digital age has brought about a revolution in archives. The creative use of information technology must play a major role in broadening access to information through local authority spaces and websites. Archives should be accessible and available on your doorstep, at school, work and at home. Service points can be created in libraries, museums, social and health centres. Archives should open their doors and reach out to their communities and share the treasures they hold.

Commercial opportunities for archives continue to develop. Digitisation on demand offers opportunities to meet customer needs and preserve collections, and linking up with other heritage services enables better marketing and use of collections.

Archives need to develop partnerships to achieve their full potential. The skills required to achieve success will be found across the workforce and across the whole community. Investment in people – staff, volunteers and users, will reap rich rewards.

Co-location and closer integration can improve services. Fruitful partnerships are to be made
between archives and museums, galleries, libraries, schools and universities, social services, private and voluntary bodies. Places that embrace change and are open to new ways of working are the ones that will thrive.

Successful archives are engaging and enjoyable places for people to visit and use, providing safe custody for our irreplaceable archives. They let us reach across generations to learn from the past, to help inform our future.

“Friendly, funny and informative. Brings the place alive for me!”

visitor to Dig This Exhibition, Bury St Edmunds record office
The following organisations can help you find out more about making the most of your archives:

The National Council on Archives
The National Council on Archives brings together archive service providers, users, depositors and policy-makers across the UK concerned with archives and their use. It aims to develop consensus on matters of mutual concern and provide an authoritative common voice for the archival community.

Mr René Kinzett, head of public affairs  
email: rene@nca.org.uk  
www.nca.org.uk

The Society of Archivists
The Society of Archivists is the professional body for the sector and it aims to promote the care and preservation of archives, to develop and disseminate good practice, to advance the training and professional development of its members and to encourage research and publication.

John Chambers, executive director  
email: executivedirector@archives.org.uk  
www.archives.org.uk

The National Archives
The National Archives is a government department and an executive agency of the Ministry for Justice, and is at the heart of information policy. The National Archives is the UK government’s official archive, containing 1,000 years of history. It is at the forefront of developing archival services for the public and plays a key role in leading and advising the archive sector.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
The Archives Awareness campaign

The Archives Awareness campaign is an annual national celebration of the riches in UK archives, with events and opportunities in archives across the country.

www.archiveawareness.com

Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG)

Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) represents the heads of archive services across UK local authorities and is a founding member body of the National Council on Archives.

Bruce Jackson, chair
email: bruce.jackson@ed.lancscc.gov.uk

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council is the strategic body working with and for the museums, archives and libraries sector. The MLA is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport.

www.mla.gov.uk