

# Introduction to Archives

# What are archives?

- Private organisations, government organisations, families and individuals create and acquire documents in the course of their business or personal activities all the time. Archives are those documents which no longer have an everyday use, yet have been kept because of their historical value.
- Archives are usually unique items which cannot be replaced.
- These records -- and the places they are kept -- are called "archives."
- The person in charge of preserving the archive is called an archivist.

# Is an archive like a library?

- Not really.
- The books in a library are often secondary sources of information, whereas the records in an archive are primary sources. Archives provide first-hand information or evidence relating to historical events or figures.
- Library books are arranged by subject and author, whereas information in archives is arranged according to the person or organisation that created it. This means that you will probably need to look at records from more than one source, or more than one archive, as you gather information.

# Is an archive like a museum?

- Not really.
- Archives only preserve records and documents, not objects and artefacts.
- Although archives do organise exhibitions and displays, their primary function is to preserve the material, and to provide access to members of the public to view the material.
- Archives are arranged in structured catalogues according to the person or organisation that created it.

# What do archives consist of?

- They can be single documents....
- ...or large collections
- They don't have to be on paper
  - VHS
  - Cassette tape
  - Microfilm
  - Emails
  - Electronic documents
  - Floppy disks
  - etc

# Why do we keep archives?

- To learn about the past
- To help us understand who we are and how we came to be the way we are – both as a community and as individuals.
- For evidential reasons
- For education and learning
- For personal reasons that affect individuals' lives today
- Contributes to accountable government

# How do we decide what to keep?

- Geographical
- Duplication
- Objects
- Ephemera
- Context
- Format

# White gloves...

- Often seen when people are handling archival material on TV
- Can provide protection, but there is a big debate about them.
- Risk that you lose dexterity and might rip delicate material
- Transfer dirt from one document to another.



# What would you keep?

- In pairs, have a look through the box and note down which items you would
  - Keep
  - Dispose of
  - Check
- And state why you have made this decision.

# What would you keep

Item number	Decision	Why?
1	Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Format, would need transferring to more modern media</li><li>• See whether relevant to Wolverhampton</li></ul>
2	Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Context, see what his links to Wolverhampton are</li></ul>
3	Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Format, would need transferring to more modern media</li><li>• Check contents</li></ul>
4	Keep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manders Paints</li></ul>
5	Dispose of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ephemera</li></ul>
6	Dispose of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ephemera</li></ul>
7	Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Printed material, check if duplicate</li></ul>
8	Dispose of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No context</li></ul>
9	Dispose of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Empty!</li></ul>
10	Dispose of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not related to Wolverhampton</li></ul>

# Where are archives held?

- The National Archives
- Local authority archives
- Business archives
- Charitable/voluntary archives
- Community archives

# Archives dos and don'ts

- Come up with suggestions for what people can and can't do when they are working with archival material.
- Think about the different aspects, such as protecting the originals, security, etc.

# Using archives

- Our priority is to preserve the archives for future generations, so most record offices have a number of guidelines
  - Locking bags etc away
  - No food and drink
  - Pencils only
  - Signing in and bringing ID for registration

# Wolverhampton Archives

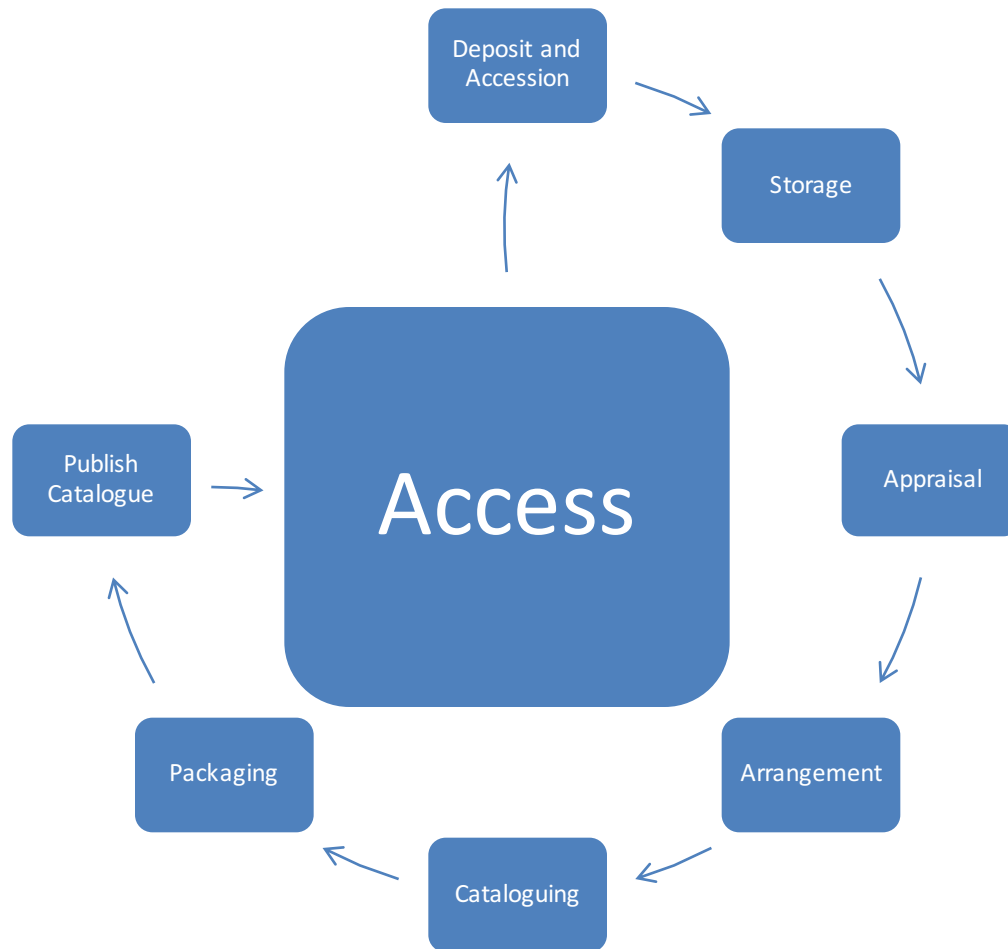
- Existed since 1978 when it was based in the library.
- Had a number of locations before moving to the Molineux Hotel Building in 2009
- Oldest document...

# The Molineux Hotel Building

# Sources available at Wolverhampton Archives



# The life of a record arriving at Wolverhampton Archives



# Deposit and Accession

- Records are acquired by the Archive as a deposit or donation
- We receive records from the Council, schools, churches, businesses, local people
- Sometimes we receive them spontaneously, or sometimes we approach individuals or companies directly.
- Accession = the process of formally accepting a collection of records into an Archive

# Storage

- All records are stored in the custom built strongrooms on mobile shelving
- Each strongroom has colour coded sections and numbered shelves
- Paper records are stored in specific conditions
  - temperature below 20°C
  - Humidity around 50%
- Fire suppression system using gas not sprinklers
  - Heptafluoropropane to remove oxygen from the air

# Appraisal

- The process of determining the value of records and disposing of records that lack informational value
- Do not keep duplicate copies of records
- Disposal of records
  - Return to depositor
  - Transfer to a more suitable archive/museum
  - Confidential shredding

# Arrangement

- Where possible records will be kept in their original order
- Where no original order exists the records will be arranged into a logical order to make sense to the user
- Can be physical or intellectual
- Prepares the records for cataloguing

# Cataloguing

- The process by which a collection is described in the hierarchical levels of the catalogue
- Hierarchical Levels:
  - Collection Level
  - Series or Subseries Level
  - Item Level
- Catalogues are based on ISAD(G), the international cataloguing standard to ensure consistency of information
- All records get a unique reference

# Conservation

- Work carried out by a professional Conservator to repair and make useable records held by the Archives
- The aim of conservation is to make a record stable and to prevent any further decay or damage occurring, not to return the item to its original state

# Packaging

- All archive items are boxed or packaged
  - Standard boxes
  - Large boxes
  - Map boxes
  - Individual folders
- Records are packaged inside the boxes to protect and label them
  - Envelopes or folders
  - Encapsulation



# Publish Catalogue

- Once the catalogue and levels of description are complete the details will be uploaded to the Black Country History website
- The Black Country History website is publically searchable and contains the descriptions of archive collections held at the Archives
- Also includes the catalogues for collections at Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall in the Archives and Museums

# Access

- To access the records in the searchroom you need a CARN card to register with the Archives
- Go the searchroom and talk to the counter staff about the records or subject you are interested in
- Fill in a request ticket with the item details
- The counter staff will then get the records out of the strongrooms for you to look at

# Any questions?

- Visit to searchroom