



Collections Development: Case Studies

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Purpose

The aim of this publication is to give practical examples of collections development activities in practice in a range of different archive services. This publication is aimed at both established and new archive collections and services, and may be useful to any organisation keen to develop and safeguard their archives.

This publication should be read with reference to *Collections Development Framework and Guidance: Understanding Collections Development* and *Collections Development Framework and Guidance: Writing a Collections Development Policy and Plan*, which provide the theoretical framework for collections development as well as a suggested approach to use when developing policies and plans for your archive service.

- Glasgow City Archives – Classifying Collections for Future Development
- Hearing Link and the Oral History section at the British Library Sound Archive – Active Collecting through Creation
- Unilever Art, Archives and Records Management – Developing Institutional Collections
- University of Durham Special Collections, Culture Durham – Reviewing Collections Development: Collections Centred and Audience Focused
- Wellcome Collection – Reviewing Collections Development: From a Targeted Approach to Agile Working

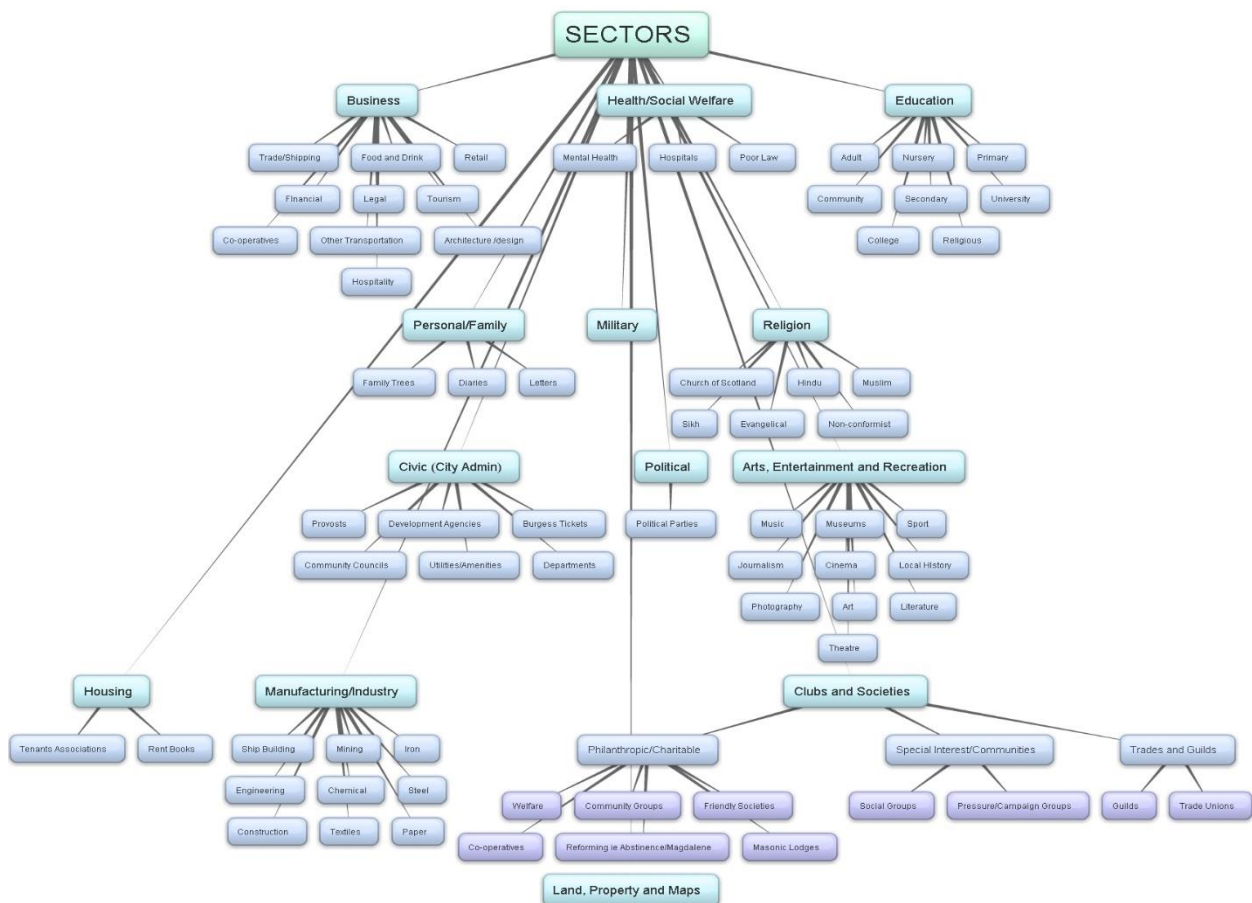
Classifying Collections for Future Development

Lynn Bruce, *Skills for the Future Trainee*, Glasgow City Archives

Glasgow City Archives

In 2014-5 Glasgow City Archives (GCA) delivered a collections development project, which established the extent to which the collections held by GCA fulfilled its remit of reflecting the heritage, history and lives of the people of Glasgow. The project aimed to demonstrate the particular strengths of GCA's collections, as well as highlighting any gaps in the collections, using collections development guidelines produced by The National Archives as a template.

The project focused on the c. 2,000 private collections held by the archives and collections held under charge and superintendence from National Records of Scotland, as this was where knowledge gaps were most prevalent. The project categorised collections in accordance to sectors of life, industry and important themes to try and identify gaps – for example, using the [Standard Industrial Classifications](#) to identify business classifications, adapting these to better reflect Glaswegian historical trends. Alongside sectors, themes within the collections were also identified, which sought to reflect Glasgow's history. However, they also highlighted areas that were a current priority for Glasgow City Council and reflected the diversity of Glasgow's population according to the most recent census.



Every collection was represented at fonds level on a spreadsheet. The project gathered metadata about these collections, including acquisition details and the level of cataloguing. Relevant sectors, sub-sectors and themes were identified for each collection.

It was recognised that collections could cover more than one sector or theme. Therefore, space was given for four sectors/subsectors and themes per collection. Some collections, moreover, would have a very strong association with a particular sector or theme. Others may have contained records relating to a particular sector/theme but its core strengths lay in other areas. For this reason a weighting system was introduced whereby 'Sector/theme 1' was highly relevant to a sector/theme, through to 'sector/theme 4'.

Each sector/theme was assigned a unique numerical value and the spreadsheet was populated using these numbers, and then analysed in a report that demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of GCA's private collections.

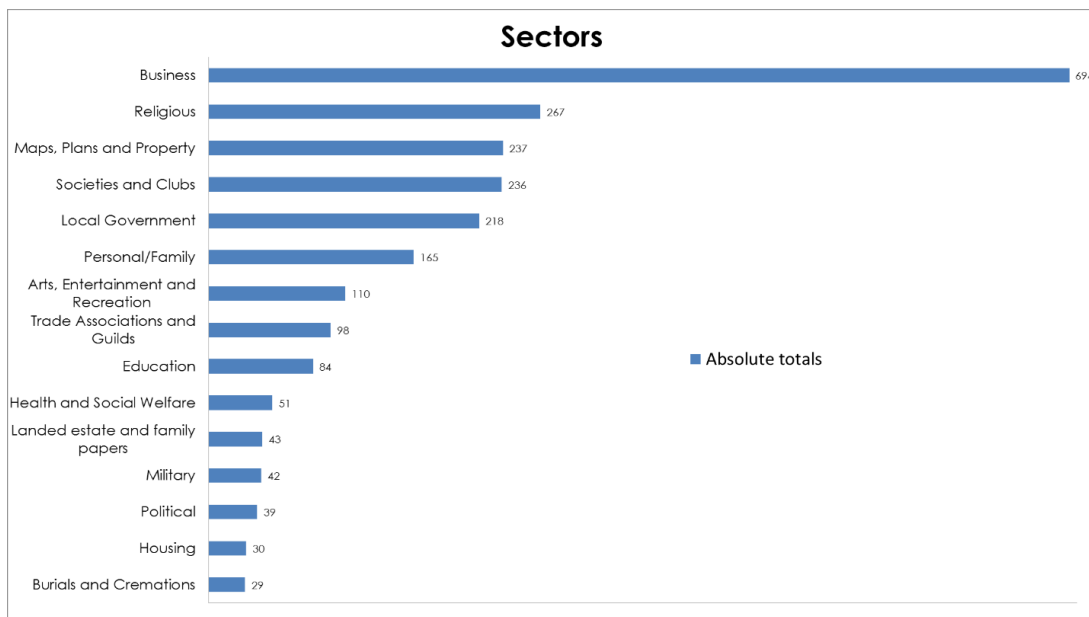
Challenges and opportunities

Challenges mainly related to this being a pathfinding project, which meant that there were many unknown variables. There were a lot of decisions to be made from the outset, including what the project's outputs would be. The project also had to be flexible as no one was sure how long any of the elements would take. However, this was also an opportunity to do something new and exciting and to help shape the future of the largest local authority archive in Scotland.

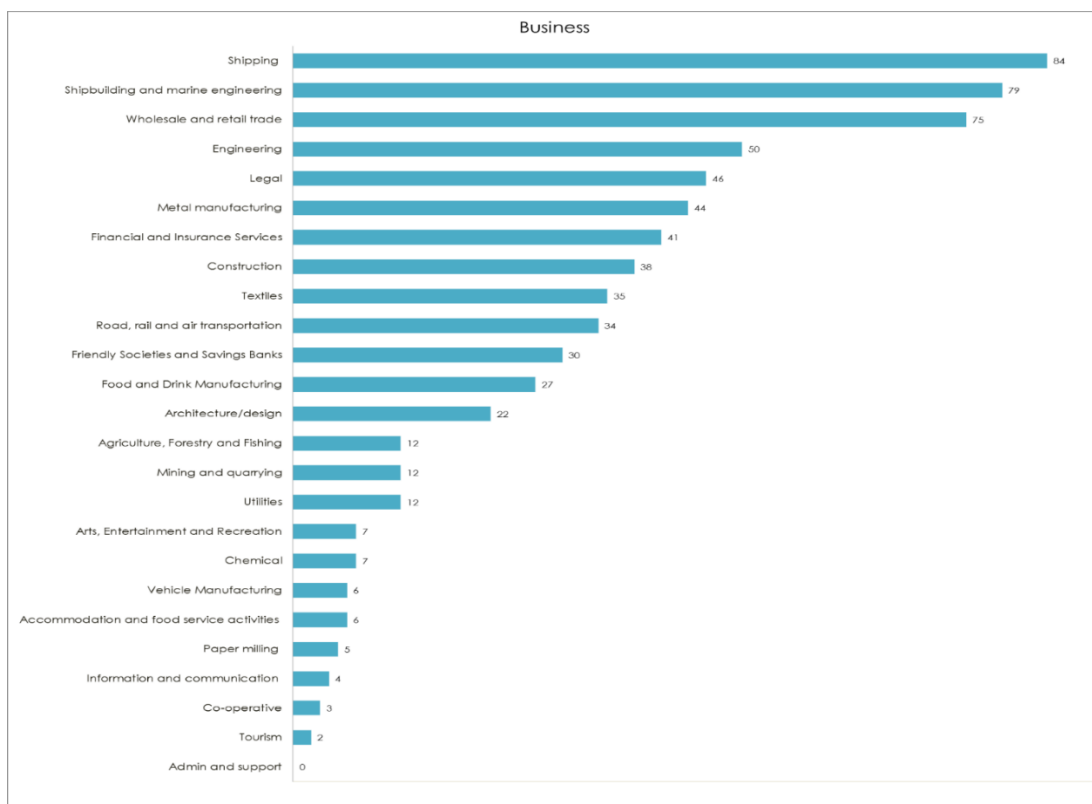
In order to meet challenges, time was spent researching similar projects and learning from their experiences. Although collections development was a relatively new idea in the archives sector, it is something that museums have understood for a long time, so the project drew on their experiences, looking at similar projects and attending training courses. There was also a lot of discussion with GCA staff as to what they wanted to get out of the project. The trainee had a mentor and weekly meetings helped keep the project on track. This feedback was incorporated into the project and helped to determine its outputs and priorities.

Outcomes

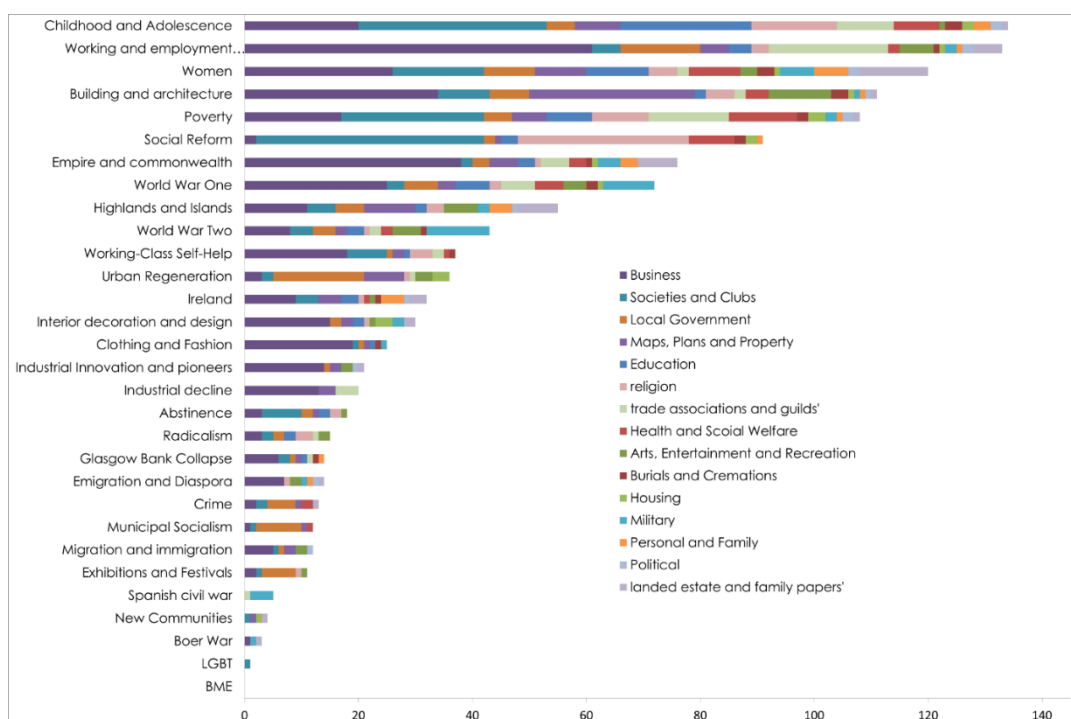
The output of the project were the spreadsheet and a report based on the spreadsheet. They showed the overall shape of GCA's collections:



It was also possible to break these down further by sector:



And by theme:



The report found that GCA collections confirm the narrative of Glasgow as a city of heavy engineering and manufacturing which became the second city of the Empire on the strengths of its trade links and shipbuilding sector. They document the industrial struggles that would fuel the growth of the trade union movement and Labour Party. The report also identified areas and groups less well represented in the collections, including housing, BME and LGBT communities. This report underpinned the importance of other work undertaken by Skills for the Future trainees based at GCA, who worked on outreach projects, which aimed to encourage underrepresented groups to engage with the archives.

The project was successful in its aim of showing the strengths and weaknesses of the archive's private collections and providing recommendations for areas where resources should be targeted in the future. By drilling down into sectors, the report was able to highlight collections of particular significance or importance. This gave a more nuanced picture than immediately appears in the raw data. For example, the graph show there are only 3 co-operative society collections. However, one of these is the extremely significant Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society. Whilst time and resources prevented a 'significance' weighting being incorporated into the spreadsheet, this would have added additional value to the outputs.

The project did investigate other archives in the Glasgow area, and what they were collecting. However, there is the potential for more work to be done in this area, and a more joined-up approach to collecting could be of benefit in the future. The Scottish Council on Archives has since recognised the importance of collections development, and has now set up a working group on the subject, of which GCA's project is an important part.

For further information, contact the team at [Glasgow City Archives](#).

Active Collecting Through Creation: *Hearing Link and the Oral History section of the British Library Sound Archive*

Mary Stewart, Curator of Oral History, British Library Sound Archive

Unheard Voices: Interviews with deafened people

This national oral history project was run by [Hearing Link](#) between January 2008 and March 2010, and was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Hearing Link is a UK-wide charity for people with any level of hearing loss, their families and friends. The oral history project was designed to collect the testimonies of people with Acquired Profound Hearing Loss (APHL) - that is 'deafened' people, who have grown up with 'normal hearing', then lost all or most of it through illness, accident or injury. An estimated 150,000 adults live with this condition in the UK. As people with APHL have lost hearing in adulthood the majority do not use sign language to communicate – but rely on strategies such as lip reading, induction loops, typed text, assistance dogs, and in some cases, cochlear implants.

Sarah Smith co-ordinated the project for Hearing Link, ably assisted by the 16 volunteer interviewers and the wider Hearing Link team. The British Library oral history team worked as the archive partner for the project, through the efforts of Rob Perks, Mary Stewart and Elspeth Millar. Training in oral history methods was led by Michelle Winslow, an Oral History Society/British Library accredited trainer. The British Library has archived the material in perpetuity and provides public access (subject to any access restrictions requested by each interviewee). These can be accessed through the [Sound and Moving Image catalogue](#) and the [British Library Sounds website](#).

The Hearing Link team used the recordings to create an accessible heritage resource, including a learning pack, DVD, booklet and online materials based on the collected testimonies. Deafened volunteers received training from Hearing Link to enable them to support the learning pack by giving talks to schools and community groups.

Challenges and opportunities

Enhancing the national collection

For the last 15 years the oral history team has been actively collecting testimony of disabled people's experiences – to fill a significant gap in the British Library oral history collections. The main strategy to redress this gap has been through partnerships with external projects – such as histories of mental health (with Mental Health Media, now part of MIND), cerebral palsy ('Speaking for Ourselves' with Scope), disabled people's experience of education ('What did you Learn at School today?' with ALLFIE), and this project with Hearing Link. In addition, the department continues to ensure that the voices of disabled people are captured through all the projects run in-house (for example *An Oral History of British Athletics*). The British Library guide to oral histories of personal and mental health and disability [can be found here](#).

Improving deafened awareness

Working with Hearing Link was an opportunity to improve the BL's own deafened awareness. Not only did the curators and trainer adapt some of the training materials, the team also needed to think about how the training was delivered – bearing in mind that everyone's speech was typed out in full in real time by two skilled typists called

Speech To Text Reporters. More breaks were necessary – to give the STTRs their rest time, and also to recognise that the participants had to expend a lot of energy to concentrate – so needed more time to recover. A fantastic hearing dog called Yogi attended one course with his owner, so the oral history team needed plan canine rest breaks and exercise areas too.

Adaptations and working with new technology

As both the interviewer and the interviewee (in almost all cases) were deafened all of the participants and trainers had to re-approach the logistics of the recording process. All the words spoken in the interview were typed up by the STTR to appear on a computer screen, plus both parties usually lipread. The two parties in the interview had to face each other, but also needed to read their own screen too. This meant that the interview has more pauses and silences than many oral history recordings. After the interview the STTR transcript was checked for any typographical and spelling errors (the skill of the STTRs meant there were surprisingly few), and the transcript was then used as the primary means for the interviewer to create a content summary of the recording to act as the main finding aid for the Sound and Moving Image catalogue.

The crucial importance of ongoing and clear communication

The training courses, project design and management and archiving were all enabled by exemplary team work within Hearing Link and the volunteer team, but also a strong partnership with the British Library that was clear from the outset of the project. The requirements of the archive were built in at the very start of the project (including a spreadsheet to capture all the metadata to create the catalogue entries), which minimised extra tidying up when the material was deposited. Good communication helped the project manager understand what was being asked and why – without this, the archive's requirements might be seen as overly cumbersome. The participants were also delighted that their recording would be valued as part of the national collection – which was good outreach for the BL with new audiences.

Benefits to the participants

The project was blessed with enthusiastic volunteer interviewers. In addition to the interview itself the interviewing events provided a valuable opportunity for the participants to get together and talk about their experiences, which was an added bonus. Interviewees received a copy of their interview transcript in the weeks following their interview, with many interviewees remarking that their families found out things they had never known or fully realised before. Two interviewees who had recently received cochlear implants used their transcript in conjunction with the audio to carry out hearing therapy exercises.

Meeting the challenge of 'insider' interviewing

As with many oral history projects where 'insiders' conduct the interviews there were obvious benefits, especially as trainee interviewers were instrumental in designing the question structure, based on their own experience of hearing loss. At the training the participants were able to consider how they might feel in the interview situation and identify strategies for making the interview a positive experience for everyone involved – including what a listener with no experience would need to know. It became clear to Hearing Link that the interviewers' stories were of real importance too, so that all 16 volunteer interviewers also had their own stories recorded and added to collection.

Coverage

The project team were slightly disappointed that there was little coverage from Northern Ireland and that there were only a handful of people who were not White British. This reflected the demographics of the people with whom the organisation worked at the time of the project.

Outcomes

Sharing experiences

In addition to the teaching packs, the project received lots of publicity, including an article in the British Deaf History Society Journal in Winter 2009. Sarah Smith presented at the Oral History Society conference in 2009 and in 2012 Sarah, Mary Stewart and Elspeth Millar led a session at the European Social Science and History conference reflecting on working in partnership on the project.

Online access to the material

3 years after the project finished, the British Library added all of the open material (audio, summaries and transcripts) to the [British Library Sounds website](#) for online access – which greatly improved accessibility. Hearing Link was keen on this development and all interviewees were re-contacted about this new type of access (where they had the option to opt out of online access) in advance of the website going live. Working on this case study has also breathed new life into the presentation of the material on the [Hearing Link website](#).

For further information, contact the oral history team at the [British Library Sound Archive](#).

Developing Institutional Collections

Claire Tunstall, Head of Art, Archives and Records Management, Unilever

[Unilever Art, Archives and Records Management](#) (UARM) part of Unilever

UARM staff undertook rationalisation exercises of records held offsite with third-party providers in line with the organisation's Data Retention standard. These exercises were driven by a corporate goal to move away from using third-party storage in the UK and Ireland to using UARM. For the service, this represented a great opportunity to further develop their holdings in line with organisational goals, as well as to further embed the service within the larger business.

Challenges and opportunities

These rationalisation activities came with several resource challenges: financial (deciding who should pay for the cost of project staff and costs relating to exiting third party off-site agreements), an impact on storage space at the service stemming from receiving an increased number of records as well as an impact on staffing in terms of post project work and support. However, this work also provided UARM with some significant opportunities to save the company money in the long term as well as to augment existing holdings with records of long term historical value.

In order to meet some of the resourcing challenges, UARM wrote a clear business case outlining the full benefits of the project, including how resources could be better utilised by moving the material into the archive collections and closing the off site stores.

Outcomes

This work has seen the service establish a model for this kind of project working, with the service now having benchmarks for future work. This has allowed the service to better plan for future interventions, as they now have a clear idea of how long such projects may take and how much resource they require, as well as practical knowledge on how to arrange transport and exit third party contracts. The success and savings from this project have meant that the service is known throughout the business, and other departments often liaise with UARM staff if they discover use of third-party records storage. The team has also shared this model wider within Unilever to encourage its uptake on a global scale. Although there is further development work in progress in embedding the Unilever Data Retention Standard into business consciousness, projects such as this one, especially if implemented globally, provide a workable model that both ensures the development of collections through improved intellectual and physical management, as well as through more efficient use of resources.

For further information, contact the team at [Unilever Art, Archives and Records Management](#).

Reviewing collections development: collections centred and audience focused

Judy Burg, Head of Archives and Special Collections, *Culture Durham*, Durham University

University of Durham, Special Collections: Culture Durham

Created in 2016, Culture Durham brings together the University's art, artefact, archives and special library collections, as well as venues and cultural engagement activity. Our collections are of national and international significance and provide material and inspiration for research, teaching, wider student experience and public engagement across the University. We care for and conserve these collections and provide access to them through searchroom facilities and services, loans, cataloguing, digitisation, exhibitions and permanent displays, schools' engagement and lifelong learning programmes.

These collections and activities have been brought together to maximise their impact across the University and beyond. We therefore needed to develop and embed policies, strategies and methodologies across all collections, to help us achieve this.

There are several strands to our work, which is still in progress.

- The establishment and effective operation of an Acquisition and Disposal (A&D) Panel
- A single, integrated Collections Development Policy
- A single integrated Collections Development plan, particularly relating to 21st century collections
- A single set of criteria for establishing priorities for cataloguing and accessioning
- A shared understanding of methodologies for different collection types working towards a shared approach to collections management at macro and micro level

Challenges and opportunities

Our challenge and opportunity has been to bring together our strategies and methodologies across all collection areas, to learn from each other and to maximise the effectiveness and impact of all of our collections work: from identifying and assessing possible new acquisitions through to prioritising collections work, promoting collections and articulating strengths and future collecting focus. We have sought to develop a strategy and processes which demonstrate good governance and ensure the recognition of resources required as well as best allocation and most impact from resources available.

Specific challenges have included:

- Drafting documents which were practical and meaningful across all collecting areas, without them being too general, or too long, to be useful.
- Defining precisely those acquisitions (across all types of material, but particularly archive and book collections) which are accruals to specific existing collections. These would not require A&D Panel approval, as it was considered that an implicit commitment to receive or seek accruals had been made.
- Identifying possible areas for collecting 20th and 21st century material, which build on strengths in medieval and early modern material, but reflect modern society and the interests of current and future researchers (ie collecting of and for the

21st century). In particular, translating broad 'subject' areas into descriptions of the types of organisations or individuals whose archives we would seek to collect.

- Developing criteria for assessing collections (initially for prioritising cataloguing work, but with possible application for acquisition too), which took into account all collecting areas, and strategic agendas (eg teaching, research, public engagement), as well as factors such as longevity and serendipity.
- Finding common measures to measure collections size and % catalogued across all collections.

Particular opportunities have included:

- Durham University Museums collection development policy and plan articulates very clearly priorities as well as boundaries for future collecting. We wanted to see how this clear focus could be expressed within the equivalent documents for archives.
- The archival practice of having collection-level-descriptions online in advance of full cataloguing (and other collection-level management processes) can help to make best use of limited resources for collections work. We wanted to see how this might help with discoverability of museum collections before they are accessioned / catalogued item by item
- As the collections are brought together more closely and given a higher profile within the University and more widely, we wanted to see how that informed and influenced our views on collecting – within specific areas and across the board.

Outcomes

The Acquisitions and Disposals Panel has provided robust governance, a wider strategic view and an audit trail for expenditure within our acquisitions budget. It has also made more explicit the resources required for collections management, and preservation post-acquisition.

Submissions to the A&D panel include archival and library items or collections which fit within the boundaries of our collection development policy, but where collections-management staff do not recommend acquisition, or are neutral. In this way, decisions are taken by the panel without being filtered or pre-judged.

The Culture Durham staff **workshop** on collections-centred and audience-focussed collecting aimed to reach some conclusions in two areas which would inform a cross-Culture Durham collecting policy:

- To identify the most important reasons to collect – within the context of the university strategy.
- To identify generic collecting priorities that all collecting areas might have in common – how might we best strengthen CD collections as a whole.

It looked at ways in which we could describe the strengths of our collections, characteristics by which we could define the boundaries of what we collect, and of these, the characteristics which would be of most strategic benefit to the university. It looked at why we collect and themes or subjects as a basis for collecting, looking beyond the horizon of current research interests.

The Acquisitions and Disposals Panel has given rise to a range of interesting and valuable discussions about the significance of possible acquisitions (and by extension, existing holdings) and their potential for research, teaching or engagement. It has also contributed to the wider process of joining up our collections and our knowledge of them, in particular enabling a broader view of how collection development policy translates into practice. This broader view is especially useful in the context of our development of a collection development plan for 21st century material, for archives in particular, but also for oriental collections.

The collections development consultation exercise involved canvassing all heads of academic departments, institutes and centres, as well as other faculty members with links to collections or staff. This received responses, with expressions of interest, from 40 members of academic staff. A further mailing, setting out aims and issues in more detail, has so far received requests for presentations or discussions to be arranged with 4 departments. We will continue this consultation in the next academic year, working with individual academic colleagues, research teams, departments and institutes.

The Culture Durham staff **workshop** reached some conclusions – which might point towards a direction of travel, rather than a specific strategy or policy: We identified the need to:

- Look at existing collection strengths
 - o To establish our level of knowledge about our collections – strengths and gaps
 - o To improve our knowledge and understanding across all collecting areas
 - o To share that knowledge with potential users (eg subject guides)
- Review our approach to acquisitions and create more focussed checklist – to ensure relevance and auditability, and to manage and balance expectations of a wide range of stakeholders
- Articulate current strengths – to inform what we want to collect and why, where to expand

We described the concept of ‘growing ink blots’ – building on strengths and forging links between existing and emerging strengths, avoiding preconceptions which become too prescriptive, so as not to limit versatility or scope.

The consultation and internal discussions have enhanced our understanding of what it means to be ‘collections-centred and audience-focussed’ including drivers for collecting and types of significance. However it has not yet, taken us significantly further towards a new statement of collections development priorities.

Discussions will continue towards the development of an integrated collections development policy and plan, in particular identifying the boundaries and priorities for 20th and 21st century material. The assessment criteria will also be finalised and embedded in collections-management and collections-development processes.

For further information, contact the team at [Durham University Special Collections](#).

Reviewing collections development: from a targeted approach to agile working

Jenny Shaw, Collections Development Manager at Wellcome Collection

Wellcome Collection

Wellcome Collection is a free museum and library exploring health, life and our place in the world. Inspired by the collections assembled by Henry Wellcome, we encourage great ideas about health by connecting science, medicine, life and art. It is part of Wellcome, a global charitable foundation that exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive.

Our collections are based on items acquired during Henry Wellcome's lifetime. Henry Wellcome was a prolific collector and after his death in 1936 there followed a long period of consolidation for the collection. During this period, it was significantly reduced in size through sale and gift and a tighter focus on the history of medicine and science was applied. After years of consolidation it became apparent that modern material was not being systematically collected so in 1979 the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre was established to encourage and help with the preservation of twentieth century records, documents and archive collections relating to medical care and research in Britain.

Throughout this period, the Wellcome Trust and the library led quite separate existences, with the Trust focusing on funding modern biomedical research and the library on the history of medicine.¹ However, in 2010 the Trust unveiled a [new major strategy](#), as well as a new strategy for the library to transform the service from a physical collection to a digital one, concentrating on 3 priority areas: strategic digitisation, expert interpretation and targeted collecting. The targeted collecting strand was an attempt to challenge the library's traditional approach to collecting and was closely aligned with challenges identified by the Trust.

Challenges and Opportunities

Targeted collecting was an attempt to bring the work of the library closer to that of Wellcome more widely and to transform our way of collecting away from being solely reactive to external events to being proactive. There were definitely some successes, but targeted collecting did not achieve as much as it could have.

Although using the Trust's challenges brought us closer to our funding body and its priorities, the categories were too broad to be practically applied. In reality it was possible to allocate any type of collecting activity to them, most things could be categorised as either infectious disease or chronic disease and if either of these categories was not suitable then connecting the environment, nutrition and health was used as a broad catch-all. The way that the collecting teams were organised meant that there was a lack of co-ordination and approaches tended to be based on personal

¹ Under the terms of Henry Wellcome's will, the collection had been left to the pharmaceutical company rather than the charitable Trust and it was not until 1960 that the collections were transferred.

interests. This type of activity was only archive-based and not across the whole range of collections that the library held. Momentum was not maintained and activity gradually ran out of steam.

We are now looking afresh at how we actively collect in a way that is effective, holistic and sustainable.

There is still a need to collect in a more proactive way and we are currently working on developing a new approach based on what we learnt from targeted collecting. We have recently restructured and have created a collections development team made up of two librarians and two archivists. We hope that bringing together these disciplines will make it easier for us to think about collections containing both published and traditional archival material.

One of our current priority areas is Art & Health. In 2014/2015 we acquired a number of exciting archive collections on the theme of art in a medical context that deal both with the recent past and with contemporary issues in the field. These pushed the boundaries of our traditional collecting practice in terms of scale, medium, the context in which material is created, and the sensitivities associated with documenting lived experience. We have several large, multi-media collections that help to document: the establishment and growth of the arts and health movement from the 1970s; architecture for healthcare; expressions of lived experience; art as therapy or healing; art within psychotherapy; and art as a catalyst for wider engagement within healthcare settings. We are in the process of scoping and planning how to engage with new groups so that we can effectively capture a broader range of voices, beyond medical professionals, within our collections.

Another priority are records of Wellcome's activity. At the moment, this collection primarily consists of material that has come through the hard-copy records management system, which does not capture digital material or anything else that doesn't pass through the formal records management system. Recognising this, an in-depth project was carried out to assess the records currently captured by the records management system. Now we are investigating how the archive might better reflect the vibrancy of Trust activity. We are starting some pilot pieces of work to build stronger relationships with Trust-funded organisations and individuals. We hope that by drawing together some of our existing activity in this area it will become more coherent and will have greater impact.

We have just started to investigate alternative ways of instigating priority areas by working more closely with Wellcome's Humanities and Social Sciences team. They are in touch with research communities and archives in a different way than our traditional forms of communicating with these communities.

Outcomes

Our traditional way of measuring collections development activity was to count the number of collections acquired or items purchased. We are intending to develop different ways of measuring success, which are not in place yet, but which will be based

on the overall success framework for Wellcome. We would like to be able to measure how we have been involved in helping to create networks that help to signpost depositors to the most appropriate repository. We would also like to be able to measure how we have brought together diverse sets of people to discuss how to collect on certain topics, a practice which ultimately improves our knowledge of the collections we acquire and helps us to catalogue them. We work in an agile and iterative way and are still at a very early stage with our strategic collecting.

We have not yet done much work in this area let alone had the opportunity to evaluate it. We would like to be able to demonstrate how strategic collecting has had a positive impact on Wellcome's aim of improving health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive, but we anticipate that this will be a challenge in the short-term because of the long timescales often involved in collections development.

We will evaluate our collections development work as we progress, rather than doing something for a set period of years and then evaluating it at the end. The plan is to undertake smaller pieces of work to constantly test what does and doesn't work rather than embark on large projects. We intend for this to be an evolving way of working that provides direction for collections development activity, but which is also flexible enough to respond to new opportunities.

For further information, contact the team at the [Wellcome Collection](#).