

“Our Shared Past: an Archival Domesday for England”

**Local Authority Archive Services in England: Funding
Opportunities and Development Needs**

A Report by the Archival Mapping Project Board

March 1998

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Progress on the Mapping Project relating to archive services in England has been regularly monitored over the past year by a Project Board, convened by the Public Record Office (PRO) and comprising representatives from the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG), the Society of Archivists, and the Historical Manuscripts Commission. The Members of the Project Board are as follows:-

Liz Hallam Smith (Director of Public Services, PRO), Chair.

Chris Kitching (Secretary, Historical Manuscripts Commission).

Rosemary Dunhill (Hampshire County Archivist), ACALG.

Jim Grisenthwaite (Cumbria County Archivist), ACALG.

Nick Kingsley (Birmingham City Archivist), ACALG.

Bruce Jackson (Lancashire County Archivist), Society of Archivists.

David Leitch (Archive Inspection Officer, PRO), Project Manager.

The team which carried the Project forward on a day-to-day basis was based in the PRO's Archive Inspection Service: Adrian Ailes acted as secretary to the Project Board and designed the questionnaire; Steven Jones took over from Adrian as secretary and did most of the processing of the questionnaires; Alec Mulinder designed the database, spreadsheets and pie-charts; and Nick Coney helped with the processing of questionnaires.

We are grateful to all 123 head archivists in local record offices throughout England who took the trouble to complete the detailed Project questionnaire.

Enquiries about this Project may be directed, in the first instance, to the PRO's Archive Inspection Service.

David Leitch
Public Record Office
Kew
Richmond TW9 4DU

Tel: 0181 392 5262
Fax: 0181 392 5284
e-mail: archive-inspection@pro.gov.uk

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***THE ARCHIVAL
MAPPING PROJECT***

THE ARCHIVAL MAPPING PROJECT

Archives are created by private individuals and a wide variety of bodies, ranging from local and central government to private businesses and societies, primarily for their own purposes. They have been produced in a wide variety of formats, from medieval parchment, paper files, maps, plans and photographs, through to video cassettes and computer disks. Without an archive, an organisation has no collective memory to inform the direction of its current activities. Of the enormous quantity of records which are created today, those which are of most value for current and future generations are selected for permanent preservation. Those selected records have content which is not likely to be found elsewhere. They throw light not only on the history of the organisation which created them but also on some of the vast range of subjects about which people wish to find out information.

Archives are looked after by archivists in record offices or archive services. The purpose of having an archive service is to ensure the survival of these unique records both for the study of history and related subjects and for legal reasons. Because most of the records are quite irreplaceable, they should be stored in conditions of a high standard to minimise the likelihood of damage. They should also be described or catalogued so that they are readily available to users in a public searchroom. Access to the records of public sector organisations is an important part of democratic accountability. Also, archives supply essential material for the study of history in many forms: national, local and family. The use of archives for educational purposes has in recent years been stimulated by the emphasis on resource based learning in the national curriculum.

As we approach the millennium, the nation's archive services are making strenuous efforts to become dynamic user-focused organisations. Innovative IT projects giving many more users access to archive holdings are being developed by Essex Record Office, the Public Record Office, and the Scottish Record Office among others, while the Historical Manuscripts Commission has put its National Register of Archives onto the Internet, which helps users to locate material much more rapidly than was possible even a few years ago. Bedfordshire and Cheshire Record Offices have been awarded the Charter Mark and many major local record offices, such as Manchester City Archives, are located within library buildings which act as a social focus for the local community. Local record offices are the bedrock of the nation's archive provision and house a wide range of

vital records which are needed by the increasing number of people who are deeply interested in the history of their family or locality or are in pursuit of legal evidence.

Local archive services, funded by county, unitary, metropolitan and London borough councils, are the linchpin of England's archive network. After 1945, local record offices were established in most counties and cities very largely as a result of local initiative with only a modicum of encouragement from central government. The fact that the legislation which underpins the existence of local archive services is largely permissive rather than mandatory makes the achievement of a nationwide local network, with comparatively few geographical gaps, all the more remarkable.

In recent years the usually slender resource base of local archive services has been eroded by a combination of general cutbacks and local government reorganisation. This means that they now have actively to seek external sources of funding, on the basis of objectively assessed shortcomings in existing levels of provision. To support them in this, a comprehensive twenty-page questionnaire was sent by the Public Record Office, on behalf of the Mapping Project Board, to 123 local archive services in England during the summer of 1997, which all of them have completed in full. The unique information which the Mapping Project Board now has at its disposal may be regarded as a Domesday Book of local authority record offices throughout England and form the basis of this report. The completed questionnaires have been translated into four priority bands of funding need for each participating record office, on the basis of current levels of provision. These priority bands will be sent to head archivists, who may use them as a basis for planning and justifying future funding bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and other funding agencies.

The purpose of this Project is to identify the urgent and extensive range of funding needs of local archive services today and to form a provisional view as to their relative importance. The results which are set out below, together with the Mapping initiatives which are now underway in Scotland and Wales, are intended to encourage a wide ranging debate about priorities within the archives profession, in close consultation with public users. The outcome will be an agreed strategic plan, which supports at a practical level Government policy on giving wider public access to information and heritage collections and on promoting primary educational resources.

The main conclusion of the Mapping Project in England is that there are a large number of potential projects in need of funding stretching right across all the main areas of archival

provision which fit in very well with the increased emphasis on public benefit and access, which is the most important feature of the National Heritage Act 1997. Especially worthy of serious consideration are projects which exploit the increased opportunities afforded by information technology to make local archives more accessible to a much wider public and thus broaden the already substantial customer base of local archive services. If local archive services succeed in reaching this wider public through IT, then this will generate an increased demand for a full range of public facilities in record offices for the greater number of people who will wish to view archival treasures for themselves. For many local archive services a move to improved accommodation, both in terms of user facilities and records storage, would help them to preserve more records and to make them available to more users.

In their applications to HLF and other grant-awarding bodies, archival institutions will have to demonstrate how they are going to attract a much wider range of users. The aphorisms ‘most actual users of archives aren’t aware’ and ‘most potential users of archives don’t’ are an unfair characterisation of many services which already deliver a high quality public service, but they should prompt greater activity by archivists to make the wealth of material in their custody more widely known. **Archival institutions should not regard outreach as an optional extra but a core function which is central to the success of their operations.**

***SUMMARY OF
KEY FINDINGS***

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Public Access

- Poor location of building or other access difficulties, such as lack of public transport and car parking spaces can sometimes act as a major deterrent to public users; the needs of the disabled are still not catered for in some cases.
- 88% of local archives have significant needs for larger and better designed searchrooms, more microform readers and printers, on-line public access to electronic catalogues and to networked information about archives across the country, more preservation equipment to encourage careful handling of original material, and for better provision for the consultation of outsize and special media material.
- Searchroom security often leaves much to be desired: lack of CCTV and other security measures to safeguard unique and irreplaceable documents; low levels of staffing can make effective invigilation very difficult.
- Lack of exhibition and conference facilities are a serious disincentive to sustained outreach activity by local archivists.
- High quality front-line public services are often achieved only at the expense of cataloguing and other aspects of collection management.

Archive Buildings

- 11% of local archives are in buildings which completely fail to meet the relevant standards and a further 54% are in premises which fall far short of adequacy: these services may be dependent on sub-standard outstores; their main building may have inherent structural deficiencies which rule out further investment; or the accommodation may be full up, with no room for further expansion on site.
- For record offices in this category, the only way in which the service will achieve its full potential is a move to new accommodation, either purpose-built or a conversion, which takes full account of the growing demands of users as well as the need to preserve original documents.

Records Storage

- If a move to a new building is not an immediate prospect for local archives with poor provision, their medium-term needs may be met by packages including some of the following elements: improved environmental monitoring / control; enhanced protection against fire and flood; more effective security systems; appropriate shelving for archives; special storage for photographs and maps; greater provision for records stored on special media.

Catalogues / Finding Aids

- 52% of local archives have large cataloguing backlogs, resulting in a denial of public access to collections of local and national significance.
- A sustained programme stretching over several years should be launched so that these backlogs are reduced to manageable levels.
- Automation of cataloguing systems is a top priority because it can help to reduce these backlogs expeditiously and also to make summary information about the richness of local record office holdings known to a much wider public.

Information Technology

- 71% of local archives need a massive injection of additional investment in hardware and software packages which are compatible with each other so that local archives can make available their rich unique content in the emerging local and national information networks.
- In parallel with programmes to automate their finding aids, local archive services need to develop their own web sites so that they can answer the enquiries of an increasing number of remote users.
- Digitisation of the most popular records can offer significant benefits both to keen researchers and the wider public.

Preservation / Conservation

- 60% of local archives have conservation programmes which are seriously under-resourced.

- Conservation backlogs in many local archive services continue to build up, and some major collections urgently require conservation treatment in the near future.
- Serious progress in this area will not be achieved without an increase in the number of professionally qualified archive conservators.
- The skills of some archive conservators are not fully used because they lack modern equipment.
- Funds are needed to provide the acid-free archive boxes and other materials necessary for the implementation of preservation policies.

Electronic Records

- 98% of all local archives are at present ill equipped to deal with the selection and long-term preservation of the increasing amount of electronic records created by their authorities.
- Unless this situation is remedied, future generations will have fewer primary sources available to them than present-day researchers working with paper records and the result will be collective amnesia by the early years of the next century.

Training

- There is a growing need for training both to help local archivists meet the challenges posed by automated finding aids and electronic records and at the same time to pass on their custodial knowledge and skills to the next generation of archivists. Centres of excellence are needed to act as catalysts for training in the entire range of professional skills.

INTRODUCTION

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Background

In the last few years the archival community has become increasingly aware that it needs to adopt a much more coherent and objective approach to the determination of its overall funding priorities. In the summer of 1996 the starting point for such an approach was the emerging trend that, with only a few exceptions, archival institutions were not achieving notable success in obtaining grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). At that time the National Council on Archives (NCA), Public Record Office (PRO) and Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) all agreed that statements about funding priorities should no longer be supported by piecemeal evidence alone, but should henceforth be informed by a detailed knowledge of existing levels of provision in archival institutions. The concept of an archival 'map' (or structural survey) to chart these levels of provision was proposed, and rapidly gained widespread support in the archival community. This support continues, partly because the initial perception about the comparatively low level of HLF funding for archival institutions has not been modified by the pattern of HLF awards over the last eighteen months.

Although the conclusions of this Mapping Project will also be very relevant to government departments with archival responsibilities, its immediate purpose is to assist the Heritage Lottery Fund to take a strategic view of the needs of the archive sector when they consider particular applications from local archive services. This report may also make a contribution to the development of more precise standards within the archival profession in areas where they are needed. As the Keeper of Public Records has stated, 'these standards should not stifle innovation and excellence with dreary uniformity, but demonstrate the credibility of a highly professional archival community to those who may be willing to fund our programmes'.¹

The PRO and the HMC both took the view that the Mapping Project should focus, in the first instance, on local archive services throughout England and Wales. Some of these services have needed capital investment for many years and are now even less well placed to obtain capital funding as a result of local government reorganisation, which has reduced the resource base of their parent authorities. It is very doubtful whether, in spite of the clear guidance issued in 1995 by the

Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the Welsh Office to local councils preparing for reorganisation in England and Wales, archive services in reorganised areas have been maintained at the levels which existed before reorganisation.

Local government reorganisation has in some cases merely exacerbated the already existing problem of year on year revenue budget cuts, which have increased the backlog of long-term cataloguing and conservation projects in local archive services. Some of them have been further handicapped by a comparative lack of experience in making applications to grant-awarding bodies and the difficulties in obtaining partnership funding.

Local archive services in Wales, which have been run by the new unitary councils since April 1996, were the subject of the pilot Mapping Project, which was largely conducted by the HMC, with input from the PRO and the Welsh County Archivists' Group. The report on this pilot exercise was completed in the spring of 1997, and it was soon followed by a General Report from the HMC about local archive services in England. Both of these reports focus on four categories of provision: Accommodation, Preservation and Conservation, Finding Aids, and Information Technology. The Welsh pilot exercise in particular has provided invaluable lessons for this Mapping Project relating to local archive services in England.

Methodology

Apart from the HMC reports, this Mapping Project builds on a significant amount of other empirical work. The publication *Archive Services Statistics*, produced every year for local archive services in England and Wales by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), provides much important factual data about such subjects as the amount and quality of storage capacity, number of readers, documents produced and copied, as well as financial information. The CIPFA statistics give a clear impression of the operational scale of most county and some metropolitan record offices, both individually and collectively, but are not intended to indicate how far their current resources are capable of meeting actual or potential demand, either for public access or the storage of records.

¹ Sarah Tyacke, 'Mapping Archival Needs and the Way Forward', National Council on Archives seminar at the British Academy, 16 January 1997.

The admirably comprehensive Survey relating to *Local Authority Archive Services* (SOLAAS), first conducted in 1992, achieved the objective of giving a very complete picture of local archive services in the run-up to local government reorganisation. One of this Survey's more sombre conclusions was that 'the level of archive provision is uneven across the country. Certain repositories are centres of excellence ...[but] others have insufficient staff or finances to meet increasing demands on them'.² The 1996 update to the Survey warned that 'this unevenness has not diminished. There is a danger that it may further increase as new sources of funding almost invariably depend on matching sources for the parent body'.³ The SOLAAS surveys, with their detailed questionnaires and helpful descriptions of general strengths and weaknesses in each area of provision, have ensured that this Mapping Project is not surveying completely uncharted territory.

The Mapping Project now takes the surveying process a stage further, at least for those areas of provision which are eligible in principle for Lottery funding. It has been designed to achieve the following objectives: a more precise measurement of the unevenness of provision by giving each local archive service a priority band for each major area of activity; an overall assessment as to whether some areas of provision stand in greater need of funding than others; and an analysis of any regional variations from the national pattern. At the same time it has identified those record offices which are centres of excellence in one or more areas of provision and therefore merit support for innovative projects, which will serve as an example to others and help to raise general standards still higher. The scores have been awarded to local record offices primarily on the basis of a twenty-page self-assessment questionnaire, which all 123 local archive services in England were asked to complete in the summer of 1997.

As the questionnaire was drawn up shortly after the National Heritage Act 1997 became law, it was able to take fuller account of the wider powers accorded to the Trustees of the National Heritage Memorial Fund by the new legislation than had the Welsh pilot and the HMC's General Report for England. The provisions giving the Trustees the power to award grants for projects, which have the purpose 'of securing or improving access' to heritage collections and 'appear to them to be of public benefit' demanded the inclusion of a new section entirely devoted to Public Access. Since the

² Heather Forbes, *Local Authority Archive Services 1992*, British Library R&D Report 6090, p.31

³ Heather Forbes and Rosemary Dunhill, 'Survey of Local Authority Archive Services: 1996 update', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, Vol. 18, no.1, 1997, p. 53.

legislation allows the Trustees to fund projects which ‘provide education or training’,⁴ a short section on Staff Training and Education was also inserted. Finally, in the light of the increasing importance which electronic record systems (records kept on computer tape or disk) are likely to assume in local authorities within the next few years, the opportunity was taken to assess how far local archivists are ready to deal with the imminent challenge of selecting, preserving and making accessible electronic records. With the addition of these three new sections on Public Access, Staff Training and Electronic Records, the questionnaire had seven sections in total.

As the Mapping Project was launched in England, a Survey of Needs, covering university and other institutions in higher education throughout the United Kingdom, was being organised by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the various Higher Education Funding Bodies in the United Kingdom. The Mapping Project Manager was given a draft copy of this survey’s very well designed questionnaire,⁵ as a result of which this Project’s own questionnaire was modified. At the time of writing a Mapping Project in Scotland, jointly sponsored by the Scottish Record Office and the Society of Archivists, is well underway. Although, unlike its English counterpart, it covers national, private, specialist and university repositories as well as local archive services, the methodology used is in all key respects identical with that adopted for England.

The head archivists in all 123 record offices throughout England have returned fully completed questionnaires to the PRO Project Team, with the result that the Project Board now has at its disposal a Domesday Book of archival provision. This 100% response rate reflects the enormous interest shown by the archival community in this Project and should lend its conclusions additional authority with grant-awarding bodies, because it provides overwhelming evidence that a strategic approach to funding is recognised by local archivists as absolutely essential. The funding priority bands for each area of provision, which will be passed on to each head of service, were awarded on the basis of the questionnaire returns, supplemented by recent PRO and HMC inspection reports. Project Board members, from their personal knowledge, helped to identify some provisional bands which required adjustment and approved the final results. At the same time as the bands for each archive service were calculated and agreed, an attempt has been made to discern the spread of general funding needs and their relative importance right across the seven areas of provision covered

⁴ National Heritage Act 1997 S.1(1).

⁵ JISC Archives Sub-Committee, Survey of Needs, conducted by Willpower Information.

by the questionnaire. The following sections of this report set out these needs in detail and suggest the types of project which could meet them most effectively.

***FACILITIES FOR
PUBLIC ACCESS***

FACILITIES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS

As one of the main purposes of the 1997 National Heritage Act is to ensure that HLF grants awarded by the National Heritage Memorial Fund Trustees produce demonstrable public benefits, it is entirely appropriate that this review of provision in local archive services should begin with those areas which the public experience most directly. The section of the new legislation, which specifically allows the Trustees to give financial assistance towards exhibitions and archives, requires that the Trustees 'shall bear in mind the desirability of public access to the archive'.⁶ The HLF's increased emphasis on public access coincides with the continuation of the steady growth in reader visits to local record offices which has been apparent over the past two decades or more. The updated SOLAAS survey includes evidence that there has been a 21% increase in reader visits to participating local record offices between 1992 and 1996;⁷ while the most recently published CIPFA statistics indicate that in the year 1995-1996 over 463,000 visits were made to local record offices in England and Wales, in the course of which over two million original documents or microforms were made available to users.⁸

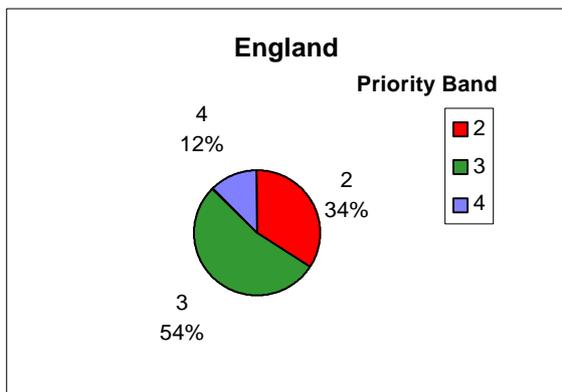
As a large section of the Mapping Project questionnaire asks about the facilities and services provided for public users, it is now possible to make some general statements about how well local archive services as a whole are coping with this already substantial readership. One of the challenges which local record offices face is the very diverse nature of that readership. Some come to the record office with considerable background knowledge and research experience, while the greatest asset of some new users is their neophyte enthusiasm. Many users of local record offices will wish to consult original documents for lengthy periods and a proportion of them will focus their research either on maps and other outsize material or on audio-visual records; for others consultation of microform copies will suffice. The view that records research is not the preserve of a small elite received emphatic confirmation from market research carried out in 1994 among the readership of the PRO itself, which revealed that 45% of its readers were unwaged (students, retired and unemployed); that 65% were amateurs; and that 49% were studying family history. A recent forum on 'quality in archival public services' held in the PRO concluded that there is a need for more precise research on the nature of users of archival institutions, and a pilot survey will be conducted

⁶ National Heritage Act 1997 S.1(2)

⁷ Forbes and Dunhill, 'Survey of Local Authority Archive Services: 1996 update', p.38.

⁸ CIPFA Statistical Information Service, Archive Services Statistics 1996-97 Estimates

by volunteering repositories later this year.⁹ It would not be surprising if the proportions of amateurs, of unwaged and of family historians are found to be even higher in the case of local record offices, which do not, by and large, attract such a large academic readership. Local record offices already attract a broadly based clientele from many walks of life who share a common interest in local and family history.



The fact that not a single local archive service has scored a priority band one (very poor provision) indicates the importance which head archivists attach to the front line public service in the midst of competing priorities. However, it is rather disquieting that 34% of local archives have poor provision for public users. At present, only 12% are able to make good provision.

63% of local archives report that their reader numbers are increasing, while only 7% report a decrease. Only 45% were able to state with confidence that potential readers are never turned away. It is no exaggeration to say that some public searchrooms are almost bursting at the seams as archivists make valiant attempts to cope with existing demand. With few exceptions, the interest in family history research shows little sign of abating, to which has been added the impetus given to documentary research in the teaching of history and geography by the National Curriculum. The comment from one London borough archivist that there is 'currently heavy pressure due to National Curriculum and Family History people' will doubtless strike a chord in the shires as well as in metropolitan areas. Some county archivists readily acknowledge that they currently offer inferior access facilities which must deter some public users; one summed up the severe limitations of the searchroom thus: 'spaces [are] very constricted; use of maps [is] exceedingly difficult. Room becomes very hot and stuffy and feels very crowded. Document security and preservation [are] very

⁹ Proceedings of the Public Services Quality Group, PRO, Kew, 26 November 1997.

difficult'. The problem is doubtless exacerbated by the fact that one of the senior archivists has his workstation in an already cramped searchroom, a phenomenon which is still far from uncommon. In one northern service the searchroom doubles as a workroom and office for staff.

It is perhaps not surprising that record offices which still have to make do with traditional county hall accommodation find themselves in this predicament, but the forthright observations of another county archivist, indicating that even purpose-built accommodation completed in the 1980s can also have severe shortcomings, is altogether more disturbing. In the public searchroom queues for seats form on average once a day: 'We turn many people away. This is very bad PR. There is a frequently a 2 week waiting list if not longer.' Once admitted, users have to work in conditions which are 'very noisy, very cramped, stuffy [and] smelly'. One county record office in the Midlands, built in the 1970s, has seating for 40 readers, but the layout of the searchroom and atmospheric conditions are below average, while the searchroom in another Midland county, part of a generally successful conversion carried out in the late 1980s, has too few seats, with queues forming once a day, and also gets far too hot in summer. In addition to these general problems, there are still particular access difficulties for disabled users in some local record offices; one county archivist working in new premises candidly admitted that searchroom facilities for wheelchair users could still be improved.

It is clear that many public searchrooms cannot cope with any increase in demand. In some cases where there is no possibility of obtaining extra public space in the existing building and this is coupled with an acute shortage of records storage, then a move to new and expanded accommodation is undeniably the only way forward. However, in other instances local archivists may be able to negotiate additional accommodation in the same building or to make better use of existing space by improving the layout of searchrooms. By demonstrating to senior officers that they will not squander any suitable public space which is offered to them, local archivists may strengthen their hand for expanded accommodation in an existing building, if a move to new premises is out of the question in the short term. **The carefully planned refurbishment of some searchrooms, involving significant design changes, coupled with the purchase of new searchroom equipment, could result in swift improvements to study facilities for users.** Although it is for the parent authority to take the initiative in providing enough long-term space and

periodic refurbishments for its archive service, an additional injection of resources from grant-awarding bodies would accelerate these healthy developments.

The refurbishment of searchrooms raises many important issues, not least the varying requirements of users of original documents and microforms. The former benefit from plenty of natural light (which should be filtered to exclude ultra-violet rays), while microfilm users often work best in a more artificial environment. Many local archivists keep pace with existing demand only by operating appointments or bookings systems, the latter an increasingly essential expedient for the rationing of microform readers. One county archivist reported that 'demand for microfilm places is higher than for original documents', a situation which is now almost the norm in county record offices, where many of the most popular records have been microfilmed to protect the original documents. The problems involved in striking the right balance between film and fiche users, and in providing enough reader printers, should not be underestimated. Many local archive services are already very actively engaged in extending the microfilming programmes of their own holdings and in receiving microform copies of material relating to their locality held by other institutions. **Grants for modern and user-friendly microfilm and microfiche readers, with an increased proportion of reader printers, would help to ease what is clearly an acute pressure point in many public searchrooms.**

Searchroom design also needs to address the requirements of document and staff security. In 28% of local archives the overall security provisions are considered by the head archivist to be either poor or fairly poor. In one northern service the limited security in the public area is to some extent redeemed by controlled access to the building. A large number of local archive services admit to poor security in their public searchrooms; one hard-pressed local archivist in the Black Country confessed that staff are not always available to monitor the document consultation area. In cases where the local archive service is part of, or situated next to, a local studies or general reference library, it is very difficult to enforce the particular rules which apply to the consultation of unique and vulnerable archival material. Apart from careful redesign of searchrooms to allow better sightlines for the invigilation and the provision of adequate staffing levels, there are plenty of measures which can be taken to improve security. The provision of lockers for readers' bags outside the consultation area, the installation of Close Circuit Television (CCTV), observation mirrors to remedy any blind spots from the searchroom supervisor's desk, document weighing machines to help staff check that every item is safely returned, panic buttons at the staff desk in

areas with a high crime rate: these and other measures can all form part of a coherent security strategy which can significantly increase protection for the documents in less than ideal conditions.

28% of local archive services also lack basic preservation equipment (document rests and weights, etc.) to help the public handle archival material carefully. The damage caused by careless (and, very occasionally, malevolent) handling when original documents are made available in the public searchroom can be almost as important a threat to their survival as the wrong storage environment. Maps and other outsize documents are in a particularly high risk category, since lack of space to spread this material out may make it difficult to handle without causing some damage. **Improved document security and preservation equipment in public searchrooms would assist the preservation of the nation's documentary heritage and would enable archivists to make original materials available to the public with much greater confidence in cases where there is no microform copy.**

In addition, however sensible document security arrangements in each individual record office may be, there is also a need for a co-ordinated network to track down the determined document thief. The County Archive Reader Network (CARN) run by the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) is a very useful step in the right direction, but this network could usefully be enhanced and its coverage extended to more local record offices, with a database of archive users maintained at some central point. A standardised reader registration system would spare readers the inconvenience of acquainting themselves with the particular registration requirements of every local record office which they visited.

In order to run a full public service, local archive services need to have more than a spacious and well designed public searchroom at their disposal. The absence of space for exhibitions, and of a lecture theatre or conference room for visiting parties can perceptibly diminish the quality of the public service. Many local archive services are honest that their public facilities are very primitive indeed, if not completely non-existent. **If HLF were to give grants for the provision of such public facilities, local record offices would have increased opportunities to educate a much wider public in the interpretation of a crucial part of their documentary heritage. Where a record office already has access to a space for exhibitions, HLF support for the purchase of suitable exhibition display cases and the production of professional displays would also be**

significant steps in making archival treasures known to a wider public and, in particular, the communities of which local archives form a part.

The perceived inadequacy of their searchrooms and other public facilities makes many local archive services hesitant to adopt an ambitious outreach strategy; only six had a written outreach policy statement at the time of the second SOLAAS survey in 1996.¹⁰ Grants for cataloguing and other time-consuming projects may release the time of an experienced member of staff to carry out some outreach work, but **specific HLF grants related to marketing local archive services among potential rather than actual users would also be beneficial.** This is an area where a local archive service might usefully form partnerships with others in the same region and pool resources, which could then be supplemented by HLF support.

The need for improved physical facilities for the public in local record offices should not be underestimated. Even in cases where a local archive service has been given some new accommodation relatively recently, exhibition areas and public lecture rooms are often among the first casualties, along with staff accommodation, when space is at a premium. The head of a flagship metropolitan service describes the public facilities in its expanded premises as generally good, but acknowledges that larger public areas for refreshment and lectures would bring benefits. Many services which are in older, adapted accommodation are in a much worse plight. The archivist in one London borough notes that its 'searchroom is too small for the range of potential users and specialist equipment' and that it lacks a conference room and even a public telephone. In another London service 'the principal deficiency is lack of space for staff and readers', and the inevitable consequence is that little outreach work is undertaken. The existing readership is asked to complete survey forms occasionally, but the severe space restrictions mean that the service does not want to encourage any more readers to attend. More generally, many local archivists would echo the sentiment expressed by one city archivist that 'the existing accommodation would require a lot of investment [to be brought up to standard]...A different site perhaps shared with a similar service...would be more appropriate. Funding from outside is essential'.

¹⁰ Forbes and Dunhill, 'SOLAAS : 1996 update', p.49.

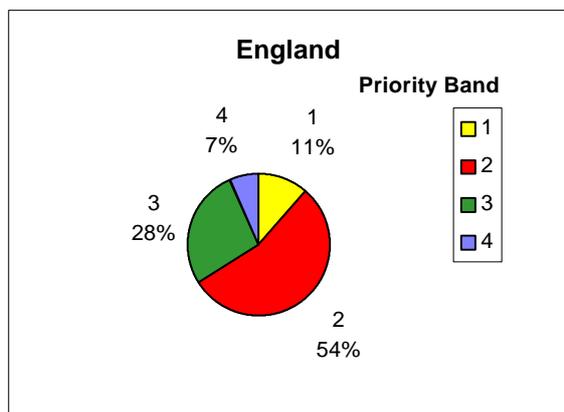
ARCHIVE BUILDINGS

ARCHIVE BUILDINGS

Support for the construction of new archive buildings in cases of proven need would bring about significant access benefits to the public. A major cause for concern is the large amount of precious archival material kept in sub-standard and often inaccessible out-stores, which have no facilities for public consultation of the records kept there. Only 50% of local archives are able to consolidate their holdings in one building. The practical effect is that either the public is denied access to this material altogether or that special labour-intensive and time-consuming arrangements have to be made to make the records available for consultation in the main building. Proximity of out-stores to the main building is no guarantee that access to the records will be easy; access to the building where the out-store is located may be comparatively straightforward, but not to the records store itself in that building. Out-stores inconveniently distant from the main record office are also a major impediment to access. The problems confronting the record office which has 24% of its holdings located in an out-store ten miles away from the main building are already quite serious, but they are not on the same scale as those of the county record office which has 75% of its holdings in a remote out-store. One London borough stores 84% of its holdings at an out-store, where access to both site and building is a complicated process. **The practical restrictions on access, to which all out-stored material is subject, can sometimes assume immense proportions, especially in services where staffing levels are already insufficient to cope with the core professional tasks.** Many record offices can arrange productions from out-stores only if users place orders for them well in advance.

The need for record offices to have such frequent recourse to out-stores is to be deprecated on preservation as well as access grounds. Main buildings sometimes fail to attain the relevant storage standards in one important respect or more, but in out-stores it is often true that even the most basic precautions are entirely lacking right across the board. One county archivist operating a service with two branches inherited an out-store quite distant from both which carries a high risk of flood, damp and vandalism and a fairly high risk of subsidence and explosions. Not surprisingly, she notes that she is 'very unhappy to store records here'. In view of the fact that accommodation in both branches is absolutely full and there is no immediate prospect of any alternative, her further comment that conditions are 'embarrassingly poor and call my professionalism into question' is unnecessarily self-critical. There is at least some consolation in the fact that this out-store holds only

15% of the main record office's holdings. Elsewhere, the out-store which holds 75% of all a county record office's holdings is situated on a flood plain next to an incinerator, with a flimsy structure, asbestos roof, and an oil-fired heater in the middle of the records storage area. It is little wonder that one county archivist in the Thames region has stated that 'the outstore is one of the biggest headaches of the service', while a London borough archivist comments with feeling that the term 'outstore' 'dignifies the very poor conditions' in the additional storage available to him - 'records are housed here simply as a matter of convenience'. Transportation of the documents from the out-store to the main building can also constitute a significant risk. **Dependence on sub-standard out-stores is one telling indicator of those cases where the record office's top priority should be a move to improved accommodation at the earliest opportunity. The longer the delay, the greater the risk to the survival of material kept in these out-stores.**



This shows that 11% of local archives are in accommodation which is woefully deficient, and that an additional 54% are in buildings which fail to meet some of the most crucial standards.

There are also many instances where a local record office's main building has serious shortcomings. Sometimes the site of the building is not one which should be chosen for a local record office keen to develop its links with the local community. One large metropolitan record office suffers from poor car parking and public transport, with crime and vandalism representing significant threats. However, the structure of the record office, that of a converted warehouse, has proved to be adequate for archival storage. In other cases conversions of premises, which were originally designed with very different purposes in mind, have either never been very successful or are now showing their severe limitations. The location of one London borough service, based in a sixteenth century listed building with wooden beams which lies next to a river, poses a significant risk to its

irreplaceable holdings. Listed building status prevents the installation of modern security systems and security provisions are, therefore, ‘very minimal and unsatisfactory’. The headquarters of one county record office is in a former army barracks, described as a ‘vintage building not built for [the] present purpose’. Here none of the records are stored in conditions which meet the relevant standards and the costs of altering and refurbishing the building would be prohibitive. **In cases where the main building has so many drawbacks, in terms of site and structure, then it would be sensible to seek new premises elsewhere. In the long-term this would prove to be a more cost effective use of HLF awards than investment in premises which are fundamentally unsuited for the storage of records. It is a matter of grave concern that the parent authorities of some archive services in this position are likely to be unable to raise the 25% partnership funding which is necessary for major capital building projects.** As one Black Country archivist states, ‘we desperately need accommodation’ but there is ‘a lack of financial resources to match lottery funding’.

Even where a local archive service is not housed in a building with major structural deficiencies and is not dependent on sub-standard outstores, there may be powerful arguments in favour of a move to larger premises, rather than improvements to existing accommodation. Where a record office has little extra storage space in its existing building and there is no scope for an additional storage block on site, then any other measures to upgrade current storage provision may be regarded as a short-term palliatives rather than the long-term solution. 61% of local archivists consider themselves either badly or very badly off for accrual space to take in more records. 25% of local repositories are full up now, and another 54% will be in the same position within the next five years.

Local government reorganisation (LGR) has significantly added to the pressures on storage space in county record offices, because new unitary structures may prompt an influx of records from abolished councils. In one county where reorganisation is imminent, it is predicted that ‘LGR may mean [that the] building fills entirely’. In another reorganised county a major transfer of records from a neighbouring unitary area would reduce the amount of accrual space from five years to two in the county record office, where ‘there is not enough space to undertake a proactive collecting policy’. The lack of accrual space poses acute difficulties for one very decentralised service, where in one branch ‘the office has been full for some considerable time’ and in another the ‘need for extra space has existed for at least ten years’. It is easy to under-estimate how quickly new buildings can fill up with new accessions of records not previously in local authority custody. One metropolitan

archivist, who moved to new premises as recently as 1994, notes that her main problem is 'persuading the powers that be that [more] storage will be needed. Their perception is that we have a new building so there is no problem'. If a record office has no accrual space and no prospect of acquiring any in its present accommodation, then the obvious solution is expansion elsewhere. **Where a record office's development is severely handicapped by sub-standard outstores, a structurally deficient main building, or a desperate shortage of accrual space, it would be entirely appropriate that the HLF should give sympathetic consideration to funding capital projects which, by removing these handicaps, would enable local archive services in a well appointed new building to concentrate on improving their direct and remote services to the public.**

RECORDS STORAGE

RECORDS STORAGE

Many local record offices are based in premises with less fundamental but more specific shortcomings, which also need to be addressed. 38% of local archivists report that their entire holdings are kept in conditions which fail to meet the main British Standard. There is considerable scope for the upgrading of archive accommodation which is currently satisfactory in some but not all respects.

Protection Against Water Damage

One mildly surprising and very worrying conclusion of this Project is the very high proportion of records at risk through water damage of various kinds: leaking roofs, poor drainage, service pipes running through record storage areas, and basement storage. 32% of head archivists consider that the risk of water damage to their holdings is either high or fairly high. It is reported that the roof of the building housing one record office in the south west is 'dismally bad', with 'holes you could put your fist through', a problem which occurs elsewhere in the same region. At least 50% of the material in buildings occupied by two London services are at risk from leaking pipes, and the situation in one home counties record office, where rainwater has penetrated into the strongrooms, appears to be almost as alarming. The head archivist in one northern record office estimates that 50% of the records in county hall are at risk from leaking pipes and 30% from roof leaks. However, one London record office, which has a high percentage of its material in basement and sub-basement storage, has combated the threat of flood with highly sophisticated water detection systems linked to a central monitoring unit. **Those record offices where the holdings are at some risk from water damage would undoubtedly benefit from early warning detection systems, which would be entirely appropriate for a small grant application to HLF, in cases where more radical and expensive solutions are ruled out through a lack of partnership funding.**

Protection Against Fire

Nearly all local record offices now take basic precautions against fire, but in some cases the risk remains worryingly high. In 18% of main buildings fire protection is considered to be either poor or fairly poor. In one county record office only 60% of the records are covered by fire alarms, most of the wiring is not flame retardant and there is no isolating switch for the electrical supply to the

strongrooms. In one south-east county some of the internal support columns in the record office are made of timber. The rapid spread of fire is a risk not confined to wooden structures alone; the archive service in one major city has counteracted the threat of fire spreading through the building's 1930s steel structure by installing an inert gas suppression system covering 100% of the records stored there. The situation in out-stores is much less satisfactory than in main buildings; in the out-store holding 15% of the entire holdings of one flourishing northern record office, there is no provision for protection against fire. Although most local archivists have done all that they can to ensure that their holdings are protected against fire within the constraints imposed by their accommodation, the serious fire which broke out in Norwich Central Library as recently as August 1994 is a salutary reminder that there is no room for complacency in this area. Even where the basic precautions of hand-held extinguishers and smoke alarms are already in place, more advanced systems, such as the Very Early Smoke Detection Alarms (VESDA) installed in the PRO's new building, are also to be highly recommended for local archive services. **The installation of more sophisticated fire detection systems, either in main buildings or in out-stores which will be used for the foreseeable future, and the provision of reliable extinction systems, whether water or inert gas, are projects which are worthy of HLF support because they will help to preserve the large segment of the nation's documentary heritage kept in local archive services for future generations.**

Environmental Monitoring and Control

The British Standard relating to archival storage states that 'unsuitable environments have damaged documents more extensively than any other single factor'. It therefore recommends 'careful control and observation of temperature, humidity and ventilation' in record storage areas. It is evident from the Mapping Project returns that many local archive services are struggling to implement this crucial recommendation; in 42% of cases, control over the environment is either poor or fairly poor. One county record office, still based in county hall in the late 1990s, has to make do with '1939 vintage strongrooms: too small and cramped, inadequate climatic controls'. In another, control of the environment is described as 'a constant battle' with 'a number of strongrooms experiencing enormous [temperature] fluctuations'. More alarming still is the situation in a third county repository, where the absence of effective environmental controls has the unwelcome consequence that 'temperature and relative humidity can vary from BS 5454 by up to 50% in hot summers and

dry winters'. Storage environment is no less important an issue in metropolitan areas, where there is an additional need to combat the effects of atmospheric pollution.

It is absolutely crucial that local archive services maintain their collections in a storage environment, where the British Standard recommendations are adhered to and where fluctuations of temperature and relative humidity are minimised. Because documents can deteriorate very rapidly in the wrong conditions, environmental monitors and controls need to be installed in existing premises - this is an essential part of repository management which cannot be deferred until such time as the service manages to secure new accommodation. The first need is for archivists to have accurate information about the environment in their storage areas so that problems can be identified and appropriate corrective action can be taken if necessary. Permanent environmental recorders fixed at strategic points throughout all the storage areas are greatly preferable to readings from portable thermohygrographs carried around by a member of staff, which indicate temperature and relative humidity only at one given point in time. Once there is clear evidence of a problem, then there are some comparatively low-cost solutions which will bring about some stability. If the temperature in the storage area is too high in the summer months, then a cooling unit would bring some relief; if the relative humidity levels are too high or too low, portable (de)humidifiers would help to cancel them out; if the air taken in from outside the building is polluted to a high degree, then air filtration equipment would help to rectify this. **A package of environmental monitoring and control equipment may help to bring storage conditions in a record office, which are currently fail to meet the national standard, up to a quite acceptable level, at least for the short to medium term.**

Shelving

As well as a closely controlled storage environment, strongrooms are required to be equipped with shelving which is suitable for the storage of archive boxes and bound volumes. Some archive services located within a library building may have to make do with shelving originally intended for library books. One northern service is based in a building where 'all the storage is for library purposes. None of it was designed with an archive in mind'. In the main outstore the shelving is so unsuitable that boxes are stacked on the floor; as the head archivist observes, 'purpose built mobile shelving would solve all shelving problems'. An archive service in a major city stores its records in 'modified library stacks with inadequate environmental controls'. Clearly, some local record offices

have the wrong sort of shelving, but for others the problem is lack of funding towards the installation of shelving in vacant areas. One large local archive service currently has only one year's accrual space left; this could be increased to twenty years if staff were available to weed records and if shelving were provided for an empty storage area. It is estimated that one west country record office has between six and ten years' accrual space, but the storage area has yet to be fitted with shelving. In addition, many local record offices lack appropriate special shelving for maps and other outside material; the unfortunate result is that this material can be damaged both when it is stored and also when it is produced for public consultation. **There is a clear need in many local archive services for customised archival shelving, to hold both standard and outside material, and applications to the HLF to meet this need would be deserving of support.**

The question of provision for the storage of records held on special media (gramophone records, sound cassette tapes, cine and video films, etc.) is altogether more complex. The Mapping Project returns indicate that many local record offices do not collect special media material and do not, therefore, need to make any provision for their storage. Instead they refer potential donors and depositors to the existing special media repositories for their region, such as the North West Film Archive in Manchester and the Wessex Film and Sound Archive based in Hampshire Record Office, Winchester. However, in other regions there is no obvious special media repository and local archive services have no option but to store special media records alongside paper and parchment material. 19% of local archives store sound recordings in poor or fairly poor conditions, and 21% have to do likewise with audio-visual material. This is an issue which is highlighted in the document *An Archives Policy for the United Kingdom*, sponsored by the National Council on Archives, which recommends that 'steps should be taken to complete, maintain and develop the network of regional film and sound archives'.¹¹ **Applications for HLF support from local record offices intending to establish designated storage areas for special media records are to be welcomed if they help to fill a gap in regional coverage.**

It may be confidently anticipated that all local record offices will continue to collect photographic material of various kinds. Nearly all record offices store their photographic material in the same storage areas as paper and parchment material. However, photographic prints should ideally be kept in a storage environment with both lower relative humidity (30-50%) and lower temperatures (45-

¹¹ *An Archives Policy for the United Kingdom: Statement of Principles and Policy Objectives*, National Council on Archives, 1996.

55 F, 8-15 C). High temperatures, especially if they are combined with high relative humidities, can cause distortion of the paper base of photographic prints, mould growth and swelling of the emulsion surface. If the atmosphere is too dry, both the paper and the emulsion layer can become brittle.¹² **If a local archive service can demonstrate convincingly that it has rich photographic holdings, then there is a strong case for a separate photographic store funded with HLF support. This should be supplemented by a programme of photographic repair and packing. Proposals for a photographic store and conservation programme would dovetail neatly with innovative projects to digitise the images, thus removing the need to produce at least some of the most popular original photographs, which are especially vulnerable to incorrect handling. Combined programmes of this sort would deliver immediate public access and long-term preservation benefits.**

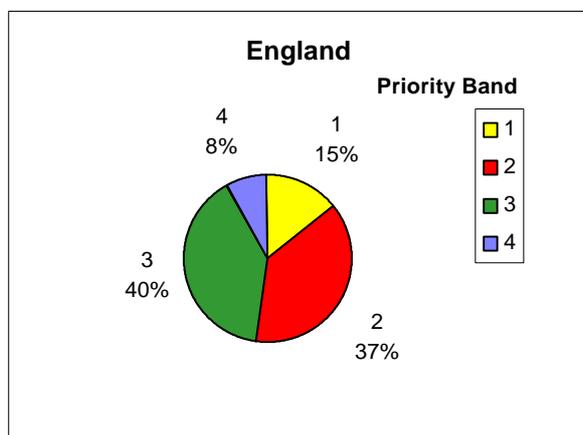
¹² 'An Introduction to 19th and Early 20th Century Photographic Processes' and 'Photographic Conservation in the PRO', both PRO pamphlets.

***CATALOGUES /
FINDING AIDS***

CATALOGUES / FINDING AIDS

One particularly unfortunate way in which reader demand is in effect suppressed at the present time is that a significant number of archive collections are either inadequately catalogued or are languishing in strongrooms completely unlisted. As the HMC's General Report for England pointed out last year, record offices are bearing the costs of storing unlisted collections without any public access benefits; this is why the PRO, in its guidance to places of deposit for public records, notes that a failure to provide finding aids for public records comes close to an infringement of the Public Records Acts.

There is abundant evidence that some record offices have been forced to scale down, if not completely abandon, work on finding aids in favour of allocating scarce staff resources to the front-line public services. Long opening hours to the public can hold back this work if staffing levels are not generous because 'nearly all staff time is concentrated on immediate day to day tasks. Longer term, behind the scenes work has suffered in consequence...'. The return from a county archive service in the south west notes that 'indexing ceased in 1979 when public demand increased but staff didn't'.



Over 50% of local archives have serious shortcomings in their cataloguing programmes, and there is good coverage of the holdings in only 8%.

Pressure on the front line public services is clearly having an adverse impact on cataloguing and other aspects of collection management in a wide cross-section of local archive services. In one

London borough archive service 45% of the material is completely uncatalogued, while in another 85% of the records do not even have a box list, and in a third 'all archives are uncatalogued'. In another metropolitan area the leading local record office has 57% of its material completely unlisted and none of the catalogued material has been indexed. This problem is clearly not confined to metropolitan services alone; the head of one branch in a county archive service observes that 'long term under-staffing and increasing public demand have prevented progress with cataloguing for many years', while his counterpart in another branch reckons that only 25% of material is fully catalogued there. Cataloguing is a much more time-consuming activity in archives compared with libraries, because many archive collections require physical sorting and arrangement as a necessary preliminary to the detailed listing of hundreds or even thousands of individual items which bring out their full evidential value. Archival cataloguing is not bibliographic description but instead involves analysis of the content of collections. It is true for many collections that, if they are listed only in summary fashion, most users will not be able to exploit them to the full.

How should record offices begin to tackle these daunting cataloguing backlogs? One sensible approach is to provide collection-level descriptions of all the records in the custody of the archive service in the form of a general guide. It makes little sense for record offices to adopt a much more proactive 'marketing' of their records if they lack basic information about the wealth of material in their custody. It appears that 59% of local archives have never compiled a general guide and that many of the remainder rely on one which is out of date and possibly out of print as well. Some archive services provide a continuous flow of information about new accessions for their readers in the form of regularly produced lists, which are sometimes published in the archive service's annual report; this has been true of one county record office in the Midlands since 1920. Another county archivist in the south west notes that the utility of annual accessions lists would be maximised if they were incorporated into a cumulative database. Since her service lacks the resources to set up a database of this kind, 'we rely too much on the memory of the older archivists.'

A general guide to all of a record office's holdings can be created and developed in stages, especially if it is produced with the aid of IT. The end product can be now made accessible to local and national IT networks through the Internet, as well as being published in conventional form. It is undoubtedly true that some record offices would benefit from a cataloguing survey of their holdings but such surveys, although very worthwhile in terms of the efficient administration of the record office, lack an immediate delivery of wider public benefit. If, however, the compilation of

collection-level descriptions, in accordance with the various standards now being adopted by professional archivists,¹³ were made the central feature of a cataloguing survey, then the benefits to the public would be much more obvious because its awareness of the collections would be markedly raised. **Projects to produce a comprehensive and up-to-date general guide, particularly if it is intended to disseminate all the information both conventionally and electronically, should produce significant public benefits worthy of HLF support.** The compilation of general guides might well be regarded as a publication of archival material and a ‘comprehensive work of reference’, both of which are cited by the new legislation as types of project which are eligible for HLF support.

Some of the collections in the published guides may not be available to the public because they are not yet sufficiently listed. Only 18% of local archives have 80% or more of their material fully listed, and 39% have less than 50% of the records fully listed. Enquiries about unlisted collections described in the guide will help archivists to become more aware of the relative demand for access to each of them and they should be able to make their cataloguing programmes more responsive to this demand in the future. It is worth mentioning that a few metropolitan record offices are already making plans to put the latest version of their guide onto the Internet; the service in one London borough has already mounted a short guide to its holdings on the Internet rather than provide a conventional hard copy. However, the service in the south east which has already put a collection level catalogue onto the Internet is very much the exception to the general rule.

In some record offices it is still proving possible to list most of the smaller collections soon after they have been accessioned, but only at the expense of neglecting general backlogs or large and complex collections, which are often potentially of considerable interest to users. Archivists need to invest considerable time researching the historical background to a large collection and acquiring an intellectual grasp of its scope before cataloguing can begin, and such investment is rarely possible in the face of incessant pressures from the front-line public service. According to one busy record office in the Midlands, ‘little time can be spared for [cataloguing] large collections’, while another head of service further to the north is convinced that ‘we badly need to list the major business collections, and produce some sort of up-to-date guide to cover the last 20 years.’ **The clear**

¹³ The main standards are ISAD(G): International General Standard of Archival Description and ISAAR (CPF): International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families, both by the

implication is that cataloguing of large and complex collections is unlikely to take place without external funding, and there would be clear public benefits if such collections were made fully accessible. The HLF may wish to consider funding cataloguing projects in local archive services not on an *ad hoc* basis, but as part of a programme stretching over several years. Access in the university sector has been given a considerable fillip from non formula (Follett) funding for the cataloguing of major collections; it is clear that the local authority sector, which has considerable potential to reach a much wider non-academic public, would benefit immensely from a similar programme. Some record offices, which do not have one or two outstanding collections sorely in need of cataloguing, may well have a significant backlog of medium-sized and smaller collections instead; the access benefits of compiling up-to-date catalogues for these collections will also be considerable. If an archive service's catalogues are connected by means of a network to information about related material held in other institutions, this will increase their value to users still further.

One attraction of a sustained cataloguing programme stretching over several years is that it could embrace a wide range of local record offices in different regions of the country and would also fit in well with the recent observation of the outgoing NHMF Chairman that 'in deciding how to allocate grants, the Heritage Lottery Fund has consistently made it clear that it will work to a three to five year horizon'.¹⁴ If it were feasible to launch a five year plan to begin diminishing the backlog of uncatalogued material in local archive services, this would greatly increase the public's access to key local collections, often of wider regional and national significance, which will otherwise continue to be vastly under-exploited. The objective should be to reduce to manageable proportions the massive backlog which has built up because of chronic under-investment over several generations. If, on completion of such a sustained programme, local archive services are staffed adequately and information technology is applied sensibly, then archivists will be better placed to catalogue new collections soon after they receive them, and there is a chance that a such large nationwide backlog will not accumulate again. At present many local archive collections, which could play a central part in schools education and lifelong learning programmes, are inaccessible; it is a matter of grave concern that such important resources are in effect locked away from users.

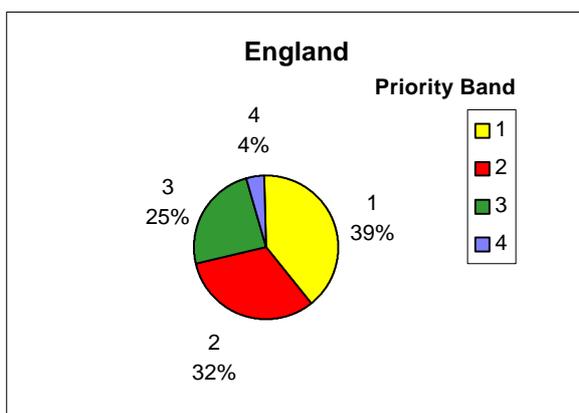
International Council on Archives; also, the National Name Authority Files (NNAF) by the National Council on Archives.

¹⁴ Annual Report and Accounts of the HLF 1996-97, p. 6.

***INFORMATION
TECHNOLOGY***

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The new legislation allows the NHMF Trustees to award grants, which fulfil the purpose ‘of encouraging the study and understanding of [heritage collections] and the compilation and dissemination of information about them’.¹⁵ Projects, which aim to make a much wider range of public users aware of the richness of local record office holdings through the use of information technology, clearly come under this heading. Many local archivists have had considerable enthusiasm for such projects for some years, but the reason why local archive services have not, in general, made more headway in the exploitation of IT has been pithily summed up by one Midlands county archivist: ‘IT development essential, but resources very scarce’. Although 38% of local archive services have still to develop their own IT strategies, most are excited by the potential which IT offers for reaching a much wider public and those who make no use of IT at all and have no Internet presence or plans for one are now in an ever decreasing minority. The general IT strategies of the parent authorities can be a great help, as in the case of one London borough where the benefits of co-ordination should make the archive service ‘one of the most IT advanced UK record offices’. However, the general strategy can also be a major constraint, as instanced by the candid observation of one county archivist that ‘the parent body’s IT priorities have not assisted development of IT in the record office’.



71% of local archives desperately need additional resources to play a full part in the information revolution. It is worth noting that, with the exception of electronic records, information technology has the highest number of local archives (39%) in top priority band one and the lowest number (4%) in band four, denoting good provision

One obvious way in which information technology has had an impact on archives is the production of automated rather than manual catalogues and indexes. Most local archive services are now at least planning to produce automated catalogues, and several have already made significant progress in this area. Some are now producing fully automated catalogues for their new accessions, while their older collections are still catalogued manually. Concerning the latter, one city archivist has stated that 'it is difficult to regard these collections as actually catalogued since access is abysmal'; the contrast with the brisk efficiency of the automated system is very striking. The funding requirement of changing to an automated cataloguing system should not be under-estimated; many would echo the comment of one head archivist that 'greatest input of resources [is] needed in IT for cataloguing and other access to collections'. **The funding of projects for the retrospective conversion of manually produced catalogues and indexes and for new cataloguing work in an automated format would produce many benefits for searchroom and remote users. Both groups would be able to adopt more sophisticated search strategies, identifying much more rapidly material likely be of interest to them, and the possibility that relevant material might be overlooked would markedly diminish.** Funds for this purpose would also ensure that the awkward transitional phase from manual to automated systems should be as short as possible. If complete automation is not quickly achieved, then public users will have to master two systems and the complexity of searching will be increased rather than diminished.

If local archive services are to harness the benefits of IT for their users, they need to be provided with a sufficient number of staff and public access terminals which are relatively up to date. Public access terminals which allowed users to interrogate the record office's own automated catalogues but were also connected to the Internet would allow users to search for information about collections held in other institutions. Equally crucial is the provision of software packages which meet the distinctive requirements of archives and their users. Clearly, some record offices cannot afford to invest in one of these packages without external funding. They may be forced to accept either a package designed to meet the different operational requirements of other information professionals or an even less appropriate package generally used by the parent authority; these constraints will prevent them from delivering the full benefits of automation to current and potential users, or applying data standards, or participating in a co-operative national networking project.

¹⁵ National Heritage Act 1997 S.1(1).

The plethora of archival software packages which local archive services have already bought raises another concern. Are these packages sufficiently compatible with one another to make the development of a national archive network a realistic possibility? This question is especially pertinent in view of the work currently being undertaken by the National Council on Archives (NCA) on the establishment of such a network. The NCA's Networking Policy Committee has the remit of drawing up a model for a network structure, to propose how this structure might be managed, and to consider funding issues. Its forthcoming report 'Archives On-Line' will set out the NCA's view of how a National Archives Network can best be achieved and will outline the practical steps which need to be taken to set this Network up.

Although many respondents believe the main thrust of archival automation should be in the areas of cataloguing and indexing, some archive services are also moving forward in other areas. Analysis of the Mapping Project returns suggests that about 25% of local archive services are either already experimenting with scanning and digitising equipment or plan to investigate the possibilities in this area in the near future. Not surprisingly, many of them are especially keen to digitise their photographic and map collections. The representation of over fifty archival institutions at a recent PRO conference on collaborative projects testifies to the high level of interest in joint microfilming and digitisation projects. Many record offices are very keen to develop their microfilming programmes as a first step towards digitisation of the filmed images later on. There is considerable scope for partnership microfilming projects of archive material relating to the same popular topics but held in different archival institutions whose holdings complement each other. Collaborative projects of this kind have much to recommend them from the preservation point of view, because they eliminate wear and tear on original documents which would otherwise have to be frequently produced for public consultation or which are too fragile to be produced at all, resulting in a denial of access. **The advantages for users in being able to conduct much of their research by consulting digitised images via the Internet or microfilm copies of material in the record office nearest to them are incontestable and should make well managed projects of this kind worthy of HLF support.**

The general finding of the Mapping Project is that, unless local archive services receive injections of external funding, they will be unable to play their full part in information networks. There is a clear danger that if local record offices do not have their own Internet presence, information about them

may be put onto other web sites over which they have little or no control. The Government's recent consultation paper on the National Grid for Learning observes that 'National and local museums, galleries, broadcasters and other content providers will have an important part to play. We intend that libraries, with their vast stores of information and accessibility to the public, will be an integral part of the Grid'.¹⁶ Local archive services, with their vast array of unique and irreplaceable documentary sources, should also aim to be connected to the Grid at the earliest opportunity. The report *New Library: the People's Network*, launched in October 1997 by the Library and Information Commission, observes that 'renewed by technology investment, libraries will become very different places. They will retain their spaces for books, study, exhibitions and events, but they will gain new learning spaces - interactive spaces - new uses and new users'. There is every reason to believe that the information revolution could have an equally dramatic impact on local archive services if sufficient investment were forthcoming. Local archives are treasure houses of information about localities, which cannot be found anywhere else, and information technology promises to provide a far larger number of people with the key to unlock these treasure houses. 'The unique tradition of storing archives, records, maps, photographs and film', which the Report attributes to local libraries, has in fact been largely fostered by the nationwide network of local archive services which has developed since 1945. Most of the 'unique local collections' which have rich content for the proposed People's Network are in fact to be found in local archive services, most of which are not part of a library structure.¹⁷ **If the HLF were to increase its funding of user-friendly IT projects which facilitated the participation of local archive services in information networks, this would make a strategic contribution to the development of the information society as well as deliver immediate benefits to public users, especially those interested in finding out about their local communities.**

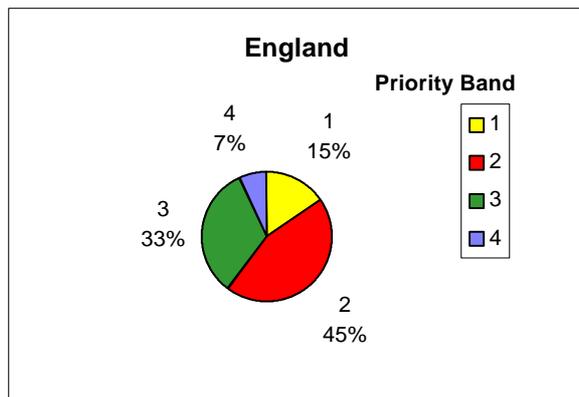
¹⁶ Connecting the Learning Society, 7 October 1997 (<http://www.open.gov.uk/dfce/grid/link.htm>)

¹⁷ *New Library: the People's Network: Introduction; Community History and Identity* (1.36-1.40) (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/lic/newlibrary>).

***CONSERVATION
AND
PRESERVATION***

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

The National Heritage Act 1997 reaffirms that the NHMF Trustees may award grants for projects which have the purpose of ‘securing the preservation or enhancement’ of cultural assets.¹⁸ The general finding of the Mapping Project in the areas of conservation and preservation is that most local archive services need an injection of additional resources which their parent authorities are unlikely to be able to provide for the foreseeable future. This conclusion is supported by the research recently carried out by John Feather and Paul Eden into preservation policies in archival institutions of all kinds throughout the United Kingdom. All archivists interviewed in the course of their research ‘considered the sheer scale of the conservation difficulties faced by most UK archives - often a legacy of past neglect - to be a major professional issue’.¹⁹



The conservation programmes in at least 60% of local archives fall significantly short of current needs, and only 7% have good provision.

The Mapping Project returns show that 45% of local archive services have no in-house conservation facilities and 14% do not even have a conservation budget. One city archivist recorded on his return that ‘the lack of adequate conservation resources is the office’s biggest weakness’, while a metropolitan service in the north west is in the alarming position of having no conservation facilities and no budget to have conservation work done externally. The inadequate resources currently devoted to conservation in relation to potential demand is reflected in inferior workshop facilities but more frequently in a shortage of professionally qualified archive conservators.

¹⁸ National Heritage Act 1997 S.1(1).

¹⁹ John Feather and Paul Eden, *National Preservation Policy: Policies and Practices in Archives and Record Offices*, British Library Research and Innovation Centre Report 43, 1997.

It is striking that at least fifteen county archivists recorded that their in-house conservation facilities were more or less satisfactory but that they were not fully used because of a lack of conservation staff, and that 37% of local authority archives as a whole have insufficient conservation staff. This point was vividly brought home by the head archivist in a southern city who noted that the in-house conservation facilities had good accommodation but that, since the service had only one conservator, 'no one can take over even simple jobs' in his absence. One county archivist in the north-west reported that, with three conservators and one technical assistant, his conservation unit was relatively large. The fact that a modest staff complement of four in a major county record office can be regarded in such positive terms indicates that this is an area where the human resources have rarely, if ever, matched the scale of the task. Many local archive services have, therefore, been unable to carry out a full conservation survey of their collections in recent years. The estimates of documents unfit for production and in need of repair which have been supplied to the Mapping Project may in some cases be little more than intelligent guesses. For many local archive services the first step might be to find out the full extent of their conservation problem. A full conservation survey would probably be best carried out by the qualified archive conservator *in situ* who is most acquainted with the collections. **It is possible that the National Preservation Office may be able to supply national guidelines for the conduct of conservation surveys and also partial funding for record offices to employ a temporary conservator, so that the backlogs of regular work did not continue to mount while the surveys were being carried out. If such a national scheme got off the ground, it would be reasonable to look to HLF as one of the sources of support.**

Even with the caveat that the current information about conservation backlogs is not as precise as it might be, there is plenty of evidence that in some local archive services these backlogs have assumed daunting proportions. These backlogs continue to increase in 67% of local archive services, and are decreasing in less than 10%. One county archivist in the south-west has estimated that 30% of the archives in his care are in need of repair; they include documents damaged during the Blitz which have languished untreated for over half a century. It appears that conservation backlogs may be an especially pressing problem in some metropolitan areas. The clear implication is that users are currently being denied access to some collections on conservation grounds. If nothing is done and the condition of those collections in need of repair continues to deteriorate, then the number of collections which are completely inaccessible is bound to increase. **After a comprehensive**

conservation survey has been completed, the next stage might be to repair those collections in most urgent need of treatment and for which there will be an obvious public demand. It may be possible to tackle the most needy cases as a direct follow-up to a comprehensive survey. A priority conservation programme to make as many collections as possible fit for public production in a given period of time would be appropriate for HLF support. Grants for this purpose would enable local archive services to recruit additional conservation help on short-term contracts.

Although conservation surveys should be the indispensable basis on which priority programmes are constructed in local archive services, they should not be regarded as the *sine qua non* for all archive conservation applications to HLF. There are large collections of incontestable importance in local record offices which are in obvious need of conservation treatment. It would be quite unnecessarily bureaucratic to insist that a general conservation survey of the record office's holdings as a whole must precede any application to HLF to conserve a particular collection. **Applications to conserve major collections which deliver demonstrable benefits to current and future public users certainly fall well within the HLF's remit. The three criteria of assessment might be as follows: the seriousness of the conservation problem and the appropriateness of the proposed remedy; the importance of the collection; and, in the absence of HLF support, the likelihood of the collection remaining untreated and inaccessible to several generations of potential users.**

In overall terms, the perceived need for improved conservation facilities emerges as the clear second priority after the deployment of additional qualified staff: 14% of local archive services noted that they are suffering a shortage of suitable equipment. In one northern metropolitan area a combination of poor facilities and budget cutbacks means that the backlog is increasing. The in-house conservation facilities in one city service require more modern equipment, while 'lack of working space is a major problem' for the conservation unit in another. The news, that the conservation facilities for one county record office still based in county hall premises are insufficient, is only to be expected, but the need to provide modern conservation equipment in a purpose-built county record office building completed less than ten years ago is more surprising, and illustrates the general point that archive services in relatively new buildings may well have significant needs in other areas. **Applications for conservation equipment which would be used by qualified staff**

to tackle already identified problems would help to safeguard the nation's documentary heritage and might, therefore, prove to be attractive to HLF. A local record office with basically good conservation facilities might apply for a grant to purchase the latest equipment because it has been designated a regional or national centre of excellence.

A crucial element in preservation policy is the use of microform surrogates or substitutes to prevent wear and tear on original documents which would otherwise be frequently consulted. Only 6% of local archive services have no such programme whatsoever. Although some county record offices are already managing to fund very vigorous microfilming programmes, it is also quite common for programmes launched with enthusiasm to fail to maintain their impetus for a variety of reasons: in one county record office the completion of the programme has been delayed by a lack of funding, and one metropolitan library-based service has to compete for access to a microfilming unit shared with other departments. Microfilm is a tried and tested medium for preservation and access purposes. For counties covering a large geographical area microform service points will greatly improve access to key collections in towns some distance away from the local record office. Their use on a wide scale has been pioneered by Devon Record Office, which runs seven service points in addition to the three record repositories.

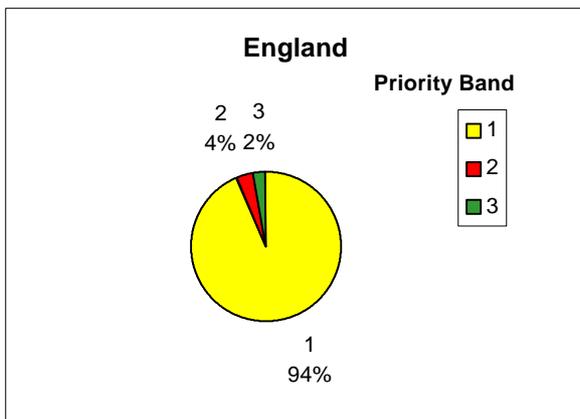
The recent study into preservation policy commissioned by the British Library highlighted that, 'although preservation management plays a central role in the everyday work of archives', only 16% of respondents to that survey had a written preservation policy. Preservation policies and practices should be framed with a view to minimising the need for conservation treatment, 'the last and most expensive resort'.²⁰ **HLF may wish to satisfy itself that an archival institution has adequate storage facilities and a sensible written preservation policy before it awards a conservation grant as a guarantee that the newly conserved material will not be allowed to deteriorate again.** Many local record offices are acutely aware of the importance of good preservation practices but some lack the resources even to implement basic packaging and boxing programmes. **Small grant applications for archival boxes and packaging material would help to alleviate or even prevent future conservation problems.**

²⁰ Eden and Feather, *National Preservation Policy*, pp.13, 53-54.

***ELECTRONIC
RECORDS***

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

Issues connected with electronic records are currently receiving much attention at European Union level. In December 1996 the European Commission organised a forum on this subject in Brussels which attracted over 300 participants. The forum noted that 'the constant and at times chaotic growth of technologies...and the absence of relevant standards all constitute a danger to the integrity of information and its use'. The forum worked out a ten-point programme 'in order to avoid the paradox of a loss of archival material in an age such as ours'. The most important points in this programme focus on the establishment of functional requirements of electronic records management in the public and private sectors and the development of training programmes for archivists and administrators relating to the handling of electronic records.²¹



It is very worrying that 98% of local archives have yet to make any significant provision for electronic records. There is, as yet, no local record office where provision is good. One of most disturbing findings of the Mapping Project is that very little of the intense European Union activity has so far made an appreciable impact on local archive services in England. Some county record offices regard the issue as not serious because they do not hold electronic records at the present time; in others, electronic records are considered to be an exclusively records management matter until the archival issues are large enough to warrant attention. There are, however, unmistakable indications that some authorities are already investing in electronic record systems without any consultation with their archive service. In one metropolitan borough 50% of the authority's records will be held electronically by the year 2000, and in a major city the local authority already stores

financial records on optical disk - in both cases no arrangements for long-term electronic storage have yet been made. One northern county council has no electronic strategies as yet, and a wide variety of material on different formats is to be found around the county. A county archivist in the home counties tells a similar story - his authority has 'no overall strategy' for electronic records, with the result that 'information is being held on literally dozens of platforms'. A few county record offices have accessioned electronic records without as yet making any special provision for their storage, while a city record office in the south-east anticipates that it will have to store the electronic records being created by its parent authority in conditions which do not meet the relevant standard. The county record office, where training on electronic records issues is already given and special storage is to be prepared in the near future, is clearly carrying out pioneering work within the local authority sector. If no long-term measures to preserve electronic records are taken, then they will deteriorate very rapidly and unique information will be irrevocably lost. **The establishment of storage facilities for a local authority's own electronic records should be funded by the authority itself. However, as an increasing number of outside organisations seek to deposit their electronic archives with their local archive service, so the case for HLF support towards the setting up of special storage for electronic records becomes correspondingly stronger. This is another area where a regional approach might be cost-effective: one local archive service in a given region might take the lead in storing electronic records and in ensuring that, in spite of rapid technological change, they can be made publicly available. Projects to make electronic records accessible for public users are especially worthy of support.**

²¹ *Proceedings of the DLM Forum, 1997; INSAR (European Archives News), no.3, summer 1997.*

***STAFF
TRAINING***

STAFF TRAINING

The Mapping Project questionnaire included a short section on training because the National Heritage Act 1997 stated that projects which ‘provide education or training’ are eligible for HLF support.²² The returns to the Mapping Project strongly indicate that many chief archivists consider the existing framework to be largely sufficient for the training of their staff. This is no doubt a reflection of the active training programmes organised by the Training Officer of the Society of Archivists and by the Society’s Regional Groups. There will be a need to make quite sure that traditional custodial skills and knowledge of the records are passed on to the following generations when experienced archivists retire. It is quite possible that, as users are increasingly able to obtain basic information about the holdings of the record office remotely, they will have more time to ask public service archivists penetrating questions about sources and particular documents when they make a personal visit. One unexpected consequence of archival automation may be that local archivists’ detailed knowledge of the records in their care will be tested more rather than less frequently.

Despite the generally positive response to this section of the Mapping Project questionnaire, there is some reason to suppose that local archivists require more training in the areas of archival automation and electronic records. Electronic records throw up a whole host of new challenges for the local archivist: appraisal, selection and accessioning of electronic material; its storage in special conditions; regular refreshment of electronic records held within existing systems and their migration to new systems as older ones become obsolete; and making the records accessible for the users of the future. **HLF support for archival training programmes in these two areas would be timely, once the move towards a national archives network is a little further advanced and it becomes even clearer that much more information will be recorded on electronic media in the near future.**

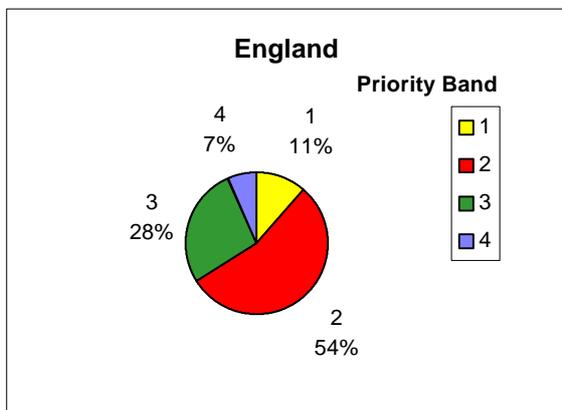
²² National Heritage Act 1997 S.1(1).

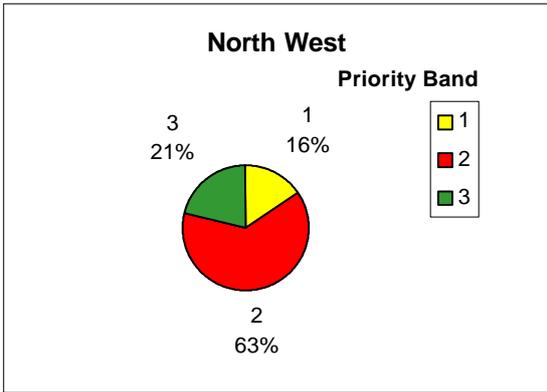
***REGIONAL
VARIATIONS AND
FRAMEWORKS***

REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS

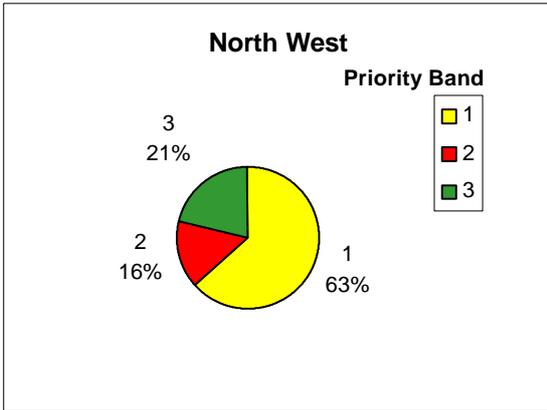
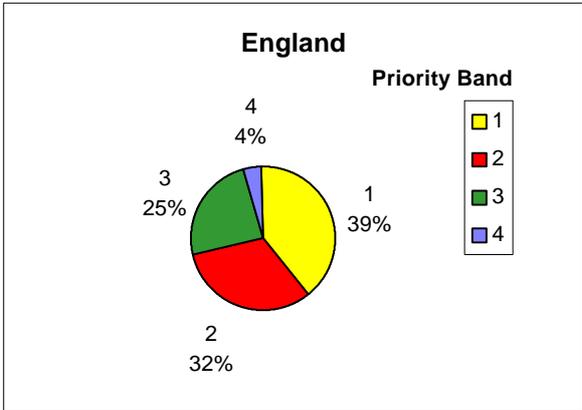
It has not been possible to conduct more than a preliminary analysis of regional variations from national averages before the publication of this report. Part of the initial difficulty lay in the varying boundaries of English regions which are employed by different organisations, but those adopted by the Society of Archivists seemed the most appropriate for the present purpose. It needs to be kept in mind that there are likely to be significant fluctuations within the larger regions covering twenty repositories or more. Also, more information about the situation in some London boroughs, where there is no recognised archive service or professional archivist in post, is currently being sought to supplement the data about other London services gathered late last year. **It must be emphasised that the examples of regional variations highlighted below are merely intended to illustrate the in-depth analysis which the Mapping Project methodology has made possible for the first time. Clearly, this is an area where further work still needs to be carried out.**

The first indications are that some of the main pockets of archival deprivation in England are to be found in the metropolitan areas of the north-west and the west midlands. The former region contains the two conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside.



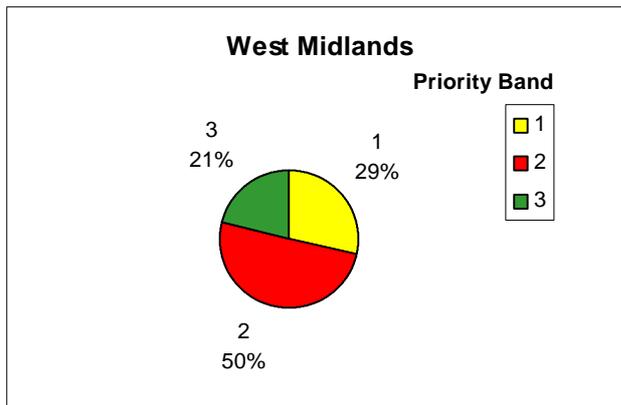
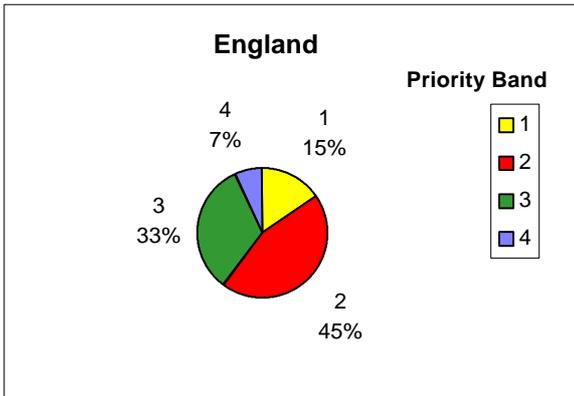


These charts indicate that, while the national average for poor or very poor accommodation is 65%, this figure rises to 79% in the north-west. The figures for Greater Manchester and Merseyside are 80% and 75% respectively.

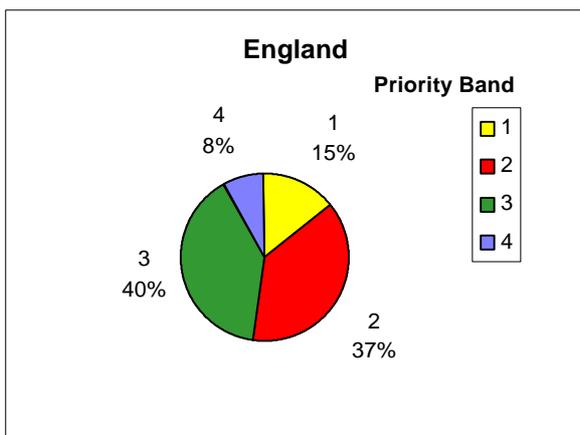


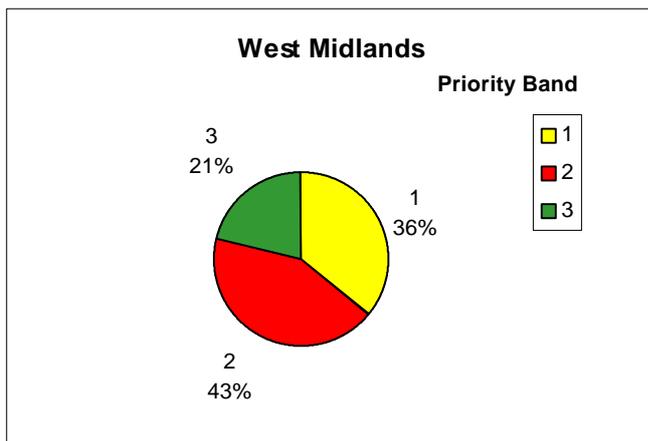
These charts indicate that, while the national average for very poor IT provision is 39%, this figure rises to 63% in the north-west. The figures for Greater Manchester and Merseyside are 80% and 50% respectively.

Returns from the west midlands also show significant departures from the national norms.



These charts indicate that, while the national average for very poor or poor conservation provision is 60%, the figure rises to 79% in the west midlands. For metropolitan boroughs there the figure is an even higher 83% (33% in priority band one compared with the national average of 15%).





These charts show that, while the national average for very poor or poor cataloguing provision is 52%, this figure rises to 79% in the west midlands. For metropolitan boroughs there the figure once again is 83% (66% in priority band one compared with national average of 15%).

The constructive responses to these and other instances of regional deprivation which may emerge after further investigation might best be formulated at a regional level. Here it is important not to be too prescriptive as the regions of England are far from homogeneous and a wide variety of agreements or consortia among archival institutions in the same region are possible. However, the preceding sections of this report have identified some areas - such as outreach, conservation, the storage of special media and electronic records, and IT networks - which may be conducive to a regional approach. To give a purely hypothetical example, one archive service might become the region's main repository for special media or electronic records, another might act as a regional centre of excellence for the conservation of paper and parchment material, and a third might take the lead in digitisation or automation projects. This could represent a highly effective concentration of scarce resources. Regional agreements could be developed through the existing structure of the Society of Archivists. **If a local archive service submits a bid for funding to HLF on the basis of a clear understanding with its neighbours that it should be the lead record office for the region in a given area of provision, this might give the HLF an additional incentive to look favourably on an application of this kind. The setting up of centres of excellence to eradicate serious deprivation within regions may be regarded as a bold and imaginative solution attractive to grant-awarding bodies.**

***CONCLUSION:
TOWARDS A
NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR
ARCHIVES?***

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Part of the purpose of the Archival Mapping Project is to provide a springboard for the activity of the Archive Lottery Adviser under the aegis of the National Council on Archives (NCA). Her remit is to assist local archive services and other archival institutions to submit well focused applications to HLF. Even if this approach succeeds in increasing the flow of grants from HLF to local archive services, it is important to be clear that it will at best be only a partial solution to the problems confronting them.

Local archive services need both legislative protection and structural stability. The importance of these issues has been taken on board by the UK Inter-Departmental Archives Committee, which is chaired by the Keeper of Public Records and brings together the heads of national archival institutions and officials from other government departments with responsibility for archives. The Committee has recently asked the Association of Chief Archivists in Local Government (ACALG) and the Local Government Association (LGA) to define 'proper arrangements'²³ for records in local authority custody in a 'best practice' guidance circular, which should give local archive services as much protection as is possible under existing legislation. However, the Mapping Project has uncovered more evidence of the prolonged instability which some local record offices have suffered as a direct result of local government reorganisation. The head archivist in one service refers to 'possible plans for [a] new office [which] were overtaken by reorganisation' and the 'ongoing uncertainties' which have prevented the elaboration of a long-term strategy by his authority. This is confirmed by the county archivist in a county where new unitary councils were set up last year - 'local government reorganisation has blighted all service planning for [the] last two years and no end [is] in sight'. The head archivist in a branch office predicts that 'Local government reorganisation in April 1998 will almost certainly prompt a decline in resources and service provision'. The need to provide local archive services with a durable structural framework is an issue for all government departments in the archival field. Without such a stable framework, it is unlikely that any attempt to develop a national strategy for archives will succeed.

One of the main effects of local government reorganisation, together with the cutbacks in grants from government to local authorities, has been to reduce staffing levels in local archive services. As

²³ Local Government Act 1972 S.224

the public service, cataloguing and conservation functions of an archive service are all highly labour intensive, these reductions have sometimes been very damaging. As the remit of the HLF does not directly extend to the provision of extra staff for core professional duties, this issue was not given its own section in the Mapping Project questionnaire. However, the comments of many chief archivists leave no doubt that the inadequacy of current staffing levels is a fundamental problem which has to be solved if local archive services are to flourish. In one local studies library with an archive collection it is admitted that ‘we desperately need the services of a professional archivist’, while in one London borough the archive ‘is entirely operated by one member of staff [currently a non-archivist] with a heavy workload’. Some county archivists drew attention to low staffing levels. In one county ‘there will always be a limit to what we can offer with 3.5 staff’, while in another ‘even core functions are being eroded by staff reductions and increasing demands’. The allocation of resources to local archive services so that they can employ sufficient staff to meet these demands is primarily a matter for local authorities themselves and indirectly for Government as well. **Well focused applications from local archive services, where staffing and service levels have been largely maintained in spite of the vicissitudes of local government reorganisation, should be especially welcome.**

In this context of increasingly tight budgetary constraints, it is of crucial importance that all archival institutions plan to use their existing resources as efficiently as possible. There are encouraging signs that the Mapping Project questionnaire may have accelerated the existing trend for local archivists to take service planning much more seriously; one respondent thought that ‘this survey has been helpful in focusing our attention on key issues and hopefully may lead to some improvement eventually’. However, these expectations may be dashed in the face of the current HLF requirement that projects costing over £100,000 must secure at least 25% partnership funding. If this requirement remains in place, it represents a major stumbling block which many of those local archive services, identified by the Mapping Project as being in greatest need, will have to find imaginative ways of circumventing. For the metropolitan archive service which has only £12K for matching funding and yet needs massive investment across the entire range of provision, progress under current arrangements is clearly going to be a very gradual process. Against this background, **local archive services may wish to consider pooling resources and expertise in collaborative projects or regional consortia as a way of progressing HLF bids which would otherwise be still-born.**

The Mapping Project provides useful confirmation that those services in sub-standard cramped accommodation are in effect prevented from giving their users full access to the collections. This is the inevitable consequences of decades of under-investment. **The clear message is that, for a significant minority of record offices, the poor standard of accommodation is so fundamental an issue that only limited progress will be possible in other areas until it is resolved. HLF is asked to bear in mind that new archival accommodation, which takes full account of the wide ranging needs of an increasing number of users, can deliver long-term public benefits.** However, it will be a very long haul to redress the chronic under-investment in archive buildings in some parts of the country and it would be unrealistic to expect any single funding agency to do this single-handedly. The Mapping Project returns also suggest that comparatively modest projects would enable many existing buildings to meet more of the relevant standards. **The existing accommodation in many local archive services could be significantly upgraded by a package of relatively small capital projects.**

One lesson for the archival world in the HLF's new legislation, with its continual emphasis on public benefit and access, is that it needs to move away from the mindset whereby 'use, and related communications tend to come last in archival thinking. If we are to engage in the process of reinventing archives, we need to move it from last to rank with the first'.²⁴ Intelligent applications of information technology can make the simplistic dichotomy between preservation and access largely irrelevant. Conservation projects to repair documents hitherto unfit for production will make them more accessible; substitute microfilming and digitisation programmes will remove the need to produce original documents and will spare many users the trouble of travelling to the record office where the original is kept. Integrated programmes for the care of, and access to, special categories of documents, such as maps and photographs, should be attractive to HLF and will benefit many users.

It is in the broad area of information technology that local archive services will desperately need resources in the near future if they are to play an important role in the developing information networks commensurate with the wealth of content in their unique collections. **For many local archive services, the immediate challenge of preparing for full-scale automation as soon as**

²⁴ Ian Wilson, 'Strategies for Communication', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol.16, No.1, 1995, p.68.

possible is now at least as important as any long-term campaign for improved accommodation. There is an awareness that if local archive services do not automate their finding aids and digitise at least some of most popular records, then they will play a marginal role in the information revolution and be frozen out by the dynamic players in other information sectors. In one London borough the ‘particular need [is] for additional resources to enable the service to automate’; the fact that nearly 39% of all local archive services are in the highest priority band for IT provides irrefutable evidence that this perspective is very widely shared. Information technology may also assist the survival of branch record offices and counteract pressures to fragment the archive service as a result of local government reorganisation. The head of one branch office looks forward to the development of electronic and other links between the branch and the main record office, while the county archivist in an area affected by reorganisation predicts that ‘one of the likely outcomes of LGR is increased demand for local access to information. Any response to this demand will be heavily dependent on IT’.

The immediate challenge for local archive services is to use their results from the Mapping Project as the starting point for the submission of cogent and imaginative applications to HLF, with the help and support of the NCA Archive Lottery Adviser. The next phase of the Mapping Project is to hold consultations, both within the archives profession and with user representatives, about the most important priorities and opportunities for development in the near future. Together with the data from the other surveys in Scotland and Wales which are currently in progress, the Mapping Project provides the foundations on which the archive community will be able to build an overall strategic plan, with clearly identified priorities, for implementation over the next few years. Such a plan constructed on a thematic basis would neatly fit in with an emphasis on similar themes by the grant-awarding bodies.

It must be emphasised that HLF funding is not a panacea for the profound structural problems confronting local archive services. However if, in response to a carefully planned UK-wide strategy for archives, HLF is bold enough to provide funding for local archive services on a larger scale than before, it will be helping to promote access to a greatly undervalued part of this nation’s heritage right across the country for a wide cross-section of its citizens.