CHARITY ARCHIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

COMPILED BY MATTHEW MCMURRAY,
ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE ARCHIVIST

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Together for older people

ii

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

FOREWORD

The Royal Voluntary Service is fortunate to have one of the most important archive collections in the UK. It is an unrivalled social document of volunteering in British society during the 20th century and has UNESCO UK Memory of the World Status, counting as its equal's documents including the Death Warrant of Charles I and the Domesday book.

However, as a charity, whose primary purpose is the care of older people in the community through volunteering, it has been difficult for the charity to justify spending as much on the care and development of its collection as it would like. In fact, the collection was very close to being destroyed in the late 1990s and languished in a warehouse for many years, unused and certainly unloved. A situation which the Royal Voluntary Service have thankfully managed to turn around.

As I have learnt to my dismay over the past seven years, the predicament I was faced with when I first arrived and the challenges that I still come across in developing our collection are endemic across the charity archives sector. Anyone involved with charity archives can reel off anecdotes of the disasters, near misses and small triumphs they have avoided or achieved. While there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of the state of the sector, coherent quantitative and qualitative data was almost impossible to find.

The Royal Voluntary Service has always been a proud innovator, ever since our foundation in 1938, willing to take a lead, try out new ideas and share our knowledge with others. The idea of *Service Beyond Self* was the cornerstone of our founder Lady Reading's philosophy.

This independent report, which I wrote in my own time fully supported by the Royal Voluntary Service, is one way in which we are hoping to give back to the charity archives community from which I have received so much help and support over the last few years.

I believe that the best and most effective solutions to problems come from within ourselves and if the Royal Voluntary Service can, with others, help lead the sector in facing and overcoming its challenges that is a role we will gladly accept.

I don't claim that this report portrays the definitive picture on the charity archives sector, but it does give a snapshot of a broad range of charities which hold archives in England and the issues they face.

The Royal Voluntary Service's hope is that it will act as a foundation, a start, from which others with more resources can take a fuller look at charity archives, taking their turn in helping to care for a priceless part of our cultural heritage.

Matthew McMurray BA(Hons), MA, MLitt (pending)
Royal Voluntary Service Archivist

ABSTRACT

Charity archives are under threat. Since the mid 1990s efforts have been made by a number of groups, organisations and institutions to elucidate the problem and to attempt to offer solutions, but all of these schemes have enjoyed little success in changing the situation. While previous work has tried to quantify the number of charity archives, or has provided opinion on the challenges the sector faces, there has not been a concerted effort to combine the two. It has not until now been possible to provide or bring together the diverse and detailed information, both quantitative and qualitative which might help provide *evidence of need* and support any successful campaign for change.

This survey gathers together quantitative data on the scale and nature of charity collections, the conditions and standards under which they are kept, the resources they have available, levels of access and how they are funded. In addition it was designed to complement this with opinion on the state of charity archives, perceptions around access and the challenges faced by individual collections and the charity archives sector as a whole. This was achieved by not only talking to those who cared directly for charity archives (from a wide spectrum of charitable organisations) but to those who owned them, those who wanted to access them, third party institutions which collected them and an independent archive professional.

The study reveals that most charity archives are operated on shoestring budgets, with in-house archival provision almost impossible for most with incomes under £10 million. They are most often cared for by volunteers or non-qualified members of staff whose lack of skills place collections at risk. Poor understanding by senior management about their organisation's histories, their archives and the value they hold for their organisations is exacerbating this problem; a situation driven by high staff turnover and modern managerial styles. Ultimately, finding funding for these collections is key to opening up access. However, the lack of resources and the public sector focus of bodies such as The National Archives are increasing and not reducing the gulf between the haves and the have not's. Third party deposit, long hailed as the solution to the problems of charity sector archives, would appear to actually reduce access and the diversity of users and may soon not be an option at all.

Without a critical mass of money and a significant change in the ethos in many modern charities, supported by national umbrella organisations, it will be impossible for the current situation to change. This study, while necessarily limited in its scale, provides new, insightful and convincing evidence and arguments around the challenges faced by charity archives.

February 2014

CONTENTS

LIST OF CHARTS AND TABLES

TABLES

CHARTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

X

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

INTRODUCTION

Charitable and voluntary organisations have formed a significant part of the fabric of this nation for well over two hundred years; many are household names.[1] Their stories and the causes, ideas and services they pioneered, and continue to deliver, have moulded and informed the society in which we live in today. They have fundamentally changed opinion, particularly over the past 150 years, and could be said to form the conscience of the nation.[2] A perfect counterbalance to the quadrumvirate completed by Government, business and religion.

The records created by these charities in the course of their work have, either through design or accident, formed into archives, which tell this rich story through first-hand, often personal, accounts of the hardship of everyday life and recount both triumph and disaster. Whether that be the fascinating details of help given to individual elderly people living in squalor in the 1940s and 50s by the Women's Voluntary Service, or the harrowing tales of abandoned children helped by the Children's Society in the late 19th century.[3] They hold the collective memory of this vitally important part of our history, a history which is perhaps more at risk of being lost than any other. The forces which have driven charities to be so successful, ruthless innovation and a single minded focus on the future, also threaten to diminish their own story.

> *British history can't be written without looking at the voluntary sector.[4] [They] have been at the forefront of articulating new concerns, interests, values of citizens in ways that begin to question the assumptions we have about modern society.[5]*
>
> *Our archive is the heart of our organisation, the soul, if you like, it's our memory … its value to the organisation and to the rest of society is enormous. While a lot of public records record facts and figures our archive is full of wonderful stories about individuals and communities, it's something you don't find anywhere else than in charity archives.[6]*

The records and archives of charities are private collections. Unlike public records which are protected by law, beyond their limited obligations under the Charities, Companies, Data Protection and other Acts, they have no obligation to keep records or to allow access to them.[7] This, coupled

---

[1] For example, Barnardo's, the British Red Cross, The Royal British Legion and the RNLI.

[2] One of the most powerful examples is the change in the care of children in the late 19th century brought about by Dr Barnardo who, seeing the plight of orphaned children in London, caused a fundamental change in the way they were both perceived and helped, driven by conscience.

[3] See the Children's Society's Hidden Lives Revealed website for some of these stories. http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk (viewed 08/11/2013).

[4] Interview.

[5] Interview.

[6] Interview.

[7] See the Public Records Act and the Local Government Act.

with the ever tighter scrutiny of charities, and the pressure on trustees to deliver their charitable purpose in the most efficient manner, has led to many of these records being lost, forgotten or discarded by the organisations which created them.

This is by no means a new phenomenon, nor one confined to the charity sector, but has perhaps become more noticeable over the last 20 years with the ever growing popularity of history and historical research, especially from family historians.[8] Fuelled by an ever-presence in print and broadcast media this popularity has driven greater demand for original records and access to them, and been followed by increasing openness from public sector archives. Organisations such as The National Archives (TNA) and local council record offices have changed beyond recognition in the past 40 years, offering free and friendly access to material which has perhaps created a climate of expectation and an increase in enquiries which private collections are in many cases unable or unwilling to meet.

The case for maintaining an archive for non-heritage charities[9] is potentially a difficult balance between the needs and demands of researchers and the ability and desire of charities to grant access to their collections. Despite all the anecdotal evidence, there is very little published work on the scope and nature of archives held by charities, the services they provide and the challenges they face. There is even less on how these organisations can meet these challenges and help maintain their collections for the future.

The aim of this study is to begin to coherently examine in detail the factors that make and shape charity archives. To, for the first time, understand the interconnected nature and the effects on collections of decisions and actions at different levels both within and outside charitable organisations. To combine quantitative data with qualitative opinion to start to properly understand the richness and challenges of keeping archives in the charitable sector.

---

[8] For example, Standard Chartered Bank in the late 1980's. Freeth, S.G.H. 1991 'Destroying archives: A case study of the records of Standard Chartered Bank', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 12:2, pp85-94.
[9] Charities whose core purpose is not the study or retention of objects from the past. An example of a non-heritage charity would be the Royal Voluntary Service, its purpose the care of older people in the community. An example of a heritage charity would be a museum or history trust, such as The Wellcome Trust or Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society.

CHAPTER I

CHARITY ARCHIVES AROUND THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The state of charity archives today is variably described as 'a little bit bleak', 'difficult', 'splintered and dispersed' and 'anchoring on poverty row'. This is not to say that there are not any glimmers of hope within the sector, or examples of success and good practice, but the situation is far from good or even stable. This has most recently been brought sharply into focus by the launch of the Campaign for Voluntary Sector Archives (CVSA) in October 2012.[10] The fact that a campaign is needed to address the most basic issues in the sector, such as survival of records, is in itself an alarming indictment of the present state of affairs.

The CVSA is an initiative created and championed by the Voluntary Action History Society (VAHS). It has sought to bring together both academics and those who own and care for archives in the voluntary sector to highlight the situation and to campaign for better care of and access to records.

During 'the 1990s VAHS conducted a survey of larger voluntary organisations that revealed a wide range of problems facing charities in preserving archives and making these available for researchers'.[11] In 1997 VAHS in conjunction with the University of North London attempted to develop a 'National Archive of Social Action', a plan which ultimately did not come to fruition.[12]

VAHS has not been the only group to champion the cause of charity and voluntary sector archives, it has just perhaps been the most vocal. The Charity Archivists and Records Managers Group (CHARM) was formed in 1996, with the aim of 'providing a forum … to discuss and take action on issues of interest'.[13] From an initial seven members, including The Children's Society, the NSPCC and the British Red Cross, CHARM grew from 'being a purely self-help group … into an advocate for charity archives in general, giving them a collective voice'.[14] It now counts over 80 archivists and records managers from across the sector amongst its membership.

---

[10] http://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/ 'The campaign launch' (viewed 27/09/2013).
[11] http://www.vahs.org.uk/archives/ (viewed 28/09/2013).
[12] University of London and the Voluntary Action History society, 1997 Proposal for a National Archive of Social Action. p.1. (unpublished Lottery Bid).
[13] http://charmonline.org.uk/about.shtml (viewed 27/09/2013).
[14] Wakeling, I. 2004. 'Looking to the Future: Creating a National Charity Archives Strategy', in ARC Magazine Issue 196 December 2005. Society of Archivists. pp. 8-9.

In 2004, TNA facilitated an initiative to create a national charity archives strategy and after an initial consultation between TNA, the Society of Archivists, Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Charity Commission and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), drafting of such a strategy began. Its aim was to 'seek to resolve some of the dilemmas highlighted in the consultation meeting', which had recognised that there was a need to raise awareness within charities themselves of the importance of their records, and had brought a 'realisation that more could be done to inform academics and local communities about the richness of charity archives for research'. Thought was also given to what provision could be made for those small and local charities who could not afford to employ a professional post.[15] It would be another six years before the strategy would be published and then only as a draft, available on the CHARM website.[16] Support from the partnership organisations, which was so crucial to adoption and success, sadly did not last and with only voluntary resources of CHARM members available to complete the strategy, progress was inevitably slow.

The document outlines effectively the value of charity archives and the issues and challenges within the sector as well as suggested ways forward. Its section on the sector's records, written by those on the frontline, gives a chillingly accurate portrayal of the situation, faced by charities and those who look after their collections.[17]

In the past it has largely been up to independent voluntary bodies, such as VAHS and CHARM to do what they could to help champion the cause of charitable sector archives and try to make a difference, a task made difficult by the lack of profile and more importantly resources. However, more recently, academic institutions, professional associations and government bodies have begun to take a growing interest in charitable sector archives, albeit in a somewhat fragmented way.

The first significant and public piece of research to be done on charitable sector archives was the Database of Archives of Non-Governmental Organisations (DANGO) project undertaken at the University of Birmingham. The survey ran from 2005-2011 funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Leverhulme Trust. It came about because, 'though historians recognised the growing importance of new social movements and civil society organisations in

---

[15] Wakeling, I. 2004. p5

[16] http://www.charmonline.org.uk/strategy.shtml (Viewed 22/11/13).

[17] Baker, Rob, Dawson, Elizabeth, Dodd, Rosie, Roberts, Jill, Stapley, Karen, Wakeling, Catherine, Wakeling, Ian and Webb, Chrissie. 2010. *Making Charity Records Matter: a strategy for charity and voluntary sector archives and records*. CHARM. pp2-3. http://charmonline.org.uk/Draft_CHARM_Strategy.pdf (viewed 27/09/2013).

February 2014

changing British society and politics, no research tool existed to assist the growing number of researchers examining questions relating to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)'.[18]

The database holds records for 1,978 NGOs, 1,237 with information on their collections. However, the vast majority of these are held by national institutions, university collections or local authority archives. All of these collections are held in only 301 repositories and of those only 176 collections in the survey are retained by their creating organisations.[19] The Charity Commission's latest figures show that there are around 160,000 registered charities in England and Wales, almost 1,000 with incomes over £10 million a year.[20] While the DANGO Survey is a valuable tool in beginning to create a picture of the scope and scale of the retention of charity archives it is limited in its ability to depict a true picture of the sector.

The most recent piece of work which touches on the charity archives sector is the 2010 Religious Archives Survey (RAG survey) which sought not only to gather information on the location of religious archives, but also to try to begin to quantify the problems they faced in keeping, maintaining and granting access to their collections. It was a partnership between TNA, The Archives and Records Association (ARA) and the Religious Archives Group (RAG), funded by the Pilgrim Trust. The purpose of the RAG survey was to try to 'make a comprehensive attempt to survey religious archives in the United Kingdom' which included all religions and faith groups.[21] The survey though did have significant limitations acknowledged at the outset by the authors and though just under 2,700 bodies were approached, only 414 responded and of those only 307 held any records.[22]

The survey came to a number of conclusions: custodians had 'little understanding of the wider interest in what they may hold or of managing records to ensure their future survival'.[23] 'That despite the richness of surviving archives … much is being lost or is at risk', due to neglect and inappropriate storage.[24] And that 'their voluntary efforts are often under-resourced and unrecognised. Frequently, those struggling to maintain these assets have no access to professional advice'.[25] In addition, without efforts to catalogue material 'the contents of collections

---

[18] http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/Dango.Introduction.htm (viewed 27/09/2013).

[19] These numbers have been generated from advanced searches undertaken on the DANGO database. Some institutions have multiple entries so there will be a small margin for error in these figures as the way information is displayed makes it difficult to analyse. http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/asearch.asp (viewed 27/09/2013).

[20] http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/ (viewed 22/11/13).

[21] RAG, 2010. Religious Archives Survey 2010: *A survey of the archives of Religious Bodies within the United Kingdom and related Personal Papers*. TNA, ARA, RAG. p.4.

[22] RAG, 2010, 10-11.

[23] RAG, 2010, 22.

[24] RAG, 2010, 22.

[25] RAG, 2010, 23.

will remain unknown and therefore unappreciated by owners and potential users and these important resources continue to be at risk while their intellectual content remains uncharted'.[26] 'One striking result of the survey was the lack of appreciation in many religious quarters of what an asset archives could be in terms of the core objectives of such organisations …'[27]

Many fragmentary attempts have been made to bring attention to the plight of charity archive collections, all of which appear after initial enthusiasm to have waned through a lack of a common goal, time and money, sustained only through voluntary effort, much like the sector itself. Even the newly formed CVSA has lost much of its momentum and is in danger of going the same way as all those previous attempts. The question that remains is how do we quantify the needs and challenges which have been previously expressed, re-ignite the debate and make a difference to the world of charity archives?

---

[26] RAG, 2010, 24.
[27] RAG, 2010, 24.

CHAPTER II

A NEW IN-DEPTH APPROACH

For charity archives the ability to quantify the situation was what was required. Much previous published work by individuals within the sector had been opinion pieces lacking good evidence and quantifiable data, to back up the claims made. The draft *National Strategy for Charity Archives* had gathered together and elucidated the problem, but had ultimately received little support. Inevitably what was needed was a survey, but it was clear that the type of survey undertaken by RAG, that of sending out questionnaires with a very top down approach, had limited ability to properly explore the complex issues and was unlikely to enable further work.

What was needed was a bottom up approach, a discussion, not a questionnaire, one that could produce hard figures to quantify the diversity and scale of the issues but which could also elucidate the wider and fundamental problems.

Ever since a meeting of CHARM in January 2012, where the idea of conducting a survey had first been seriously considered, the idea had been forming in the author's mind that a survey of charity archives could make the perfect dissertation topic. Conducted as part of their strategic archive development work, vital time and support was gained from the Royal Voluntary Service to cover the not inconsiderable resource required to carry out such a piece of work.

METHODOLOGY

Learning from previous surveys and taking advice from those who had done similar work before, it was decided to undertake a set number of one to one discussions with people who had differing connections to charity archives. It was hoped that these meetings would both encourage people to participate and also allow a freer discussion with the ability to easily follow themes and areas of interest for that interviewee and their particular circumstances. Additionally it would give the opportunity to record the interviews and create an oral history of the state of the sector during the summer of 2013.

It was decided to interview 20 individuals in six groups.

TABLE 1

No.	Interviewee type
9	Charity archivists or those who look after archives
3	Charity senior managers/directors/trustees
3	Academic users (e.g. VAHS)
2	Receivers of charity archives (e.g. LSE, Bodleian)
2	Charities which have or are thinking of disposing of their archive (e.g. Oxfam)
1	Archival sector professional (with experience of working with charity sector archives)
20	**Total**

Charity archivists and those who look after charity archives comprise the bulk of the interviews and within that it was attempted to gather a broad spectrum of different sized organisations, from a geographically dispersed area and from a spectrum within the charity sector.

Analysis of data available on the Charity Commission website suggested that it would be possible to achieve the first of these aims through use of turnover and employee figures. Using the Charity Commission's definition of a large charity as one which turned over more than £10 million per year as a starting point, potential charities were placed into three groups:

Large: Turnover >£10 million and over 300 staff.
Medium: Turnover £1 million -£10 Million and 30-300 Staff.
Small: Turnover <£1 million and < 30 staff.

With a limited budget and time, achieving a geographical spread of respondents was inevitably difficult and those organisations chosen had to lie within a 3 hour travelling time (a day trip) of Devizes, Wiltshire.

Of the remaining groups, it was hoped that one senior charity manager could be interviewed from each of the large, medium and small categories. They would preferably come from the organisations whose archivists had participated, to allow comparison of the answers from both groups. All other groups had at least two participants to enable the collection of a cross section of opinion.

Calls for participants were made between 24th June – 2nd August 2013, with interviews requested to take place during August 2013. Calls were made via the CHARM e-mail group, to members of the CVSA, to charities featured in media stories, personal contacts of the author and via the private archives team at TNA.

No responses were received from cold contacts, and follow up telephone calls to some charities were ignored or rebuffed.[28] Ultimately interviews were only able to be secured through personal contacts. In the end it was impossible, due to the summer holiday period, to conduct all of the interviews during August. The first was undertaken on 1st August, the last on 3rd October.

In order to gather as much honest information as possible, participants were promised their interviews would be anonymised. Where quotations from participants are used they are referenced only as 'Interview'. All non anonymised information already existed in the public domain.

In all, 18 participants were spoken to in 15 interviews; those from Conway Hall Ethical Society and SPAB were interviewed together. The Bodleian Library submitted their answers in written form.

Within the time and resources available it proved impossible to secure interviews with a third small charity which held an archive or a third academic who had experience of using charity archives, as originally planned. Interviews were also not able to be secured with any organisation which was thinking of, or had, disposed of its collection.

---

[28] Cold contacts were those who were not previously known to the author or their personal contacts.

All participants agreed to be identified as part of the study and are listed in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

Participant name and position	Charity or Institution
Archivists or those who look after charity archives	
Large Charities	
Ian Wakeling – Records, Archives & Data Protection manager	The Children's Society
Rob Baker – Information and Archives Officer	Blind Veterans UK
Julie James – Heritage Manager	Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)
Martine King – Archive Manger	Barnardo's
Matthew McMurray – Archivist	Royal Voluntary Service
Medium Charities	
Maggie Goodall – Education and Training Manager	Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)
Sarah-Joy Maddeaux – PhD Student	Bristol Zoo Gardens
Kevin Roberts – Archivist	Barrow Cadbury Trust
Small Charities	
Carl Harrison – Honorary Archivist & trustee	Conway Hall Ethical Society
Lindsay Kenniston-Udall – PhD Student	Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust
Senior charity mangers/directors/trustees	
David McCullogh – Chief Executive	Royal Voluntary Service
Matthew Slocombe – Director	SPAB
Jim Walsh – Director	Conway Hall Ethical Society
Academic Users	
Matthew Hilton – professor of Social History	Birmingham University
Dr Georgina Brewis – Research Fellow	Institute of Education, University of London
Receivers of charity archives (e.g. LSE, Bodlean)	
Sue Donnelly – Head of Archives	London School of Economics
Susan Thomas – Digital Archivist	Bodleian Library
Archive Sector Professional	
Philip Gale – Senior advisor for private archives	The National Archive (TNA)

CHAPTER III

RESOURCES AND HOLDINGS

The first part of this study was designed to look at the quantifiable aspects of charities and their archives. What level of resources they were able to commit to their collections, how big they are, what types of material they hold and the ways in which they were managed and added to.

INCOME AND STAFF

Data on the income, staffing and volunteer levels of the participating charities was primarily gained from the Charity Commission website with some data on staffing and volunteer numbers coming from the interviews and is presented in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3

Charity or Institution (income order)	Income (2011-12)	No. of Staff	No. of Volunteers
Barnardo's	£245.2 million	5,025	17,175
Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)	£174.7 million	1,624	45,000
Royal Voluntary Service	£74.7 million	1,073	39,296
The Children's Society	£46.3 million	812	27,000
Blind Veterans UK	£25.4 million	310	300
Bristol Zoo Gardens	£9.5 million	147	250
Barrow Cadbury Trust	£3 million	13	0
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB)	£1 million	15	300
Conway Hall Ethical Society	£550,000	11	10
Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust	£306,605	11	Unknown

This very small sample of ten charities shows the huge diversity in the sector, not only in the range of activities, from childcare organisations to grant giving trusts and conservation bodies but also the gulf in income between the smallest and the largest. However, with the exception of the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust (a local charity), all fall into the top two brackets of the Charity Commission's

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

data (those with income over £500,000 per year) which are only 6.17% of all the charities in the UK, but account for 88.96% of the total income.[29]

How do these charities then resource their archives and look after their history? Chart 1 and Table 4 below show the bracketed expenditure by all of the ten charities and also a breakdown of the percentage of their income which is spent providing their archive service.

Chart 1 - Expenditure on archives per annum
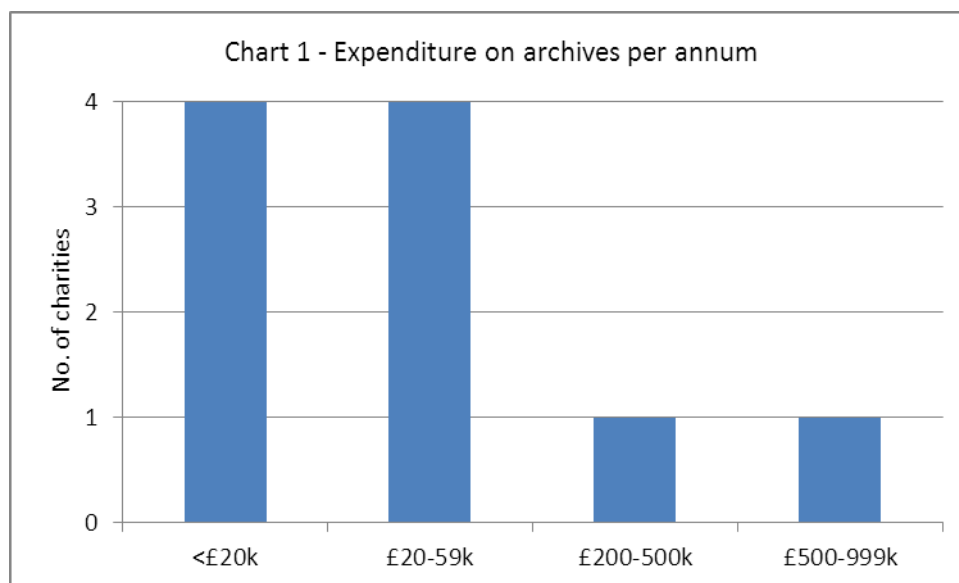
TABLE 4

Percentage of income spent on Archive services by the ten charities									
8.18%	0.83%	0.70%	0.70%	0.22%	0.16%	0.07%	0.05%	0.01%	0%

Where no exact figures were available an estimate has been made given the percentage of estimated staff time spent on archive related work.

The majority are using less than 0.25% of their income on the retention of their archives and a service to access and maintain them. The average is 0.3% (excluding the 8.18% where the library was part of the core purpose of that charity). A few of these figures are subject to a variance as they do not include the cost of space to house their collections as they own their own buildings, others represent only short term expenditure and some collections are housed by third parties at no cost to the charity. This though is unlikely in most cases to significantly alter the result and the trend, from experience, seems reliable.

---

[29] http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities Charities by income band – 30 June 2013.(viewed 18/10/2013).

The vast majority of costs are salaries. Chart 2 shows the numbers of staff employed by any one charity and Chart 3 the number of qualified archivists and records managers employed by the organisations.

Chart 2 - Charity archive staffing levels (No. of charities)

- 8 staff members, 1
- >1 <2 staff members, 1
- 17 staff members, 1
- <1 staff member, 5
- 1 staff member, 2

Chart 3 - Number of qualified archivists/ records managers employed by charities (No. of charities)

- 1 Archivist /RM 4
- No Archivist /RM 5
- 3 Archivists / RM 1
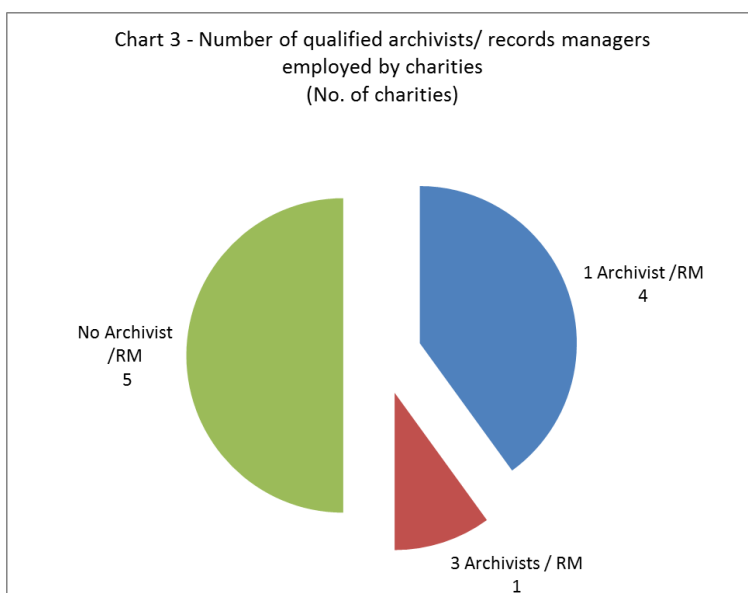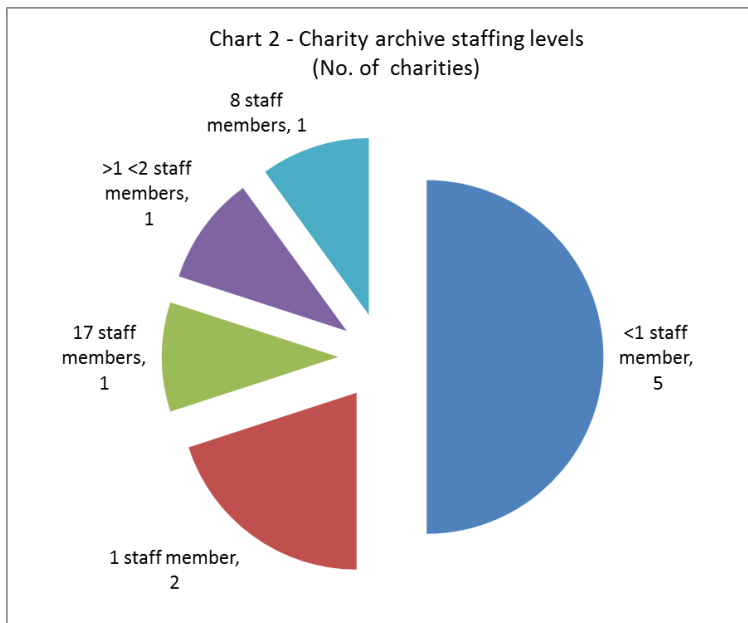
In many organisations, archives are the responsibility of non-qualified members of staff who have nominal responsibility for collections, e.g. the chief executive's PA or the education officer.[30] While these individuals are in most cases doing the best that they can under the circumstances their lack of professional archival skills can in some cases lead to poor management and even physical and intellectual damage to collections.[31]

---

[30] Interview.
[31] In one collection volunteers had been dragging 200 year old bound manuscript volumes over sharp cupboard edges, seriously damaging the bindings.

VOLUNTEERS

Archives are also in some cases managed by volunteers.[32] As could be seen from Table 3 a number of the larger organisations have a significant number of volunteers helping them to undertake their charitable work, and this is also reflected in many of their archives which have varying levels of volunteer involvement. Table 5 shows the number of volunteers working for participating charities and the number of hours they give per year.

TABLE 5

No. of Volunteers	No. of hours per year
10	1,300
8	2,538
5	1,974
4	1,316
3	1,488
2	658
1	658
1	77
0	0
0	0

Of the ten charities, two had no volunteer programme and two were run solely by volunteers. The average full time staff post is 1,645 hours per year meaning four charities were supported by almost (or over) a full time equivalent member of unqualified staff every year, a theoretical cost saving of £15-20,000.[33] Time to manage volunteers and expenses should though be considered when looking at this figure, especially with large volunteer projects where volunteers give only short but regular assistance. The skills and abilities of volunteers play a significant role in determining their value to projects. Some charities rely heavily on the skills of a very few volunteers who make up the majority of their volunteering hours.

One charity had a graduate student volunteer studying for a distance learning Master's degree in Archives & Records Management who gave 10 hours per week (c.450 hours per year) and after 18 months of 'on the job' training, was able to undertake even the most complex archival tasks within the collection.[34] Another charity had six college students working on a development project as part of their course, each of whom gave a day per week.[35] In fact (leaving aside AHRC Collaborative

---

[32] Interview.
[33] Based on an unqualified archive assistant post.
[34] Interview.
[35] Interview.

Doctoral Awards which will be discussed below) the idea of formalised collaborative working with educational institutions is something at least one other archive was about to embark on.[36] Another collection was run and managed by a volunteer, a qualified archivist, who had spent his career in a county record office.[37] These highly skilled volunteers enable these charities to develop their collections in ways that others might be unable to.

> *Volunteers are time expensive at the beginning, but once they are rolling and confident, that is when you reap the benefit. … The more volunteers you have the better. … If you are going to do volunteers do it bigger rather than smaller.[38]*

> *Our volunteers are indispensable; they do everything from accessioning and cataloguing, to answering enquiries and repackaging archive material. … The skills our volunteers have are very varied and a lack of computer skills is a major problem we face. The majority of our volunteers do quite basic tasks like repackaging because with anything complicated they have forgotten how to do it by the time they come in next week. We just can't spare the staff time to go over it each time, especially if they are only in for 2 hours.[39]*

This reliance on volunteers though can be a problem. In a very recent example, a volunteer working at Barnardo's blew the whistle on what he claimed was an attempt by the charity to dispose of part of its collection.[40] Another charity had problems with volunteers who had been running their archive with no professional oversight for many years and had become very independent.[41]

Ultimately, 'the trouble relying on volunteers is what do you do when they leave?'.[42] While recruiting of skilled volunteers for some charities didn't seem to be too much of a problem, especially those in London, the retention and replacement of skilled volunteers for others is a significant issue.[43] Large volunteer projects and professionally skilled volunteers clearly provide significant benefits, the former to larger charities with professional oversight and the latter are vital to the success of the archives of small charities.

---

[36] Interview.

[37] Interview.

[38] Interview.

[39] Interview.

[40] http://britishphotohistory.ning.com/m/blogpost?id=2680769%3ABlogPost%3A72775 (viewed 18/10/13); also follow up articles in Third Sector http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/1192660/fears-circulate-barnardos-photo-archive-destroyed/ (Viewed 18/10/13).

[41] Interview.

[42] Interview.

[43] Interview.

FUNDING

While the majority of funding for charity archives comes from the charities themselves, there is a growing amount of money coming from external funders. These include bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), National Cataloguing Grants Scheme (NCGS), The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust (NMCT), Wellcome Trust and others. Access to this money though has proved hard for many charity archives for a variety of reasons. All of the charities, excepting one, wanted to apply for grant funding, but had all faced significant hurdles in the past.

The principal problem was a lack of time and support to be able to write the applications. Those who had applied and been given grants specifically for their archives, had either had them written by a specialist volunteer, or had been done in the archivist's own time. 'I either come in on Saturdays; or the last one I did in the Easter Holidays'.[44]

Other problems centred around grant giving bodies needing significant evidence of previous success and provision of services, or that the expectations of the funders were too high. One charity had been refused a grant because, having no history of allowing access to its collection, the funding body did not believe it would grant access in the future.[45] Another said; 'They wanted a larger project, more throughput, more stuff done, but for £10,000 there was only so much you could do'.[46]

In other instances, it is the charity's own unwillingness to draw attention to its history which has stopped archivists from being able to apply to funders, and in the most dramatic case a charity had to return money which it had been awarded for failing to meet its promised aims.[47]

Only two charities had been able to secure external funding specifically for their archives. One had been extremely successful bringing in over £360,000 in the last ten years, another having recently achieved a grant from the NCGS in partnership with another organisation.[48]

These grants though are all for project work, cataloguing, preservation and outreach, and not for the core running costs of these collections. 'It's all about identifying the jewel in the crown' and

---

[44] Interview.
[45] Interview.
[46] Interview.
[47] Interview.
[48] Interview.

arguably this diversion of resources into cataloguing the most 'important' documents means that it is difficult to systematically and strategically develop a collection.[49]

> *In an attempt to bring money in, we are undoubtedly doing things which we wouldn't otherwise have done, and it diverts resources from our day to day work and other more important things.[50]*

One interviewee suggested that for many large public sector archives, this external funding has become an income stream in itself and getting a small grant from one grant giving body gives an organisation a 'track history' which helps to get further funding.[51]

Without that track history or the resources to make any funding bids in the first place many charities find it almost impossible to access grant funding. An examination of the lists of grants given out by the NCGS shows how it is repeatedly large well-funded public archives who receive almost all of the grants. Of the 13 grants awarded in 2012, only two were awarded to non-public bodies or national institutions. One was to a non-heritage charity, only the second such organisation to receive a NCGS grant.[52] Between 2006-2010 the NCGS gave out 55 grants, 46 of which were awarded to local authority, university or national archives and only one to a non-heritage charity, The Children's Society (2010).[53] Matthew McMurray clearly lays out the difficulties being faced by all smaller archives.

> *The access agenda and the additional requirements on these programmes have made it almost impossible for smaller, especially non-heritage, organisations to even get a look in. We are in a chicken and egg situation, without the levels of access required we cannot get funding to develop the backroom necessities, what some might call 'proper' archival work, of arranging, describing and preserving our collections. However without this vital work being done we cannot give the access required to our collections.[54]*

Helen Forde a former president of the Society of Archivists has also addressed this same issue.

> *What is possible for those in the vanguard is not easily replicated for the rear-guard; the divide between the two is not diminished and may even be increasing. For the latter the situation has changed for the worse and much effort will be needed to ensure that they neither fail to catch up, or worse, fail entirely.[55]*

Another solution to providing resources for the development of collections are the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Collaborative Doctoral Awards. Two of the participants

---

[49] Interview.

[50] Interview.

[51] Interview.

[52] http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/cataloguing-grants-programme.htm (viewed 18/10/13).

[53] NCGS. 2011. *National cataloguing grants scheme five year review (2006-2011)*. The Pilgrim Trust. Pp18-19.

[54] McMurray, Matthew. 2012. 'Out of the Headlines' in *ARC Magazine* No. 277 Sept. 2012, ARA, pp 37-38.

[55] Forde, Helen. 2005. 'Access and Preservation in the 21st century'. *Journal of the Society of Archivists*. Pp193-200.

17

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

were working with their respective institutions as part of this scheme, both through the University of Bristol. For the previous 3 years they had been working in partnership with the Zoo and Cemetery Trust, in one case to catalogue and better preserve the collection, in the other to uncover and publish its history. While the amount of time these doctoral students were able to give specifically to the archives of these organisations was just 1-2 days per week, with only small collections to work on, their impact was significant. With almost all of the work done by the university and student to gain the grants, this type of partnership seems to offer a significant benefit to charities in helping to preserve, develop and make accessible their collections.

SIZE AND CONTENT

As much as anything else the scope and content of charity collections determines the level of resources required to keep them. Chart 4 below sets out the sizes of all ten participating collections in linear metres.
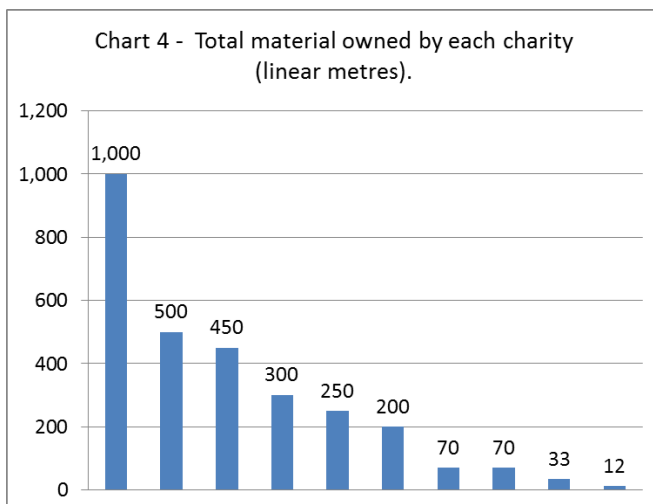
Excepting the very small collections, all of these are rough figures. Not every charity had this information available and in some cases it was estimated during the visits. While it might be assumed that the scale of the collections was directly related to the size and longevity of the organisations this was not always the case. The size of several collections was beginning to cause an issue.

> *It's expanding rapidly, especially due to the conservation work … which is increasing the volume considerably.[56]*

> *We have just about run out of space in our stores and are beginning to have to store things in piles in corners. As we repackage the collection it's getting bigger which is just exacerbating the problem.[57]*

---

[56] Interview.

A couple of charities have solved their storage problem by farming part or all of their collection out to third parties, to make a cost saving, in the main due to office downsizing. Two charities had their collections totally held by third party archives, and one had part of their collection held elsewhere.

The collections held by all the charities were diverse, covering not just a wide range of document types within paper collections, such as the standard series of minute books and organisational publications, but significant numbers of letters and correspondence, reports, scrapbooks, daybooks, plans, posters, children's case files, and membership records. Additionally some collections had very substantial microfilm holdings of original material which had been destroyed.

A few collections held non-standard media. There were very significant photographic holdings by four repositories as well as small – medium sized film and video collections, the largest of which held 100-200 hours of footage.

All collections held at least a small number of objects though many of these were works of art. Some of the larger organisations hold significant object collections (one of which was managed by a museum arm). One charity held a significant textile/costume collection as well as some food items.[58]

STORAGE AND ENVIRONMENT

All of these different media present a number of conservation challenges, but with these specialist media making up such a small part of most of these collections there was little or no ability to store these correctly or to divert resources to do so. Only one organisation had previously had an environmentally controlled store for its specialist media.

As has already been discussed, the resources spent by charities to care for their archives are extremely limited. It should therefore come as no surprise that no charity who held their own collection was able to provide storage which came up to the standards required in the old British

---

[57] Interview.
[58] Further information about some individual collections can be found at:
http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-history/archive-and-heritage-collection/collections
http://www.conwayhall.org.uk/about-the-collection
http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/

19

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

Standard or new guidance.[59] Only those whose collections were housed by third parties were able to provide this level of storage for their collections.

> *While the British Standard and its successor are useful as a guide, operating in a building like this we can't use it as a target because it isn't realistic.[60]*

On the whole there seemed to be only minor concern for the environmental conditions under which their material was held.

> *The conditions aren't too bad, the RH and temperature are quite stable. They only vary by two degrees on a day to day basis and by ten degrees from summer to winter.[61]*

> *It's better than a lot, but not as good as some. … We usually keep the archive area between 16-19 degrees.[62]*

> *Both temperature and humidity are rather over what one would want, and over a year fall outside the perimeters both ways but not seriously, it is fairly stable.[63]*

Only in a couple of cases were there real concerns about the environment.

> *Temperature is a real problem for us, while we managed to keep the humidity mostly within the boundaries, the highest temperature we have recorded in our store is 28 degrees and the coldest 11 degrees.[64]*

Another charity had a problem of a daily temperature fluctuation, caused by the air conditioning in the office building where their archive is stored being turned off at night.[65] One charity that had been monitoring their environment were also worried about embrittlement due to low humidity levels in the summer months. Others were concerned about their specialist media such as film.

Only one charity had encountered a problem with mould and this had in one instance been caused by an unwillingness of management to invest a relatively small amount of money (£150) in monitoring equipment. In the other a faulty boiler caused a serious and on-going damp problem in one store room but with nowhere to move the material to it had remained in place, monitored daily.

---

[59] BS5454:2000 Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents and PD5454:2012, Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials.
[60] Interview.
[61] Interview.
[62] Interview.
[63] Interview.
[64] Interview.
[65] Interview.

February 2014

Beyond environmental conditions, other concerns included risk of fire and fire resistance, especially in multiple occupancy and poorly constructed buildings.[66] Also flooding risk in a basement store which has live sewer and water pipes running through it.[67]

Security was another issue in two charities, where there was either open access to the collection for anyone, or an uncontrolled number of key holders to stores.[68] One charity admitted to having lost a file through theft by a visiting researcher.[69]

Overall there was what could be best described as a resignation that within the restrictions under which they were working they were doing the best that they were able and that the situation was unlikely to change. This said, there were attempts by some charities over the years to improve the conditions in their stores. One had installed portable humidifiers and dehumidifiers to try and control the humidity levels and were enjoying a certain amount of success.[70] Another had partitioned off its archive store, which used to be in a thoroughfare, yet another had recently constructed a very small purpose built fire proof store in the best location it could find within its building.[71]

The option of storing material with a third party is an attractive option for many charities, removing both the need to pay for the storage and management of that material. Three charities had material held by regional and national archival repositories; all of that material was on deposit, with ownership retained by the charity. In one case this was a very small collection, but the other two were sizeable. However, both of these latter deposit agreements were made 30 years ago and one has just been revoked, meaning the charity is having to find a new home for the material that is stored there. There are complicated issues surrounding the deposit or disposal of collections by charities and these are discussed at further length in Chapter V below.

RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND DIGITAL RECORDS

While the collections in many cases contain unparalleled material about the history of each organisation and the field in which it worked, only one had a records management programme which was successfully bringing new material into the archive in a structured way. Most were

---

[66] Interview.
[67] Interview.
[68] Interview.
[69] Interview.
[70] Interview.
[71] Interview.

accumulating material through unstructured deposits or donations from outside the organisation. Structured deposits were of material such as internal magazines or publications.

> *In terms of institutional transfer it is somewhat haphazard. It fits all of the stereotypes. When someone is leaving and having a clear out, or there is an office move … or when we are reviewing space …*[72]

> *When I was at head office, I used to get most of my modern archive material by rescuing it from the skip as it was tipped in, now I'm not there anymore I can't even do that.*[73]

The charity who did have a Records Management (RM) programme which fed into the archive had a different problem, that of having too much material which needed transferring. Their RM holdings were three times the size of the archive and just beginning to sort through the material was an enormous undertaking. They had almost no series which could be universally destroyed, with valuable material integrated into every one.[74]

The transfer and retention of digital material was also in a similar state. The one charity that was beginning to address the problem only had a plan and hadn't found a way to solve it. Most had not even begun to tackle the problem of the retention of born digital archives, many seeing it as a problem to be faced in the future after they had got their house more in order. 'Cataloguing is the primary focus, then after that is finished we will look at RM and digital archiving is something to address'.[75] In another case the charity was managing digital records, but because of a lack of consultation with the archive when the systems were set up, those records were unable to be transferred to the archive and they had 'now ended up with a big mess'.[76]

Digitisation of material already within collections was another step some of the larger organisations had taken. This was done either for usage, access or preservation purposes; principally for photographs and publications. One charity had systematically digitised and catalogued over 5,000 photographs to place on its online catalogue, another had digitised all of its internal magazines.[77] Others had undertaken unsystematic digitisation of images for use in its publications and for fundraising and marketing purposes.[78] Only one charity had undertaken digitisation purely for preservation purposes because of a previous migration onto microfilm which had begun to seriously vinegar. The digitisation process produced a problem of its own, creating over 40

---

[72] Interview.
[73] Interview.
[74] Interview.
[75] Interview.
[76] Interview.
[77] Interviews.
[78] Interview.

terabytes of information, which, if stored on the charity's third party servers, would have cost £40,000 per year. The temporary solution adopted was to use Network Access Storage (NAS) drives held in the archive.[79]

DISASTERS

Chart 5 - Disaster plan
(No. of charities)

- Disaster plan only
- Contract with disaster recovery specialists only
- Both
- Nothing
- disasterplan for part of collection
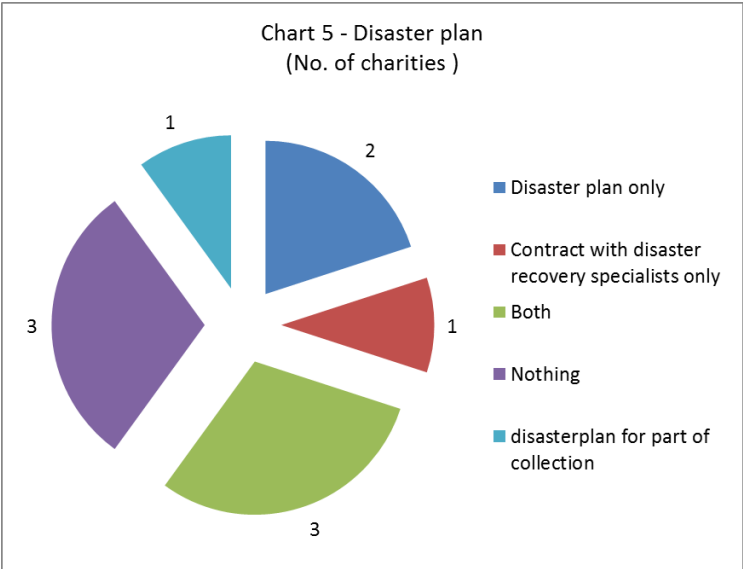
Only one charity who held their own collection had both a disaster plan and a contract with a disaster recovery specialist, the other two had their collections held in public third party repositories which had these measures in place. However, of the three which had nothing and the one which only had a disaster plan for part of its collection, three of these saw drawing up a disaster plan as one of their top priorities in development work they were planning.

[79] Interview.

CHAPTER IV

USE AND ACCESS

All charity archives are private archives. While subject to rules such as the Data Protection Act, Children's Act, Companies Act and Charities Act, beyond these limited statutory obligations they are not required to retain records or to offer wider access to their collections.

Access, or the perceived lack of it, to charity archives has spawned campaigns such as the CVSA calling for the opening up of these collections for research. But what is the actual level of access to these collections and what are the reasons behind any restrictions? What demands are being placed on collections by their own organisations and by external enquirers.

"Institutional usefulness is key in any specialist repository".[80] While this may be considered a truism by many, it lies at the heart of any debate about the retention of any charity or other private collection. The level to which any collection is used by its holding organisation has in most cases a direct relationship to the value which that organisation places on it. Table 6 and Chart 6 show the total number of enquiries received by the ten organisations and the percentage of usage placed upon the ten collections by external and internal audiences.

TABLE 6

Enquiries total. Per year.	Internal %	External %	Visitors per year
2,000	<1	>99	0***
1,200	45	55	10-12
1,000	50	50	20
246**	45	55	0***
221	40	60	6
77	0	100	2-300*
56	60	40	3
32**	Unknown	Unknown	28
6	100	0	0
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	0***

---

[80] Interview.

24

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

Visitors to the library not necessarily users of the archive
**Extrapolated from available figures*
*** *indicates a closed collection.*
Unknown – *No data (unable to be provided by interviewee).*

Chart 6 - External vs internal enquiries
(Percentage of enquiries)
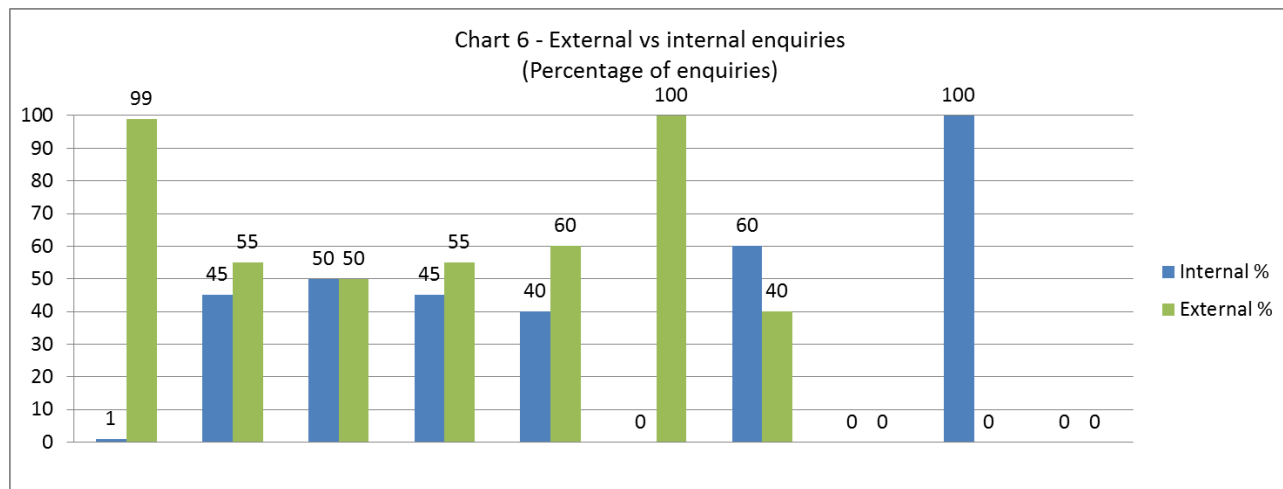
The most startling statistic is that in all but one case, where there is access available, collections are used by more external than internal users. If institutional usefulness is a significant factor in the successful retention of charity archives, this failure to use their own collections is one reason why organisations do not value them. However, without skills or influence within organisations, those who care for many collections are unable to successfully advocate for their collections and effect change.

Where collections are used by internal audiences the departments using collections show a certain level of consistency. Chart 7 shows a breakdown of functions which use the archives by the number of times they were mentioned by participants.

Chart 7 - Internal use by department
(No. of times mentioned)

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014
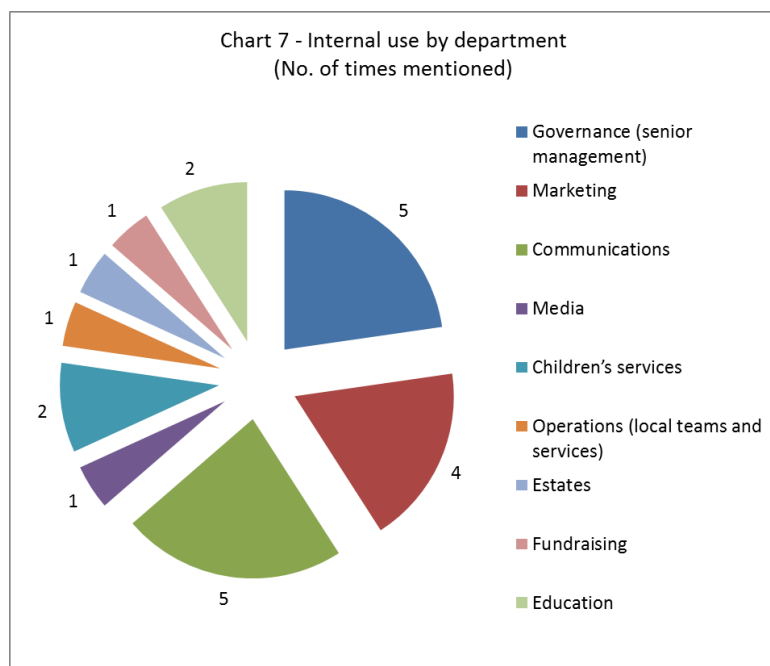
While one of the largest groups shown is Governance (senior management) the number of requests that come from this function is tiny, but the importance of that contact with archives is significant. Anecdotally interviewees suggested that the largest number of requests came from Marketing and Communications. This links directly with the type of material that these collections are most commonly asked for; images for promotional purposes. While these make up the majority of demands on archives other requests mentioned also included: information on past policy, local reports, buildings, material related to historic abuse and also internal magazines.

The use of collections by charities is also mainly done remotely. Even when that collection is housed in their own head office, most organisations are accessing their collections through specialist staff. Half of the charities had both remote and on-site users of their collections, but the number of on-site users was extremely low. Four had no on-site users and one had only on-site users. This move towards remote use of archives is a consequence of collections no longer being housed in the charities Head Offices and the growing popularity of remote and home workers as they seek to minimise their premises costs. At the time of writing half the archive collections were not housed at the charities Head Offices.

EXTERNAL USE AND ACCESS

Charity archive collections are used by a wide variety of people; Chart 8 shows the spread of users across the ten charities by type.

Chart 8 - External users by type
(No. of charities which had this type of enquiry)
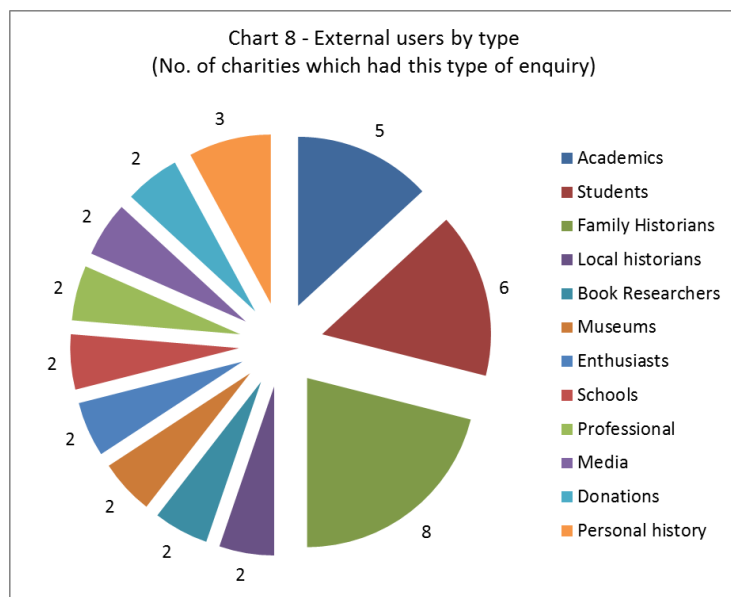
Unsurprisingly the most universal type of enquirers were family historians, however, students and academics combined had a larger share. Again this reflects the type of user and not the number of

enquiries. Many charities did not keep accurate data on the types of enquiries they received, but the Royal Voluntary Service provided statistics from their enquiry service from January – September 2013 which are probably fairly representative (excepting perhaps for children's charities, which overwhelmingly attract family historians).

Chart 9 - Royal Voluntary Service external enquiries by type
(Percentage of total external enquiries)

- Academic — 4.9
- Family History — 26.5
- Local History — 17.6
- Media — 11.8
- Specialist/professional — 15.7
- Students — 4.9
- Own History — 6.9
- Donation (accession) — 8.8
- Other — 2.9
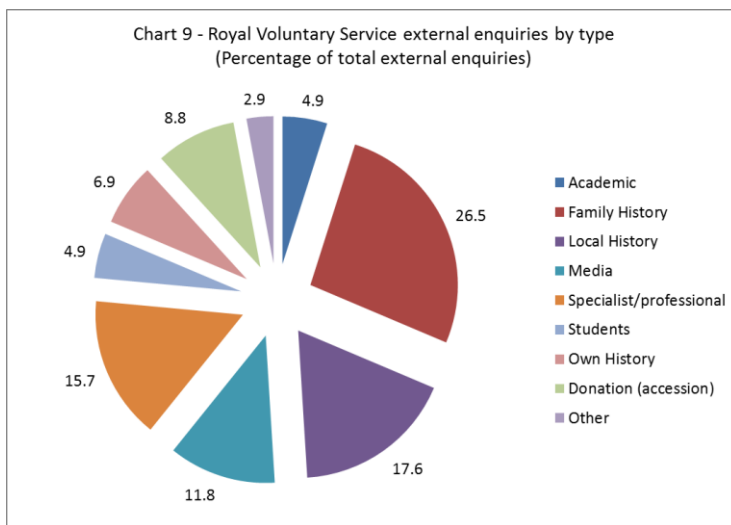
The Royal Voluntary Service figures show a wide spread of users, a quite different result from those who use public archives such as county record offices, where in 2011, 66% were family historians.[81]

While all bar one charity provided at least some access to its collection at the time of writing, the provision of on-site access to collections was significantly restricted, with no collections offering access without an appointment and those available in public archives requiring permission from the charity before those records could be viewed.
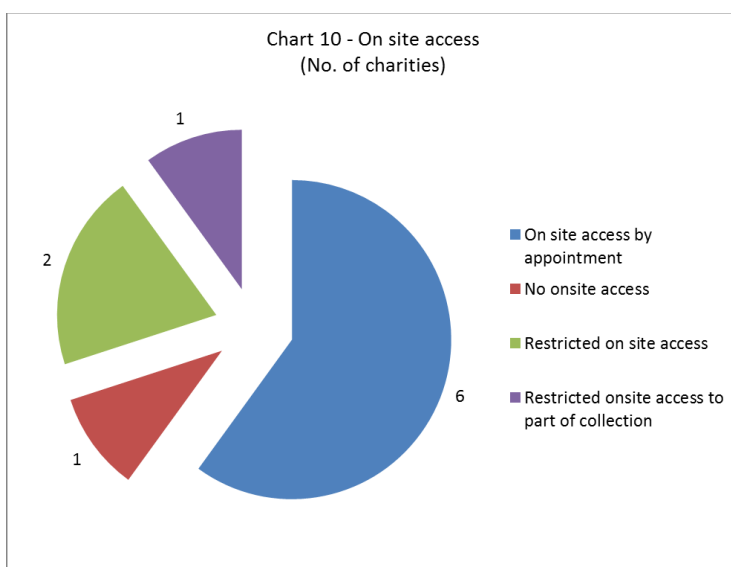
Chart 10 - On site access
(No. of charities)

- On site access by appointment — 6
- No onsite access — 1
- Restricted on site access — 2
- Restricted onsite access to part of collection — 1

---

[81] PSQG. 2011. *Survey of visitors to U.K. Archives in 2011*. Archives and Records Association. p22.

February 2014

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

Only two organisations had a dedicated reading room; the remainder who offered on site access found space either in their general offices or in one case in their store room to accommodate readers. The charity which had no on-site access to its material was unable to provide it because of the size of its accommodation and the failure of the building to comply with the requirements of the relevant legislation.

Even where no on-site access was available all offered some form of remote enquiry service but with considerable differences across the spectrum.

Chart 11 - Enquiry services

- Paid for enquiry service only
- Free enquiry service
- limited free enquiry service
- supplementary paid for enquiry service
- On site only access
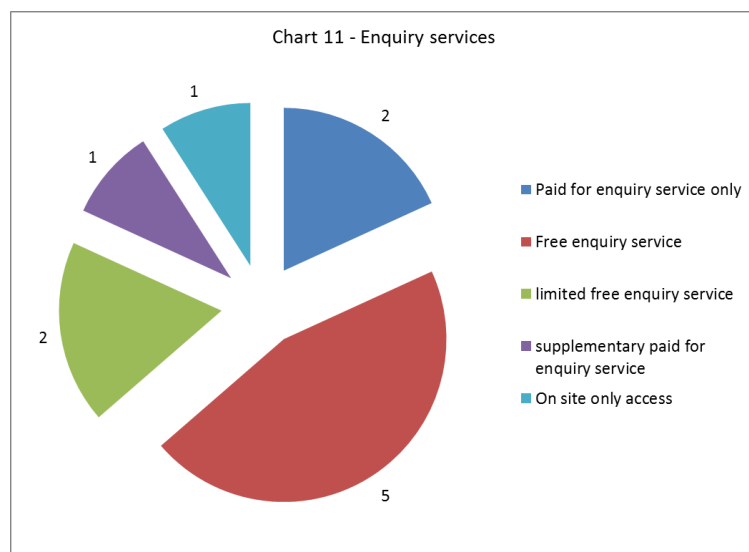
While half offered a free enquiry service to external users, with no advertised limit in the amount of work that could be done, in practice most set an internal limit on the amount of work they would undertake, but this varied wildly from one hour to over a day. Two charities required payment for any search of their records. Barnardo's charged £15 for an initial search of their records with further charges for the provision of copies.[82] Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust provide a range of search and material provision services ranging from £10-60.[83] The Royal Voluntary Service offered a half-way house with an hour of free work and then a charge of £30 per hour for additional work.[84]

The issue of charging for access to collections seems in most circumstances to be linked with the scale of enquiries received. In one case charging had been started to dissuade people from making enquiries and to begin to cover the significant cost the charity was incurring answering

---

[82]

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/who_we_are/history/family_history_service/family_history_service_our_service.htm (viewed 27/10/2013).

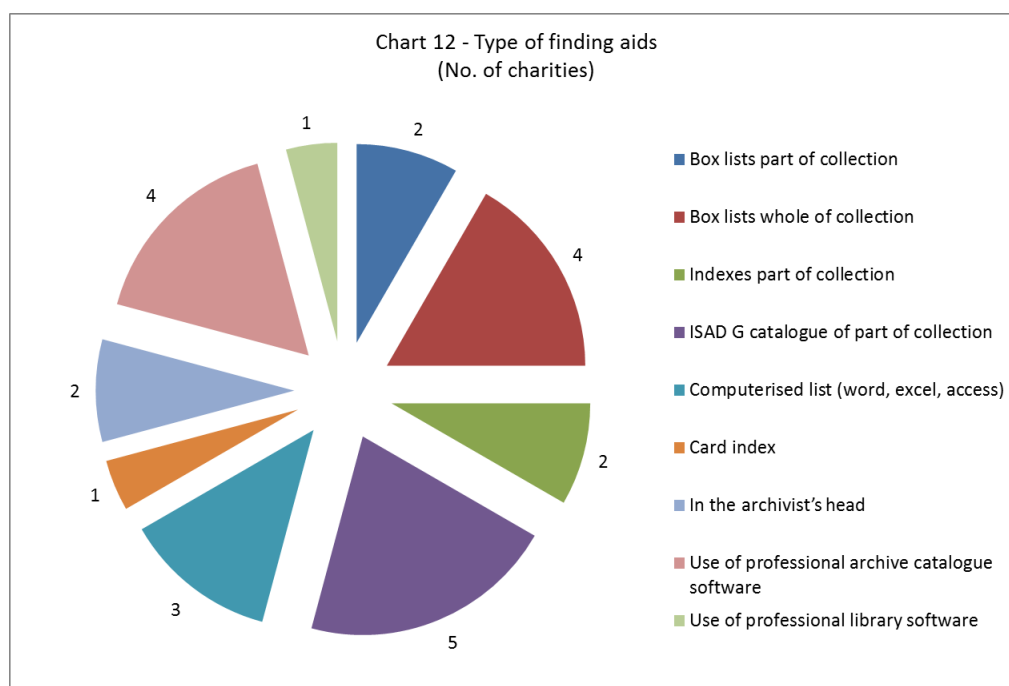[83] http://www.arnosvale.org.uk/family-record-search (viewed 27/10/2013).

[84] http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/About%20us/archive_access_policy_2013.pdf (viewed 07-10-13).

them. 'We never used to charge a search fee, but we had all these people that would come in nothing to do with us, and it does tend to weed out the ones who are speculating'.[85]

All of those offering access to their collections also undertook or allowed copying in various different forms. Photocopies were provided in all but one case where only electronic scans of documents were provided (at significant cost). Charging for photocopying was patchy, and only one charity used copyright declaration forms, but another did have a statement in their accompanying letter about copying and useage.[86] Most provided copies (sometimes electronically) at no charge and those who preferred only on-site visitors allowed readers to use their own digital cameras without restriction.

FINDING AIDS AND CATALOGUING

While access is available to all collections in some form, the ability to find material in that collection and to efficiently use the whole of a collection was variable.

Chart 12 - Type of finding aids
(No. of charities)

- Box lists part of collection
- Box lists whole of collection
- Indexes part of collection
- ISAD G catalogue of part of collection
- Computerised list (word, excel, access)
- Card index
- In the archivist's head
- Use of professional archive catalogue software
- Use of professional library software

Half of the charities had at least made a start on the creation of an ISAD-G standard catalogue, with representation across the size spectrum. In the case of the small and medium charities this cataloguing had been made possible through external grant funding, either through the NCGS or the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme, whereas the larger charities had funded this

---

[85] Interview.
[86] Interview.

February 2014

themselves, with the exception of one case where it had been done by the third party institution which held the records.

Six charities were in the process of developing ISAD-G standard electronic catalogues, but were at different stages of progress as shown in table 7 below.

TABLE 7

Level of progress	No. of charities
<5%	1
5-10%	2
40-50%	1
60-70%	2

Despite dedicated staff for some of the cataloguing projects, the progress was in some cases slow because of the size of the collection. One charity had spent 18 months creating 17,000 catalogue entries, but this still represented only approximately 5% of its collection.[87] This was a discrete project and when finished no more work would be done unless additional funding could be found. Only one charity had their catalogue publicly available online, but one planned to have a partial catalogue available internally by the end of 2013 and two others would have catalogues available online externally in 2014 and 2015.[88]

What emerges is a very mixed situation, where access is always restricted, whether through obligations under Data Protection and other legislation or a desire by the charity to keep material secret, or at least not to promote its existence. This though is balanced against the resources those who look after these collections are given to provide a service, and the level to which the collections are ready to be able to open up and more importantly promote the archival services they offer.

> *You don't make a big to-do about having a collection which isn't catalogued, because that invites people to come and get disappointed when they can't actually access it.[89]*

The reasons behind the accessibility of collections are explored further in Chapter V, but a final piece of evidence for the lack of willingness to open up collections more are the benefits, or lack of them, which charities receive as part of the work done. The majority of users of these collections are low profile. Only in a few cases has the use of archives by external users resulted in any significant benefit for the charity. One author who used a collection

---

[87] Interview.
[88] Interview.
[89] Interview.

30

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

gave a lecture for the charity, media attention has created a very significant influx of enquiries for another and an academic has helped promote one charity's history of work across the world. But very few of these instances are thought to have had any lasting impact.

CHAPTER V

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHARITY AND THE CHALLENGES OF CHARITY ARCHIVES

There have always been two main arguments for the retention of archives. Firstly that of day to day governance, the retention of material to aid with the practical running of an organisation; evidence to prove they own something, or that a certain decision was made at a certain time; or in the example of charities that they are able to prove that they are making a difference. Secondly and supposedly less important is corporate memory. The ability to see where the organisation has been, to allow it to use its triumphs or mistakes to help make decisions in the future and to utilise that history to help promote the work and ethos of the organisation.

While the first of these is oft quoted as the most compelling argument for the retention of archives in practice this would seem not to be the case. The question of the importance of archives to their organisation is invariably met by similar responses.

> One of the things about what we [the charity] do is that it is self-evidently good, we don't need a lot of record keeping to establish that. What is interesting is why we did it … and it is the stories of why the volunteers are important.[90]

> Our archive is the heart of our organisation, the soul, if you like, it's our memory. … Its value to the organisation and to the rest of society is enormous. While a lot of public records record facts and figures our archive is full of wonderful stories about individuals and communities, it's something you don't find anywhere else than in charity archives.[91]

> [Our archive] illustrates the genetic relationship [of our charity] and the reasons for founding [it] and the things that grew from it, or because of it, or were somehow related to it.[92]

> The story is unique and the organisation is unique.[93]

> It's about sustaining a cultural identity, … and that tends to be a more powerful argument than the governance argument.[94]

It is manifestly the stories and the ability to use the memory which archives hold that is by far the most compelling reason for charities to keep them. This is the case amongst all interested groups;

---

[90] Interview.
[91] Interview.
[92] Interview.
[93] Interview.
[94] Interview.

Chief Executives, Archivists and those who use archives. It is an emotional response not a business decision.

It seems that archives are mostly only useful for a governance role when they are required for regulatory reasons, or when there is a crisis. They are 'worth their weight in gold' during legal proceedings.[95]

> *There is a very real case for keeping charity archives so that we have a degree of transparency because charities have a public benefit in terms of a tax break and in return for that they are meant to provide public good. That cannot be assessed if there is no record keeping … . This has most clearly been seen in the recent child abuse cases where trusted institutions have been held to account because of record keeping.[96]*

Conversely record keeping of this kind has also exonerated charities and saved them millions of pounds.[97]

No senior charity manager mentioned governance as an important part of why they kept an archive and only four people mentioned it at all. It should perhaps be asked why this is the case. Is it most closely linked to the paucity of regulation, of regulators checking whether those records organisations should be keeping are in fact kept? However wider cultural influences should also be considered, with the growing perception of archives performing a cultural heritage role fuelled by the boom in research and the influence of Heritage Lottery Fund money which has seemingly supplanted their traditional evidential role.[98] We have said above that governance arguments for the retention of archives are only truly considered in a crisis, but these crises anecdotally are few and far between and are soon forgotten as staff move on.

If, as it seems, emotion and cultural influences, and little solid business reason is what is supplying the lifeblood to charity archives then it is perhaps not surprising that the future of many charity archives is precarious.

In almost every case the success or failure of a charity archive has fallen on a single individual or a very small group of concerned people. Out of those organisations involved with this study only two had initially, as a whole organisation, been behind the retention and development of the archive. In all other cases it had been a single individual who had managed to convince the organisation to look after and invest in their collection and in one instance one individual to undo decades of

---

[95] Interview.
[96] Interview.
[97] Interview.
[98] See: Ray, L. et al 2013. Funding archive services in England and Wales: institutional realities and professional perceptions. In 'Archives and Records: Journal of the Archives & Records Association'. p.16.

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

work.[99] This is probably at the heart of the weakness of the position of charity archive collections. With no understood business (governance) reason for their retention amongst decision makers, they are seen as an unnecessary luxury and when staff leave their futures are repeatedly thrown into doubt.

Most charitable organisations have been set up by very passionate individuals whose whole life was dedicated to the cause they championed. These include legendary names such as Dr. Barnardo, Leonard Cheshire or William Morris as well as far less well known, but no less important, people such as Lady Reading or Sir William Hillary. Many of these organisations functioned on the good will of volunteers and were driven by the strong ethical imperatives of their dynamic founders.

The increasing professionalisation of charities over the past 20 years has brought with it a huge problem.

> *One of the challenges for the charitable sector is the ethos of senior management, because in the past when there was a greater stability in senior management the ethical motors behind these charities were a given. They no longer are.[100]*
>
> *Part of the problem is a generic form of managerialism where any Chief Executive worth his salt is under constant pressure to re-organise continuously. This type of Managerial Maoism can be profoundly destructive of any sense of continuity within the organisation and ultimately lead to not just the marginalisation of the archives but lots of other specialists within the organisation.[101]*
>
> *We can all think of people who have flipped between charitable, public, private sector, … just to round off their CV and move on, often implementing re-organisations to prove that they are doing something. Driven by a contemporary understanding of what a manager does rather than by the needs of the charity.[102]*

This professionalisation and the high turnover of staff (in one charity the yearly turnover of staff was 33%) has led to a disconnect between many charities and their histories and makes the retention of an archive, based almost exclusively on the emotional buy-in of important individuals, very challenging.[103] It has been this emotional buy-in, or lack of it, which has led to the near destruction of and catastrophic disinvestment in many archives.

In 1992 the Women's Royal Voluntary Service became a charity and officially employed its first staff after spending the preceding 54 years as a Crown Service run by its members. The radical

---

[99] Interview.
[100] Interview.
[101] Interview.
[102] Interview.
[103] Interview.

34

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

transformation of the organisation which ensued, and the replacement of those long standing volunteers with members of staff, created a form of collective amnesia at the organisation's centre. This loss of the charity's corporate memory coupled with the on-going transformation led in 1996 to its archive (which had been running for 39 years) being mothballed and placed in warehouse storage. The archive would remain under threat of destruction for the next ten years, extremely marginalised and with little or no resource. The late 1990s and early 2000s were an exceptionally difficult time for the Royal Voluntary Service, many factors coming together to form a perfect storm which left its archive in a perilous position.

This is just one example that has many other parallels. Another organisation was proud of its past and maintained a museum, photograph collection, library and archive until a new member of senior management was appointed who had no interest in the history of the organisation or its historic collections. Within 5 years, a large proportion was disposed of or held by third party repositories; almost the only part retained on-site by their archive was the statutorily required portion.[104]

> *Many charities have a tension between being seen to invest in frontline services … and as a result a tendency to underinvest in their archival provision. Often this means collections are kept in very poor conditions, accessibility is invisible which leads to the marginalisation of these archive collections to the point where they are then deposited in other institutions where they often suffer further neglect. It is particularly important that an appropriate level of investment in terms of storage, conservation, but also human capital to be able to look after those archives with a suitable degree of professional oversight and interpretation of those collections is available. This is particularly important in an environment where staff turnover is incredibly high and the institutional continuity is very fragile.[105]*

This is particularly the case in large organisations where the separation between senior management and the archive is a significant one. It is easy to forget about something you might never visit in your entire career with an organisation.

There are instances where benign neglect can in fact be advantageous, especially in organisations which own their own buildings and have been in these locations for a long time. This steady accumulation and low key management saving collections that otherwise may be lost or destroyed. Three charities were in this situation, where their collections had been either slowly accumulating or managed by volunteers for decades with little or no interest from the organisations, which had only recently begun to take notice of their potential. While these collections were not under threat, neither were they managed properly nor was there, in two cases, any access to them at all. They could perhaps be best described as slowly decaying. This falls at the heart of the question about the cost of retention of these collections.

---

[104] Interview.
[105] Interview.

35

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

Where a collection is invisible to an organisation and when it does not appear as an itemised cost then the collections appear to be *safe*. Asked whether their archive service provided value for money, one senior charity manger replied

> *That is the wrong question. The reality is that you would have to get up to a much more significant sum of money each year before you would start asking yourself the value for money question.*[106]

All of these issues have led to the current state of charity archives. While it has been explored in the previous chapters the resources available to them and the extent to which they are accessible, the question remains about how they continue to function, with both internal and external pressures.

The challenges faced by charity archives are by no means unique, but it is perhaps the singular lack of resources these archives have to begin with which makes their survival and development all the more interesting. The challenges can be split down into three main groups. The first revolves around the status they and their collections hold within an organisation.

> *We are just a thorn in the side to some people, because we are a constant reminder of the history that they are constantly wanting to get away from.*[107]

> *Because I'm not an employee … I have no status. I can only make recommendations and I am left out when decisions are being made.*[108]

> *It's a lack of support from line management, who just don't understand what I do so pretty much leave me to my own devices. It's got its advantages until you need help with something.*[109]

The second is internal politics.

> *Politics without a doubt – I have to have my ear so close to the ground, you develop a sixth sense for stuff. … This job is 80% politics 20% doing stuff. … It is justifying what we do partly, it is promoting what we do, partly. It is fighting to the death, partly. … It's just perpetual public relations.*[110]

> *Internal Politics, there are members and trustees who just 'don't get it'.*[111]

> *Politics – Trying to keep the archive on the agenda and fire fighting against stupid ideas from senior management who are not interested and have no conception about the running and managing an archive collection.*[112]

---

[106] Interview.
[107] Interview.
[108] Interview.
[109] Interview.
[110] Interview.
[111] Interview.

The continual need to innovate, to win awards or recognition to prove your purpose and bring what you do to the attention of those who make the big decisions. If I didn't do all these things and just focused on making the collection better I can guarantee that serious questions would start to be asked about how much it costs to keep the archive. It stops me doing what I should be doing, which is making the collection more accessible.[113]

It just feels like we are constantly being challenged about what we do and why we are doing it.[114]

We've been dropped from the induction programme making it more difficult to engage new starters with the archive.[115]

While promotion and public relations is part of what all archive managers have to do, it seems to take a disproportional amount of time from charity archivists making undertaking day to day tasks very difficult, and the problem is particularly acute for lone and especially part time archivists.

There is so much that ultimately needs doing the task can seem overwhelming.[116]

The third is money.

Oh money, money, money, it's always money! If any archivist you have interviewed has said that money isn't an issue for them, then I don't know what they are doing.[117]

Finding funding and then doing it when you get the grant bid, takes up a lot of time management wise.[118]

The perception is that we should think ourselves lucky that we have far more resources than other departments.[119]

Most archives battled to get even the most insignificant funding for their collections from their organisations. For example, one collection for the sake of £150 for some monitoring equipment ended up with a mould problem and a £15,000 conservation bill.[120]

ACADEMIC ACCESS AND THIRD PARTY DEPOSITION

The willingness or ability of charities to maintain their archives in-house has over the years found several solutions. It is undeniable that much of the history of charity archives has been lost through the destruction of material as charities have closed, merged or downsized. But for some

---

[112] Interview.
[113] Interview.
[114] Interview.
[115] Interview.
[116] Interview.
[117] Interview.
[118] Interview.
[119] Interview.
[120] Interview.

February 2014

charities a solution to the cost of maintaining their archives has been found in depositing or gifting of their collections to third party repositories. These can be large national, or university repositories or local record offices.

It has long been the ambition of many academic researchers to get charities to deposit their collections with public archives to make them more accessible. The VAHS *National Archive of Voluntary Action* proposal in the 1990s was the first significant manifestation of this and the CVSA is in part a reanimation of this idea, with individual academics encouraging charities that they come in contact with to deposit their collections with third party collections. This was also 'one of the most important things [they] did in DANGO, [to] match … NGOs to potential archives'.[121] This desire stems from the restricted access imposed by almost all charity archives. The by-appointment or remote access, in many cases with time limits, does not easily accommodate the lengthy in-depth research requirements of academics. But for those charities without an archivist (professional or honorary) researchers often found it difficult to get past the 'gatekeepers', repeatedly coming up against brick walls.

> *There are issues of time and staff availability, although I think that they can also be used as excuses. … Having somewhere to work and someone to be there with you, that could be a barrier, but it is probably more of an excuse. … For many it is just too much hassle, for others they are focussed on the future and may want to forget their past, others are worried about reputational risk.*[122]

> *They don't grant access because a lot of it is pragmatic, they don't have the resources, they are oriented on present and future, they have to be fleet of foot. It's only the older established organisations, who have roots in the 19th century who have the resources, the space and the sense of their own history, [who] want to appoint an archivist.*[123]

Excuses which bar researchers from access to collections, to save organisations hassle, are inevitably given. However, this exposes the far deeper problem of the lack of resources and skills these organisations have to deal with such complicated requests which potentially have far reaching consequences. As most charities are still relatively young data protection is a particular issue, but there are also reputational risks that these charities face in making their records available. Without skilled oversight and management organisations in many cases have no idea what material is contained in their files and what risks they are exposing themselves to in allowing researchers access. The laborious, and costly, work to assess each file has in the majority of cases not been done and the easiest and most cost effective method of protecting themselves is therefore to refuse access.

---

[121] Interview.
[122] Interview.
[123] Interview.

February 2014

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

38

The argument made for third party deposit are three fold; that the records will be better preserved and safe for the future, better documented and that access will be increased. As we have seen very few charities have the capacity to keep their collections under ideal environmental conditions and it cannot be denied that care in professional repositories would be better for their long term preservation. The final two arguments though must be examined more closely.

In the past (from the examples given) it is probably true that the documentation of collections was vastly improved by the third party repositories which took that material on; an example would be the cataloguing in the 1980s of the Barnardo's collection by Liverpool University. But the situation today is likely to be significantly different, especially with large accessions. With the tightening of budgets little now comes for free and the security of third party deposit is no longer guaranteed. Three charities who took part in this study have their collections held on deposit with third party repositories. One is paying for the cataloguing of its collection, one has no proper catalogue and is unlikely to have in the foreseeable future, and the final one has been asked to find a new home for its collection by summer 2014.

The latter situation has come about through a particular trait of university archives, 'You end up following fashion'.[124] This is not particular to this collection either, the Women's Library and their move from London Metropolitan University to the LSE is another example. 'As the pressures build on the higher education sector and local authorities, we may well see the issue of de-accessioning coming up'.[125] As the academics who attracted the collections to the particular university move on and their subject area is marginalised or dropped as it falls out of fashion, so the archives they attracted become less popular. Poorly used, and therefore not offering value for money, the need arises to replace them with collections that will attract more researchers. This is particularly the case where collections are only on deposit.

It is rare (outside the local authority record office system) to find institutions which will now take any sizeable deposits without substantial strings and money attached. 'These days we try to negotiate gifts'.[126] Gifting was the option taken by Oxfam, which after very lengthy negotiations gave its archive to the Bodleian Library, severing the charity's ability to have the final say on how its collection is used and accessed. However, in its initial stages, this case does present an interesting example of collaborative working with Oxfam archive and library staff working alongside

---

[124] Interview.
[125] Interview.
[126] Interview.

each other. There is also a steering group with representatives from Oxfam on it and a desire from the library that this should be a long term collaborative effort.[127]

The professional archival standards by which these collections will be looked after are also surely a better situation than they might enjoy in many in-house charity archives? However, looking at the number of collections housed by public archive institutions raises another question. The two institutions which took part in this study each have in excess of 2,500 individual collections in their care; one had 17,000 and another over 4,000 linear metres of material.[128] Can an archivist in those institutions have a proper understanding of each one of those collections, or have the time and resources to promote the use of one collection over another?

> *Archives don't become dead when they enter a public institution, they can be kept alive by the holding institution by encouraging use and development. That is of course the ideal case. Large collecting institutions cannot though devote time and energy to one of many thousands of accessions and therefore the situation as it is [at our charity] is probably better.[129]*

In charities where they are able to employ a professional archivist or have a skilled honorary archivist there is invariably a very significant amount of knowledge vested in these individuals. While this can in some cases be a bad thing (one charity's honorary archivist maintained almost all knowledge of the collection in his head finding it difficult to share it) more generally that knowledge is extremely detailed and enables them to eloquently tell and share the great stories that their collections hold. In fact such an encounter with an archivist was what got one interviewee 'hooked on archival research'.[130]

This accumulated knowledge, easily and immediately accessible is one of the strengths of in-house archives and one which is on the whole lost as a result of third party deposit, when collections are permanently dislocated from their creators. The contextual value of archives in their original setting and their on-going connection with their creating organisation is key.

> *[The main problem is the loss of] context and memory , but these aren't insuperable. As an archivist you should be gathering context when it arrives, and [maintaining] good links with the charity on-going. The main problem is charities ceasing to use their collections and therefore cease to value it. They no longer see it as part of their assets.[131]*

---

[127] Correspondence between the author and the Bodleian Library.
[128] Interview.
[129] Interview.
[130] Interview.
[131] Interview.

If you created it wherever possible you should take responsibility for it, you should recognise it as being your corporate memory. It's about how an in-house archives allows value from the corporate memory to flow back into the organisation. Which it does not do, however you stack it up, when it is outsourced to a third party for storage. Organisations lose their connection with the collection and that corporate memory. If you put all archives out to third parties, what is there for the future? It creates a disconnect and a divide; what records would make it through to the archive world from charities?[132]

I would suggest that many [issues] are a lot easier to solve within the organisation. You have complete control and you are likely to be more culturally engaged if you hold it in house. Above all you will probably have the institutional knowledge to properly interpret the collection, which an external body may not.[133]

It's easy enough to forget about an archive which is on-site let alone across the city.[134]

While the balance of opinion as part of this study might be that ultimately the retention of archival collections in-house is best culturally and contextually, amongst professional archivists and others an opinion remains that collections which are neglected and inaccessible might be better elsewhere.

It is key that their archives are publicly accessible. … If it [a charity] isn't able to curate and make accessible its collections it shouldn't be keeping them.[135]

They are only at their best [in-house], if they are able to manage and provide access, and make use of them, not at their best if they are just in a basement with no knowledge of what is in them.[136]

Some of the big organisations do have their own archives and I have always been intrigued as to why they are so keen on keeping hold of it. … Providing the deposition leads to greater access it is richer surely [in a third party repository].[137]

The assertion that access within third party repositories to these collections is far superior is superficially unassailable. Opening hours of national, university and local record offices are usually at least office hours or better with in many cases no appointments required. Compare this to charity collections where there may be no on-site access or access by appointment only and the distinctions become clear. However looking more closely at this there is a deeper question of the diversity and number of users of this material. The diversity and numbers of those using in-house charity archive collections has already been discussed above. The same question applied to those collections housed in third party repositories gives a very different impression.

---

[132] Interview.
[133] Interview.
[134] Interview.
[135] Interview.
[136] Interview.
[137] Interview.

February 2014

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

While the number of users of a very few collections are broadly comparable, productions up in the mid-200s, these tend to be collections which are fashionable at any one time. Use of other charity collections though were in low double or single digits. Accompanying this, the use of these collections were almost exclusively by three groups, academics, students and the depositing institutions. In terms of the depositing charities, at one third party repository, only 10% of those who had deposited archives came back to use them, and then the use was termed as 'very intermittent', of the other 90% it was said that 'most of them just want to get rid of it' but they do 'feel guilty'.[138]

As both institutions are university collections it is impossible to make a judgement about the level to which this might also apply to other public archives, but the inference here is that there 'might be a cultural barrier which prevents members of the public from using university facilities', with the general public perhaps finding university archives intimidating and unwelcoming.[139] What is perhaps more definable is the nature of the way most people look for information. It is much easier to contact the charity to ask them for information than to try to locate material that may have been deposited as one of thousands of un-promoted collections in a public archive. Even if an individual asks a charity who has deposited material, it is all too often the case that they do not know what happened to material they may have deposited in the past. One university archive had an example of a charity that had been ringing round institutions trying to find material to help them celebrate their anniversary. They had no idea that 30 years ago they had deposited records there.

For all the disadvantages of depositing archives with third parties, there are also significant advantages for charities, not least the removal of on-going costs and the release of responsibility for those collections.

> When it is in-house, it is a pain in the arse; if you give it away you have one less person asking you for money et cetera.[140]

While this is a very honest answer, it strikes at the heart of the issues, however:

> Out sourcing everything is theoretically better, but every outsourcing project I have been involved with has never ended up with a better result than when in-house and it certainly doesn't come cheaper.[141]

The successful deposition of archive material with a third party is a symbiotic relationship, such as that enjoyed by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, where regular deposits have been made over a protracted period and resources for their cataloguing have been supplied by the charity. Deposited

---

[138] Interview.
[139] Interview.
[140] Interview.
[141] Interview.

in the Library of Birmingham this approach for collections with regional ties seems to be a possible exemplar for at least some collections.

> *I like to see biodiversity of archival repositories, … the reality is that we will always have a mixed economy of deposited collections and in-house collections. … [There does though] need to be a distinction for very small, local charities, who don't have the capacity and no premises.[142]*

Records from very small local charities are often ephemeral, housed in the lofts of trustees, and in these cases it seems preferable to see these deposited with their county record offices or other local archives. And, ultimately if a charity fails or ceases to exist it is better that collections are stored somewhere than lost. However if every charitable and voluntary organisation in the UK were to want to deposit its collections with a public archive, the capacity that there is would quickly be overwhelmed.

> *I think ultimately we will have casualties and some institutions will make a good fist of it and others won't.[143]*

What is clear is that third party deposit seems to be a very viable concept for very small charities, and even larger regional charities, their purpose and activity in one small geographical area falling easily into line with public archives' collecting policy. Where more difficulty arises is for large national collections which have no easy fit with collecting institutions and where much material is likely to be closed for significant periods.

---

[142] Interview.
[143] Interview.

CHAPTER VI

CHARITY ARCHIVES AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

It has been seen how the nature of charities, their management and the resources at the disposal of those who care for them have collectively created the current situation, but how do charity archivists and those who look after charity archives see their collections and those of charity archives in the wider archival sector.

What is perhaps most striking is the lack of knowledge of the wider archives world, and more particularly the lack of knowledge of the archives of other charities, that those individuals had. 'I'm a little bit in a bubble … so I don't really see a lot of what is going on'.[144]

This was repeated across many other interviews, curators and custodians were so busy dealing with their own problems that they did not have time or the inclination to get involved in understanding and participating in the wider sector. With most charity archives being run by a single individual, many part-time, the ability to effectively close down the service they offered to go to meetings or to explore wider issues was extremely limited.

Voluntary groups such as CHARM and CVSA have tried to lessen this isolation and bring together interested parties to help each other and to shine a spotlight on and campaign for help in improving care for charity archives. But maintaining membership, interest and momentum behind these groups, with the daily challenges charity archivists face, has proven difficult. Encouraging wide and diverse membership has been particularly challenging. Both CHARM and CVSA are London centric groups, with few of their members, who regularly attend meetings or participate in the groups' work, coming from outside the capital. Both are pushed along by a small number of very dedicated individuals many of whom work for the oldest and largest charities and academic institutions and it is a credit to them that they have been able to achieve what they have.

In building a coalition of interested groups and individuals, including CHARM, TNA and VAHS, the CVSA has managed to pool the very limited resources available to produce some draft guidance for the Voluntary Sector, aimed primarily at non-professionals who look after charity archives.[145]

---

[144] Interview.
[145] CVSA, 2013, *Keeping Value: archival guidance for the voluntary sector.*

44

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

This one stop shop for basic advice and signposting to additional resources is something which has been missing for some time and if successfully publicised will prove useful to many struggling along and with limited knowledge and skill in the sector. The group has also been trying to engage the Charity and Information Commissioners in providing help and advice to charities through their channels, currently with little success.

The most descriptive phrase of the sector to come out of this report was 'splintered and diverse' and in spite of the efforts of groups like CHARM and CVSA the difficulties of pulling the sector together and especially to reach those smaller organisations which do not have professional archivists perpetuates.

Without money and an umbrella organisation to administer any concerted and focused programme or project to develop the sector, it is difficult to see how any meaningful progress can be made in the shorter term. The obvious candidate is TNA which now has the task of leading the whole archival sector. However, TNA seem to have found it difficult to adjust its thinking to this wider role and is still very focused on the public sector, particularly local authority archives.[146] The recently published review of TNA's sector leadership function highlights this with criticism of its continuing local authority focus and that it is perceived as doing little to assist business, charity and voluntary archives.[147]

Unfortunately, there is a risk that many of TNA's schemes designed to promote archives and to raise standards within the sector will do little more than re-enforce the growing inequality that Matthew McMurray and Helen Forde have spoken about in the past.[148]

The Accreditation Scheme, which is a joint development by TNA and a coalition of Welsh, Scottish and English archival and cultural bodies, is perhaps the most recent and divisive of these schemes. Designed to set and encourage the attainment of a standard for archival repositories, it is in the opinion of many of the interviewees only likely to do harm to the charity archive sector.[149] The standard set was generally perceived to be unattainable for charity archives.

In general the scheme was described as 'a great bureaucracy which keeps people at TNA in business' and 'not flexible enough, it's born out of the public records world, without a doubt, out of

---

[146] Interview.
[147] Norgrove et al, 2013, 27-28.
[148] See Chapter III.
[149] Interviews.

the local authority records world and they just haven't thought about business records, about the charity sector, about anything else that exists actually'.[150]

The biggest fear though came from the angle of funding. 'Funding organisations such as the HLF will probably look upon those with accreditation more favourably, but those without probably need the money more'.[151] 'It will particularly disadvantage those who don't get it, particularly in relation to funding'.[152]

> *With funding bodies so focused on taking little risk and making sure that they are assured the right outcomes from projects they fund, it seems inevitable that they will prefer those archives which have accredited status. I would imagine that those who can't achieve that are likely to fall further back in any queue for funding and that charity archives are likely to end up at the very bottom of that queue if in it at all.[153]*

While the charity archives sector needs to organise and co-operate, to help itself to improve its lot, it will need assistance to do so. Unless archival and funding umbrella bodies change their approach and create a level playing field or even positively discriminate it is difficult to see how change will happen.

---

[150] Interview.
[151] Interview.
[152] Interview.
[153] Interview.

CONCLUSIONS

The challenges faced by charity archives are, in many cases, no different than those faced by others in business, private, religious and the public sectors; internal politics and money. However it is the unique restrictions on charities, the overriding need to fulfil their charitable purpose and to focus the maximum of their income and attention on this, that has led the charity archives sector to its current situation and makes them feel these restrictions more keenly than others.

In the majority of cases charities are spending less than £50,000 a year on their archives and many a much lower or unmeasureable amount. These sums barely cover the storage of these important collections in sub-standard conditions and the part time employment of a professional to look after them. This though is only possible for the very largest charities, those with incomes over £10 million. Those with incomes under this threshold (and many above) are reliant on unqualified staff or volunteers to care for their collections and run any service. Analysis of the amounts spent on collections in relation to their charity's income suggests that the maximum amount that would be tolerated for even the largest and most regulated charity would be 0.7% of their income, on average though the figure is only 0.3%.[154] Translated into real terms the tolerance for a cash cost to a charity, with an income of £500,000, would be £1,500 per year.

This brings into stark focus the challenges faced by charity sector archives. If a critical mass of £10 million is lacked, without the support of skilled volunteers it would be unlikely they could maintain an in-house archive and provide any type of service. This is of course subject to a number of caveats, including if a charity owns its own property, which has adequate storage space, and whether the archive/library is part of its core purpose (as it was with one participant). Those charities with incomes under £500,000 make up almost 94% of all the registered charitable organisations in the country and without a considerable change in attitude it is unclear how the majority of these could support the retention of archives.[155]

Institutional usefulness is ultimately the key to any non-statutory record keeping. How does it help the charity to achieve its charitable purpose, and how does it help the organisation in its day to day work? It has been seen how this concept of institutional usefulness amongst senior management is in most cases limited at best. The role of archives and record keeping in general and their role in governance is almost completely missing from their understanding; or at best there is an

---

[154] See Table 4.
[155] http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-charities/sector-facts-and-figures/ (Viewed 22/11/13).

unwillingness to engage in it. 'One of the things about what we [the charity] do is [that it is] self-evidently good, we don't need a lot of record keeping to establish that'.[156]

Also, structured record keeping in some organisations is almost non-existent and therefore their ability to create archives is impaired, or there is no link between records management and the archive which results in the same thing. Archives are seen as *nice to have*, an evocation of a fondly remembered past, with perhaps some potential to help them fundraise or market themselves. It is all about the captivating stories that they can tell, not the facts that they can provide.

What is perhaps of most concern is that the majority of archives are used by more people outside the organisation than those inside. However, this must be balanced by a realisation that while numbers may be lower, the length of time spent on enquiries for internal clients is often longer. If charities use their collections less than members of the public (if they allow access) then there will always be an increased tension on the value of their continuation. Why should a charity be spending money supporting someone's family history research or an academic's studies if that does not have congruence with their core purpose. The answer is ultimately linked to the benefit that these organisations gain from the contact and subsequent publicity, but it seems that the impact that any of these external researchers have for the charities that help them is extremely limited.

While archives have been created, or accumulated through benign neglect in the past, the lack of investment in many over long periods of time has left them in a condition where their institutional usefulness is extremely limited or non-existent. They have become fossils and if not dead, they are very much on a life support machine. Rather than just the challenge of running and maintaining an archive, it is this challenge of making in some cases significant collections of material useful, and the time, money and patience which most tests the charities to which they belong. The amount of effort required to transform a pile of boxes in a warehouse into an organisational asset is significant. Institutional underinvestment and its consequences are directly related to this 'managerial Maoism'; of trying to forget or repress the past, of focusing solely on the future; reorganisation as a means of self-advancement. Even where an archive, library or museum may be successful and institutionally useful as we have seen it can easily and quickly be swept away.

Cost cutting will always disproportionally affect archives across the whole sector, especially in times of recession. However, in the case of charity archives, when they are not part of that

---

[156] Interview.

organisation's core purpose, they are even more vulnerable. Much has been made over the past few years about the severe impact of government cost cutting on public sector archives, with redundancies and even in a few cases the closure of services. While it is undeniable that the recession and the cuts have hit public sector archives hard, the majority are still in existence providing a very good level of care for their records and a service to the public. As large institutions with significant numbers of staff they can to some extent absorb these cuts. It is though not just during times of recession that charity archives are hit. It is perceived by those who work in the sector as an on-going process, one which is neither tied to nor perhaps particularly influenced by any prevailing economic climate. However, the result of cuts for charity archives, where there is only perhaps one member of staff, invariably brings the complete cessation of services or the disposal of collections, their anonymity meaning they depart with little outcry or attention.

How then will it be possible to retain any charity archive collections into the future? If the key to their survival is institutional usefulness, how is this going to be achieved? How can the smallest charities maintain archives and how will any charity archive be able to be accessed in the future?

It has been seen how some of the largest charities are able to maintain and offer access to an in-house archive collection, sometimes on very low budgets, but ultimately these collections are in a continually precarious position. With some charities volunteers are the key, providing not only basic help but also in some cases professional skills, but qualified volunteer archivists outside big cities are a rarity. Ultimately collections run by volunteers without professional supervision can be extremely counterproductive and in some cases damaging. Large and well run volunteer projects though can enable the development of collections, which might otherwise have stayed hidden. That is not to say that volunteer projects are cost free, but for larger organisations they do offer a range of advantages.

Ultimately it is this ability of these organisations to make their collections accessible, primarily for their own use, which will attract attention and then perhaps additional resources. Many of the volunteer projects were involved with cataloguing and repackaging material, some with answering enquiries. The task for many though is enormous. The Royal Voluntary Service's volunteer project has been running for 5 years, attracting over 1,300 hours of volunteering time every year. The scale of their archive means that during the period their project has been running they have managed to catalogue only 5-6% of their collection, the majority of the computerised cataloguing work done by professional staff. Of all the collections which participated in this study most had completed professional standard catalogues of less than 50% of their collections, many were not even able to consider this option. Of those who had professional catalogues, most were created by third party organisations or through grant funding.

This presents a significant problem. With no resources to make grant bids or the track record to convince funders to give money if they do, many charities will be unable to use this source of funding to help them. The current system seems heavily weighted towards large public sector bodies who, relatively speaking, are already well funded. Where charities have been able to gain this grant funding it is those who can call on professional volunteers to write bids and those who have the facilities to give access to material which have been successful; charities which are large and or have established successful archives and or libraries. Until there is a change in the way in which funders approach their grant giving, it is unlikely that there will be a move away from the current situation where the rich get richer and the poor continue to be marginalised.

The solution which has been touted by many, particularly from the academic world, is that charities should deposit their collection with third party repositories; university libraries, national and regional archive institutions and public record offices. In some circumstances this has worked well or offers promise, but in one third party repository 90% of depositing charities have no ongoing relationship with their deposited material. These archives have become dead, divorced from much of their context and used only by a very few and very restricted user group (academics and students). While it is argued that these institutions can give these collections new life and that such problems are not insuperable, with charity collections making up perhaps only one percent of the thousands of collections which they house, there is little evidence that these institutions can resource the promotion of these little known and understood collections.[157] Or for that matter whether they can widen their user types to the broad spectrum currently enjoyed by some charity archives.

The instances where these deposits work is where there is an on-going relationship with charities and the organisations themselves retain ownership. However, these types of agreements are becoming rarer as pressure is placed on institutions to only hold well used and popular material or material which they own. Gifting has become the norm and we have already begun to see institutions giving back deposited collections to charities where long standing agreements have become burdensome. This is not to say that it might not be possible for gifting to work as a solution; the Oxfam and Bodleian collaboration, currently in its early stages, has aspects to recommend it, but we have yet to see how that experiment will work out in the longer term.

In contemplating third party deposition it should also be considered what type of organisation a charity is, how big it is and what statutory obligations it has. Those with very large collections are unlikely to find homes with existing public collections as the space is simply not available. Those with particularly sensitive information covered under the Data Protection Act are unlikely to find

---

[157] This is the case at the LSE and Wiltshire & Swindon History centre.

homes in public institutions as access could not be given to those collections for research. The impact of deposition, and the inevitable disconnection that occurs, may though not be so detrimental in some cases. For example, while volunteering organisations may need their past to re-enforce their connection with their volunteers, a grant giving trust is less likely to need that link; people will always want their money.

> *An organisation should ultimately take responsibility for its own records, it shouldn't expect somebody else to pick up the tab, and increasingly, expecting the public purse to pick up the tab is not going to be an option.* [158]

The best situation for charity archives must undeniably be for them to maintain their own collections, in a good enough state for them to be institutionally useful, where they benefit from the rich context their organisation can give them, and where hopefully they continue to be added to as living archives. But this does not always help those outside the organisation who want to use charity collections. The culture of openness and free access created over the past decade or so in public record offices has perhaps fuelled an expectation, that access to all information should be free; a situation which has placed an additional burden onto charities. Clearly funding access to collections on the scale offered by the public sector is unable to be done from the pockets of charities and a growing number of larger charities have turned to charged-for services of varying types to access material within their collections. Without other sources of external funding this would seem the only way some charities can justify external access. Charging can though not just be used as a vital revenue stream, but also as a method for lessening the demands on any service that is offered.

What is clear is that there is not a one size fits all solution to the problems which charity archives face. Ultimately the situation will most probably remain a mixed economy, where public institutions take those collections that they can from the smallest charities, where others work in partnership to care for their records and where those with enough critical mass look after their own collections. However, ultimately there will be casualties and it seems unlikely that without effort from important national umbrella organisations little will change.

While the issue of charity archives has been addressed over the last decade, with co-operative groups such as CHARM and VAHS working to highlight the problem and devise solutions, no one has so far been successful in turning their ideas and good intentions into measurable results. Where change has come to charities in respect to their archives, it has been internal pressure and in many cases small groups or individuals which have driven that change. This is not to say that either of these groups has had no impact, but they have, because of their voluntary nature and

---

[158] Interview.

51

ROYAL VOLUNTARY SERVICE
Registered charity 1015988 & SC038924. Registered in England 2520413.

February 2014

their singular lack of resources, been unable to gain the considered attention of those who could make a difference.

TNA, which now also has responsibility for non-public sector archives, has found it hard to adjust to its new role and two years in its own independent report highlights many of the shortcomings, and its successes. While the private archives team have been doing great work in helping to support individual charities and other private archives with advice, and also contributing to the RAG survey, TNA's efforts more generally are perceived by those who participated in this survey to be likely to harm not help the charity archives sector. The most recent example, the accreditation scheme, is likely only to perpetuate the inequality which currently exists and was highlighted earlier in relation to grant funding. Those who can gain accredited status (primarily public archives) are likely to further corner the market in their ability to attract grant funding, while those unable to do so (most likely all charity archives) will be further frozen out.

The state of charity archives in 2013 is mixed and in flux. Described by participants in this study as 'a little bit bleak', 'difficult', 'splintered and dispersed' and 'anchoring on poverty row', the situation is particularly challenging. This fragmented and dispersed nature is a consequence of a lack of time, resources and knowledge available to those who look after collections. Coupled with the continual struggle they face to gain support or even recognition from their own organisations, this has created a situation where a solution is currently unobtainable.

Ultimately, the value which organisations place upon their history, where they have been and what they have done, and how that informs who they are, is fundamental to the way in which they view and care for their archives. The survival of charity archives is inevitably predicated upon a continued flow of money to support them, whether that is the rent for the place in which they are stored or the salary of the person who looks after them. Change, successful change, is only going to come from one place, from within the organisations themselves, from senior management and trustees. It will require a significant, if not dramatic realignment of the current attitudes towards archives and record keeping more generally; a move away from the business bottom line and a move back towards the use of those ethical motors employed by their founders. But they will need help to make that change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following four recommendations are made in the light of the conclusions of this survey and represent just some of the most significant ways in which all concerned bodies could help preserve and develop charity archives for the future.

1. **In light of the need demonstrated in this report a respected and established umbrella organisation should undertake further work on the state of charity archives in the UK**. Any such work should combine both qualitative and quantitative data to build up a detailed picture of the situation. Any survey work should be large enough for the results to be statistically valid and should endeavour to cover the full diversity of the sector.

2. **All charities should look to pool resources and work collaboratively with each other and other institutions and agencies.** This report has highlighted charities, groups and institutions which have successfully managed to work together to gain funding to open up and preserve archives. The best examples include: Bristol Zoo and the Arnos Vale Cemetery working with Bristol University through the AHRC Doctoral Awards Programme or the Conway Hall Ethical Society's partnership with the Bishopsgate institute. Also the Barrow-Cadbury Trust's long term partnership with the Birmingham Archive Service.

3. **Umbrella organisations and statutory bodies need to actively engage charities in recognising the value of records and archives in governance.** Without effective oversight and guidance from bodies such as the Charity Commission, the Information Commissioners Office and TNA it is unlikely that changes to the management culture and their attitude towards record keeping will change.

4. **Funding bodies should positively discriminate to enable charities to apply for and be successful in gaining grant funding**. The ring fencing of funds to be used specifically for charity archives is essential if we are to see development of the sector. But this must be accompanied by funders providing substantial assistance to charities to enable them to apply in the first place.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PUBLISHED SOURCES

Baker, Rob. Dawson, Elizabeth. Dodd, Rosie. Roberts, Jill. Stapley, Karen. Wakeling, Catherine. Wakeling, Ian and Webb, Chrissie. 2010. *Making Charity Records Matter: a strategy for charity and voluntary sector archives and records.* CHARM.

BSI. 2000. *BS5454:2000:* Recommendations for the storage and exhibition of archival documents. British Standards Institute.

BSI. 2012. PD5454:2012: Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials. British Standards Institute.

NCGS. 2011. *National cataloguing grants scheme five year review (2006-2011).* The Pilgrim Trust. Pp18-19.

PSQG. 2011. *Survey of visitors to U.K Archives in 2011.* Archives and Records Association.

RAG, 2010. Religious Archives Survey 2010: *A survey of the archives of Religious Bodies within the United Kingdom and related Personal Papers.* The National Archives, Archives & Records Association, Religious Archives Group.

Norgrove, K and Mirchandani, S. 2013. *Review of the National Archives' sector leadership function: Final report.* Cultural Consulting network.

JOURNAL SOURCES

Forde, Helen. 2005. 'Access and Preservation in the 21st century'. Journal of the Society of Archivists. Pp193-200.

Freeth, S.G.H. 1991 'Destroying archives: A case study of the records of Standard Chartered Bank', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 12:2, pp85-94.

McMurray, Matthew. 2012. 'Out of the Headlines' in *Arc Magazine No. 277 Sept. 2012*, ARA, pp 37-38.

Ray, L. Shepherd, E. Flinn, A. Ander, E. & Laperdrix, M. 2013. 'Funding archive services in England and Wales: institutional realities and professional perceptions'. In *Archives and Records: Journal of the Archives & Records Association.*

Wakeling, I. 2004. 'Looking to the Future: Creating a National Charity Archives Strategy', in *ARC Magazine* Issue ?? 2004. Society of Archivists p. ??

February 2014

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES:

McMurray, M. 2013. *WRVS the First 75 years.* Unpublished presentation.

University of London and the Voluntary Action History Society, 1997. *Proposal for a National Archive of Social Action.* Unpublished Lottery Bid.

WEB SOURCES

Arnos Vale, Family record search: http://www.arnosvale.org.uk/family-record-search

Barnardo's Family History service: http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/who_we_are/history/family_history_service/family_history_service_our_service.htm

Campaign for voluntary sector archives (CVSA) 'The campaign launch': http://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/

Charity Commissions, Find Charities: http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/find-charities

CHARM: http://charmonline.org.uk/about.shtml

Conway Hall Ethical Society, About the collection: http://www.conwayhall.org.uk/about-the-collection

CVSA, 2013. *Keeping Value: Archival Guidance for the Voluntary Sector.* http://www.voluntarysectorarchives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Keeping-Value-published-draft-1.pdf

DANGO: http://www.dango.bham.ac.uk/Dango.Introduction.htm

Hidden Lives Revealed: http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk

National Cataloguing Grants programme: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/cataloguing-grants-programme.htm

Pritchard, Michael, 2013, *Barnardo's archive 'up for grabs' or destruction.* http://britishphotohistory.ning.com/m/blogpost?id=2680769%3ABlogPost%3A72775

Pudeleck, Jemma. 2013. 'Fears circulate that Barnardo's photo archive might be destroyed' in *Third Sector.* http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/1192660/fears-circulate-barnardos-photo-archive-destroyed/

Royal Voluntary Service, Archive & Heritage Collection: http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-history/archive-and-heritage-collection/collections

Royal Voluntary Service, Archive & Heritage Collection Access Policy: http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/About%20us/archive_access_policy_2013.pdf

Royal Voluntary Service, Schools resources: www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/schools

Voluntary Action History Society (VAHS) 'archives': http://www.vahs.org.uk/archives/

INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE