
The Archives Hub: a new resource for historical research

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Breweries, nuclear physicists, munitions workers and protest movements. Their connection? All have papers carefully stored in the archives of universities and colleges in the UK. Carefully preserved - but not necessarily easy to find out about. The aim of the Archives Hub is to provide a comprehensive online gateway to information about the raw material of history held in institutions of higher and further education throughout the country. Participating libraries range from those with thousands of archive collections, such as the Bodleian Library and Cambridge University Library, to those with fewer than ten. Bournemouth University has just one Archives Hub entry – but size really isn't important!

The service started as a pilot project in 1999, funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (<http://www.jisc.ac.uk>). Fifteen universities took part in the pilot, providing details about over 3,000

archives. Over 61 institutions are currently involved in submitting information about their holdings and by July 2003 more than 20,000 collections will be covered by the service. Most of these descriptions have been created using funding provided by the JISC, but a growing number have been produced by institutions which have not received any external funding. The website can be found at <http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk> and is freely available for everyone to use.

WHAT IS ON THE ARCHIVES HUB?

Archivists and librarians are compiling detailed collection-level descriptions of their holdings for inclusion in the service. These descriptions usually contain the following elements:

- Biographical information about the individual who created the archive or a history of the business or organisation
- Information about the records contained in the collection
- Information about the library or archive that looks after the collection
- Any restrictions on access to the collection
- Index terms which record key people, places and topics

The Archives Hub is a searching tool which allows researchers to find out about these resources without having to contact each university library or archive directly. In many cases, the Hub description is the first appearance on-line of information about a collection. Archivists and librarians have spent a great deal of time preparing the information that they send to Hub: the descriptions have to be easily understood by researchers who do not have the benefit of a nearby staff member to explain the complexities of archive catalogues. Descriptions also have to be adapted for their new worldwide context, with ten percent of Archives Hub searches originating overseas. It might be obvious within an institution that the 'Birmingham' mentioned in a description is in the West



Home page of the Hub

Midlands, but this might be less obvious for a user in Alabama.

WHO IS THE ARCHIVES HUB FOR?

The Hub is useful for anyone undertaking historical research. Academic historians use the service to find out about sources relevant to their research interests. Subjects covered include scientific research, industrial development, literary history, politics, medicine, art and architecture. Much effort has been expended on providing index terms so that users can identify significant themes across several thousand collections. The 'Subject finding' facility on the 'Browse indexes' page allows users to enter a natural language search and see likely matches in the index terms from Hub records. Many Archives Hub collections are relevant to people researching the history of their locality. Individuals are frequently mentioned in Hub descriptions, meaning that the service is also useful for biographers and family historians.

The Hub service team at Manchester provides free training for members of UK universities and colleges: please contact them at archiveshub@mimas.ac.uk if your history department would like to arrange training for postgraduates or undergraduates.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

An online data entry form is available from the page at <http://www.archiveshub.ac.uk/template.shtml>. Information about each archival collection is entered into this form, which is structured to reflect the International Standard for Archival Description. A button at the base of the form then converts the information into Encoded Archival Description (EAD) format. The EAD SGML files are then sent to the central team and indexed by the 'Cheshire II' search engine, which has been developed for use with EAD by a team at the University of Liverpool. Descriptions are usually 'live' on the Hub within a day or two of receipt. At the moment all the Hub data files are held centrally on a server in Manchester Computing at the University of Manchester. However, within the next six months a 'distributed' version of the Hub software will be made available. This will allow institutions (or 'spokes') to host their own Hub descriptions, while still allowing them to be searched through the main Archives Hub site.

WHAT ABOUT ARCHIVES HELD ELSEWHERE?

The Archives Hub is just one of a number of initiatives that are revolutionising access to information about archives in the UK. AIM25 (<http://www.aim25.ac.uk>) covers higher educa-

Your request was submitted and has matched the following subjects.
Click on the name to see the finding aid, or to list the finding aids if it occurs in more than one.

Subject	Relevance
national health service great britain	100%
medicine great britain	99%
health boards scotland	97%
mental health	91%
primary care medicine scotland	91%
national health insurance scotland	91%
hospitals administration	89%
orthodontology scotland	89%
nrl service	87%
national service great britain 20th century	87%
hospitals england northhamshire administration	86%
health services administration macedon northhamshire	86%
liverpool university faculty of medicine community health	86%
public health	86%
roman language study and teaching	86%
postal service employees labor union great britain	86%
social service	86%
child welfare	85%
health policy	85%
medical policy scotland	85%
public health records scotland	85%
public health laws scotland	85%
sanitation scotland e-shelburgh	85%
liverpool university faculty of medicine school of hygiene	85%

Results screen for a 'Subject finding' search on 'National Health Service'

tion and learned institutions in the London area, while SCAN (Scottish Archives Network: <http://www.scan.org.uk>) holds information about archives in repositories in Scotland. The largest programme is A2A (Access to Archives: <http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk>), which has converted a large number of complete finding aids for many repositories in England. These different 'strands' of the UK's archive network have come about as a result of different funding streams, but a key priority for all involved is to develop ways of bringing these sources of information together. The National Register of Archives (NRA) has been online since 1995 (<http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra/nra2.htm>), providing summary information about the location of UK archives. The NRA now provides links through to the fuller records held by the various network strands.

Technology, funding and sheer enthusiasm have opened up the nation's archives in ways that were scarcely dreamt of only a decade ago. Archivists have always known how fascinating their holdings were: it has now become much more easy to share that information with new audiences and to open up new avenues of research.