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Curating Care: Creativity, Women's Work, and the Carers UK Archive

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Curating Care: Creativity, Women's Work, and the Carers UK Archive

Cover Page Footnote

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Curating Care: Creativity, Women's Work, and the Carers UK Archive

In 1999 a “unique archive” was deposited at Greater Manchester County Record Office (GMCRO) in the United Kingdom. Donated by Sandra Leventon, a long-term carer and campaigner with the Association of Carers (now Carers UK),¹ an advertisement circulated by the GMCRO described the archive as giving “a picture of how carers in Great Britain campaigned to raise awareness about their needs and wants over the period 1960 to 1999.”² The advertisement gave a detailed summary of the archive and put forward a definition of a carer as “a person whose lifestyle is disrupted because of the need to assist a family member or friend who needs such help because of illness, disability or old age” and who works without pay. Researchers and “other interested parties” who wished to enquire about or access the archive were encouraged to contact the GMCRO or Sandra Leventon directly.³

In this article, we explore and critically analyze the archives of Carers UK and its predecessors for the first time in the organization's fifty-three-year history. The archives tell an important and often overlooked story about changing policies relating to care and the carers' rights movement in the UK. This movement is about fighting for rights and recognition for a growing number of people who provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail, or disabled family member, friend, or partner. By drawing attention to the typically low-income status of carers, the physical and mental demands of caring, and social isolation, the carers' rights movement clearly intersects with other activist campaigns for social justice, including feminist, disability, and worker's rights agendas. The Carers UK archive is important because it documents this history of legal battles and policy changes but also, through its commitment to retaining diverse forms of material from carers including letters, first person accounts, campaign documents, and photographs, insists upon the importance of valuing the personal experience of carers and recognizing their history and contribution to society more broadly. As Zanish-Belcher and Voss argue: “Women's archives have a greater meaning than the collections they house. Their very existence confers weight on the value of women's history, increases the demand for sources and offers the opportunity to promote and enhance the study of women's history.”⁴ The Carers UK archive, which is largely curated by women and focused on female experiences of care, places personal narratives alongside political documents; it brings domestic concerns into the public arena. It represents a particular moment in women's history in the UK and internationally, in which “the mentality of considering one's life and work important enough to be preserved for succeeding generations . . . exemplified a certain degree of liberation. Women's files refused to be banished to the domestic sphere anymore.”⁵

¹ Carers UK, as explained later in the article, is the product of two merged charities. For ease of reference, the merged organization is referred to throughout as “Carers UK” (including the devolved charities Carers Scotland, Carers Wales, Carers Northern Ireland, and Carers England).

² Vincent McKernan and Sandra Leventon, “Carers Find the in History” [*sic*] (Manchester: Greater Manchester Country Record Office, 1999).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Tanya Zanish-Belcher and Anke Voss, Introduction to *Perspectives on Women's Archives*, ed. Tanya Zanish-Belcher and Anke Voss (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013), 8.

⁵ Dagmar Wernitzig, “Memory Is Power: Rosa Manus, Rosika Schwimmer, and the Struggle about Establishing an International Women's Archive,” in *Rosa Manus (1881–1942): The International Life and Legacy of a Jewish Dutch Feminist*, ed. Myriam Everard and Francisca de Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 210.

We argue that the Carers UK archive constitutes a significant early case study of participatory research and the prioritization of neglected voices. Carers UK, previously known as the Carers National Association (1988–2001), is the product of two merged charities: the Association of Carers (1981–88) and the National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants (1982–88) (itself originally the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants, 1965–82). We analyze this previously unexplored archive as a valuable resource for social, political, and economic histories of non-institutional care, of everyday life in the UK from 1965 to the present day, and in particular of women’s everyday narratives of care work. The archive gives voice to work that is often undervalued and invisible: outside of institutional structures, unpaid, and carried out by marginalized groups. We also propose that the Carers UK archive presents a model of archiving as both a creative practice and an act of advocacy.

In a 2011 interview, Melanie Nind described participatory research “as a way of doing research largely for people who have been considered voiceless, or powerless, in research [...] it’s about trying to enable people to participate more, and thereby have some more power in the researcher-research relationship. So often it’s regarded as blurring the division between researcher and researched.”⁶ Sandra Leventon and the cofounders of the Carers UK archive represent early examples of precisely this kind of self-taught citizen archivist, and the Carers UK archive is an example of innovative participatory research and archiving at a grassroots level.

Leventon, one of the founders of the Carers UK archive, was both a carer and, in later life, a recipient of care. She cared for her elderly mother for eleven years and recorded her personal experiences in a range of creative forms, including life writing, short stories, engagement with local theatre groups, and contributions to television programs on care (many of which are retained in the archive). Leventon also worked as a campaigner and advocate for carers more widely: volunteering for Carers UK in its earlier form as the Association of Carers; serving on the Management Committee from 1984 to 1988; acting as an editor of *Caring* magazine from 1988 to 1999; and working as a self-trained archivist for the charity. During the 1980s and 1990s, much of the correspondence and material that formed the first half of the archive was stored in Sandra Leventon’s spare room, where she worked from home on her campaigning and writing alongside caring for her mother on a full-time basis. By late 1999, when the first section of the Carers UK archive was donated to the Greater Manchester County Record Office, Leventon was retired, and herself the recipient of care. Meanwhile, Carers UK (and its archive) had grown from its origins as a “shoe-box full of letters”⁷ into an established charity whose members were invited to speak at international conferences and contribute to the development of public policy on care. The charity received significant press attention, for example, when British prime minister Tony Blair and his wife Cherie Booth attended the celebrations for the charity’s rebranding as Carers UK in 2001. By 1999 the archive had shifted from a private, domestic environment to the public sphere: it was no longer housed in the home of a private citizen but was instead deposited in Manchester Central Library. It did, however, remain in Leventon’s home city of Manchester, despite the fact that the Carers UK headquarters was in London.

As an untrained archivist working from her home to preserve a striking array of materials and voices, Leventon collected a diverse range of first-person narratives of care. Leventon’s

⁶ Melanie Nind, *What Is Participatory Research?*, online video resource (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011).

⁷ Judith Oliver, “Director’s Report,” in *The Association of Carers Annual Report and Accounts, 1985–1986: “The First Five Years”* (London: Association of Carers, 1986), 4.

approach represents a participatory practice that, through its form, insists that carers and their histories should be heard, preserved, and cared about. Aline Gubrium et al. state that an essential principle in participatory research is that “the means are as important as the ends,” requiring full participation and collaboration between participants and researchers and the prioritization of lived experience.⁸ As a case study, the archive is important because it is a key example of early participatory research centered on social justice, built by carers for carers, that privileges creative writing and carers’ first-person narratives. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook describe twenty-first-century archives as wielding “power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups and societies.”⁹ Writing in 2013, Cook suggests that archives have shifted, in the twenty-first century, from being “a cultural and heritage resource underpinning the academic elite” to “a societal foundation for identity and justice.”¹⁰ From its inception in 1965, the Carers UK archive sought diverse and innovative strategies for furthering these aims, most notably in its strong association with and encouragement of creative writing as part of the expression of care work.

The Carers UK archive, which we track in this article from its inception as “words and memoranda”¹¹ delivered to members of Parliament (MPs) about the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants in 1965 to a digital resource in 2018, raises wider questions about the changing forms and challenges of preserving archives in a twenty-first-century context. It also provides an important example of a community-based citizen archive that is extremely varied in its form: materials include policy documents, minutes of meetings, short stories, newsletters, video diaries, poems, fiction, essays, newspaper articles, radio programs, artwork, and life writing. We argue that the Carers UK materials provide an important model for thinking through the interconnection between archiving and advocacy and for understanding archival work as an intersectional practice and a creative process; not just as a retrospective historical process of recording, but as a resource used to drive forward the direction of the organization.

The Carers UK Archive

The archive is comprised of forty-two boxes of diverse material, including: the minutes of the various committees and subgroups of Carers UK from the 1960s to 1999; letters on campaigns for carer support to and from members, linked charities, politicians, media representatives, and members of the public; magazines, newsletters, pamphlets, and books produced by Carers UK; extensive publications and government reports on care, in finished and draft stages (with staff from Carers UK providing advice on the development of white papers and policy documents); VHS recordings of television programs and debates on care; cassette tape recordings of radio interviews and programs on care; artwork on care; photographs from events throughout the history of the charity; extensive newspaper cuttings centered on care; and publicity campaigns and advertisements produced by Carers UK and its associated branches. The archive is catalogued in its entirety, and stored at Manchester

⁸ Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper, and Marty Otañez, Introduction to *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, ed. Aline Gubrium et al. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2015), 26–27 (15–40).

⁹ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 1–19.

¹⁰ Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Archival Science* 13, nos. 2–3 (2013): 95–120.

¹¹ Mary Webster, “Deputation to the Chancellor, 10th March 1964,” *National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants Newsletter* (April 1964).

Central Library in the UK, with some higher-quality recordings of television materials also held at the British Film Institute, London.

Cumulatively, the Carers UK archive outlines the history of care in the UK from the mid-twentieth century to the present day, prioritizing everyday narratives by carers and their attempts to improve the situation of carers and those for whom they care. By maintaining a body of material that is predominantly produced by people with extremely limited income (particularly in the years covered by the archive before legislation provided benefits or state pension allowances for carers), Carers UK and the Greater Manchester County Record Office have preserved and made available the voices of a historically marginalized and disadvantaged group. By prioritizing the narratives and needs of carers, this ongoing process of archiving actively addresses one of the key aims of Carers UK as a charity:

Carers UK is here to listen, to give you expert information and advice that's tailored to your situation, to champion your rights and support you in finding new ways to manage at home, at work, or wherever you are.¹²

This mission statement outlines Carers UK's commitment to advocacy; it also aligns with wider work on the significance of participatory research and first-person narrative. Melanie Nind positions participatory research as inherently concerned with the ethical prioritization of lived experience, focusing on participants rather than objects of study:

Participatory research [. . .] says you are a valued social actor. And what we have to do in our researching is enable you to be an active participant, for us to hear your voice, gain your perspectives, access your worldview. But more than that, to involve you in the various stages of the research process [. . .]—what's going to be researched, how, how we make sense of it, what we do with it at the end.¹³

Nind's description is representative of Carers UK's engagement with research throughout the history of the archive. In 1986, following extensive research by academic partners and sustained political campaigning by Carers UK, women were finally allowed the same access to the Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) as men. Sandra Leventon spoke of the "privilege" of being chairperson of the Association of Carers (later Carers UK) that year, and of the "thrill" of being able to tell women, "Yes, you are eligible."¹⁴ It is evident from the documentation in the archive around the ICA campaign that Leventon and her fellow carers were working closely with academics and researchers, and were themselves the subject of research as well as active campaigners. However, Leventon's summary of the Association of Carers' strategic use of this research, and wider discussions about voting rights, make it clear that carers' voices were the priority for the charity, and their members were far from passive objects for research. Significantly, in the same anniversary report Judith Oliver stated that "we are, and always will be, an association *of* carers, not *for* carers [. . .] whilst we greatly welcome anyone who supports our aims into associate membership, only carers may define the policies and activities."¹⁵ Such a statement is a provocative challenge to the mainstream neglect of carers and their voices. It also indicates a sustained commitment to ensuring the full

¹² Carers UK, "Why We're Here," accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.carersuk.org/about-us/why-we-re-here>.

¹³ Nind, *What Is Participatory Research?*

¹⁴ Sandra Leventon, "Chairperson's Report," in *Association of Carers Annual Report*, 3.

¹⁵ Oliver, "Director's Report," 4.

participation of carers in research and writing about them, and embodies the participatory disability studies slogan “nothing about us without us.”¹⁶

Writing about creating inclusive spaces for marginalized voices, Lae’l Hughes-Watkins suggests that many mainstream archives remain fundamentally conservative, particularly with regard to whose voices they preserve. Hughes-Watkins argues that this inequity has “created a systematic defect [. . .] that has led to the marginalization, erasure, and oppression of historically underrepresented communities,”¹⁷ and invokes Randall Jimerson’s call to archivists to “adopt a social accountability for the profession,” using archives to “promote accountability, open government, diversity, and social justice.”¹⁸ By preserving and maintaining the neglected voices of carers and recipients of care, those who support a friend or family member who is older, disabled, or seriously ill,¹⁹ Sandra Leventon, her fellow archivists, and the founding directors and chairwomen of Carers UK in its various incarnations all contributed to the establishment of an archive that challenged societal and—at the time—archival norms to create an early example of an archive that is primarily and self-consciously concerned with social justice. The commitment to recording a diversity of voices is articulated through the form of the archive itself, both in the range of genres represented, and in the variety of points of view preserved in the archive. Throughout, the work of care and curation are bound together as ethical imperatives.

“Women Are News”: Correspondence Campaigns, 1960–1970s

The Carers UK archive demonstrates that life writing and personal narratives of care were a priority from the earliest days of the charity, both in the narratives of the founders of the charity and those seeking help. In 1954 Rev. R. Mary Webster, a newly ordained minister, gave up her charge of Twyford Congregational Church to care for her elderly and ill parents. By the 1960s, alongside her care work, Webster was campaigning to found a charity to ensure greater support for the rights of women carers; and in 1965 the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants (NCSWD) was founded. In the early records of the NCSWD, the earliest incarnation of Carers UK, two key issues are at the forefront of the archival material. The first is the dedicated emphasis on women’s role in unpaid care work. The second focus is Webster’s framing of these injustices as the responsibility of the “national and local welfare administration,” rather than purely the remit of the church or religious or charitable bodies.²⁰

Webster positioned the focus of the proposed council on providing relief to single women carers as both filling an urgent need, and as a solution to a relatively short-term social problem. In 1966, following a funding application to the Carnegie Trust, the secretary of the Trust described Webster as follows:

¹⁶ James Charlton, *Nothing about Us without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, “Moving toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, no. 6 (2018), 2.

¹⁸ Randall Jimerson, “Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice,” *The American Archivist*, 70, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2007), 252. Quoted by Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, “Moving toward a Reparative Archive.”

¹⁹ Carers UK, “Why We’re Here.”

²⁰ R. Mary Webster, “The National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants Ltd.,” letter appealing for support for proposed charity, 1963, G/CA/1/9, box 4, Carers UK Archive, Manchester Central Library, UK.

Miss Webster is a Congregational Minister without a charge. She lectures to students at Stockwell Training College and ministers only on supply. The work of the Council takes up all her spare time and she despairs of ever being able to cope adequately with the increasing tide of correspondence from single women all over the country in need of help or just sympathy. Miss Webster is a short, plump, dynamic personality, grieved that the Council has not yet been recognised or encouraged by substantial financial support, but she is undismayed and driven by the plight of single women who have, or have had dependants, to keep the Council going and if possible to establish it on a surer foundation. As a student of demography she is convinced that the problem of the single woman with dependants will disappear within thirty years—when there are no more single women. She sees the Council as having a task that is very important and urgently in need of help but limited to three decades.²¹

The reference to the projected thirty-year life of the council stems from discussions about the number of unmarried women in the UK in the 1940s and 1950s who became the primary carers for their parents, other family members, neighbors, or friends. These single women, unlike married men and women, were unable to access specific forms of state support for carers. At the point at which the council was founded, unmarried women were specifically disqualified from claiming a “housekeeper allowance,” which was given to married persons who cared for an elderly sick person in the home to enable them to pay for domestic help while they carried out caring duties. Unmarried women had no right to continue to reside in council housing after the death of the person for whom they cared and with whom they lived, and there were no pension credits available for women who were obliged to give up their jobs to care for relatives or friends at home. In this environment Webster founded the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants, beginning with letter-writing campaigns to high-profile public figures, politicians, academics, and newspapers, and letters of support to carers across the UK. The archive is therefore characterized and shaped from the outset by dialogic material, in the form of exchanges of letters from the writing campaigns. Webster prioritized letter-writing and specific narratives of carers’ everyday, domestic concerns in forming the council’s aims, objectives, and strategic plans. In the Executive Committee minutes outlining the “Provisional Summary of Work for 1968,” the first campaign item listed is “home helps” and the provision of respite care, a direct response to the most frequent request in letters from carers to the charity. This focus on domestic work and enabling women with care responsibilities to continue to work in paid employment suggests the way in which the voices of the carers drove the policy of the organization.²² Within the same list of topics and action points were the provision of “general advice by correspondence or interview” for carers and the founding of a pen friends initiative, which was established and remained active until it was replaced with online message boards and forums in 2002.²³ From the beginning the importance of communication with like-minded supporters and the preservation of autobiographical accounts of care were at the core of the charity’s work.

²¹ Carnegie Trust, “Minutes of Meeting of the Community Services Sub-Committee Held in Comely Park House, Dunfermline” (December 7, 1966), Item No. 7, “National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants,” 157–58, G/CA, box 36, Carers UK Archive, Manchester Central Library, UK.

²² National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants, “Provisional Summary of Work for 1968,” *Minute Book 2: Executive Committee 1967–1974* (London: National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants, 1968), 14.

²³ *Ibid.*

Extracts from letters from individual carers were included (with permission) in the first advertisement for the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants under the heading “Please Help A New Charity.” The earliest published item in the archive, the advertisement takes the form of a pamphlet comprised of a front cover, contact information on the back sheet, and two pages of content. Over half of the printed text is dedicated to autobiographical extracts from carers; each quotation is followed by a resolution from the council as to their intended response. One unnamed woman writes that “only those who have been through this particular hell alone know what a toll it takes both physically and mentally (to say nothing about financially)” —which prompts the pledge that “Our Council exists to provide a centre of help and advice for these families.”²⁴ Similarly, another contributor recounts the adjustment period after the death of the person for whom they cared, where “one just cannot pick up the threads where normal life left off years ago, and a frightening and perplexing period of rehabilitation has to be lived through”; the charity responds by stating that they exist “to help to re-establish life in a new pattern for those who have been bereaved.”²⁵ The charity’s manifesto, like the archive that it created, is driven by a commitment not only to recording the voices of carers, but to privileging them and using them to set the agenda for campaigns and the development of the charity. The letters that are preserved are part of an ongoing conversation in which the words of carers themselves become a means of both driving forward changes in national policy and articulating the identity of the charity itself.

Roxane Arnold, the director of the NCSWD during the 1970s, following Webster’s death, continued this work on the interconnected aims of campaigning and curating a body of material written by carers through letters and first-person narratives. Letters and life narratives, many of which are preserved in the archive, were key to the work of the council during this period. Arnold, for example, launched a national letter-writing campaign from the members of the NCSWD (organized, in turn, via the regular newsletters), on behalf of Dorothy Pointon. Pointon, who had cared for her disabled mother for forty-five years, had received a notice of eviction from Sevenoaks Council after her mother’s death, as the two-bedroom council house where they had lived had been registered in her mother’s name. Had Pointon been caring for a husband, she would have had the right to remain in the house indefinitely as a widow; as a daughter and carer, she had four weeks’ notice before eviction. The details of Pointon’s case were outlined in successive NCSWD newsletters and, in an appeal titled “A Companion Needs Your Help Now,” Arnold encouraged members to write letters to their MPs and Sevenoaks Council protesting their policy.²⁶ These letters were framed in terms of a campaign for social justice, and in particular as challenges to the discrimination shown to Pointon as a single woman.

Letter-writing campaigns have been a staple tactic in twentieth-century activism (and earlier), from workers’ rights to intercessions on behalf of political prisoners.²⁷ What is distinctive about the Carers UK approach is how many copies of campaign letters, sent from carers via the charity offices, are retained in the archive, as a bank of material that could be—and was—

²⁴ National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants, “Please Help A New Charity,” advertisement, 1965, 2.

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants, “Minutes 19th July 1972,” in *Minute Book 2*. See also newsletters, December 1971 to December 1972.

²⁷ Paul Michel Taillon, “‘All Men Are Entitled to Justice by the Government’: Black Workers, Citizenship, Letter Writing, and the World War I State,” *Journal of Social History* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 88–111; Vanessa Hearman, “Letter-Writing and Transnational Activism on Behalf of Indonesian Political Prisoners: Gatot Lestario and His Legacy,” *Critical Asian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2016): 145–67.

used as evidence, providing first-person narratives for future campaigns. This prioritization of life writing as both a campaign strategy and a participatory research practice is also reflected in the development of the first book-length publication from the National Council for the Single Woman and Her Dependants, *Feminine Singular: Triumphs and Tribulations of the Single Woman. An Anthology* (1974). This anthology was funded in a strikingly modern way: it used a kick-starter funding model, with a letter-based campaign procuring indemnities of 1,000 pounds against possible losses.²⁸ *Feminine Singular* was edited by Olive Chandler and Roxane Arnold and published by Femina Books (a publisher with an explicitly feminist focus). Dr. Nancy Seear, also a founding member of the NCSWD, and elected to the House of Lords for her campaigning work on care, provides the introduction and an unapologetically provocative opening:

Whether we like it or not, women are news. Yet another book requires an explanation.

This anthology does not speak for the entire female sex. It is limited to the minority of women who remain single. Always a small proportion of the total whole, the single woman has existed in all eras, in all societies and in all classes. In a few cases, she is revered or even glamorized. More often, she is used or scorned or pitied. To many people, her singleness is more important than her womanhood, and far more important than the simple fact that she is a person, like all others, regardless of sex or marital status. It is from the isolated fact of singleness that the stereotype has been born.

If this book does nothing else, it shatters this stereotype. The single woman is portrayed here in a variety of types and with the whole human range of weaknesses and strengths. And this variety, it is shown, existed in antiquity as it exists today.²⁹

Feminine Singular acts, in some senses, as a microcosm of the archive itself: it brings together a diverse range of materials from writers from different classes, periods, and locations. The anthology also spans a variety of genres: parliamentary speeches and campaign manifestos; translations from classical treatises on marriage and women; extracts from popular novels, plays, and poems discussing women, care, and education; and histories of women's lives from the medieval to the modern periods. Throughout, *Feminine Singular* is insistent in challenging the idea of the "single" woman in a political sense: it is a call to collective action. The form of the book, with its "many voices," is part of a campaign to draw attention to the fact that these socially isolated women are everywhere, quietly carrying out labor that is economically and emotionally necessary to the basic running of society. The act of anthologizing is a process of archiving, editing, cataloguing, and politicizing documents about private experiences by bringing them together in dialogue with each other and into the public domain.

In the introduction to the anthology, Seear provides an explicit critique of the women's movement, class, and voicelessness. She writes:

²⁸ National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants, "Minutes 17th September 1973," *Minute Book* 2.

²⁹ Nancy Seear, Introduction to *Feminine Singular: Triumphs and Tribulations of the Single Woman; An Anthology*, ed. Olive Chandler and Roxane Arnold (London: Femina Books, 1974), ix–x.

Until very recently, it has been a common criticism of the women's movement that it is overwhelmingly middle-class, championed by professional women but lacking popular support. At first sight this book might provide such critics with additional ammunition. But it is almost tautologous to say that the better educated and the better off can make themselves heard more easily than the under-educated and the hard-up. In the past, and still to some extent today, those whose need has been greatest could not commit their case to paper and so do not speak through these pages. But because the voice of the single woman, in this anthology and elsewhere, is frequently a middle-class voice, this in no way means that the middle-class woman speaks for herself alone. The problems cut across classes as they cut across centuries and cultures. This is well illustrated by the National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants, the organisation which has sponsored this book, and which has attracted into membership women of all types of educational and social backgrounds, drawn together by shared needs.³⁰

Seear engages directly with criticisms of the middle-class dominance of women's activism in the twentieth century but as a whole, the Carers UK archive is unusual in giving precedence to working-class women's voices (like Sandra Leventon and Judith Oliver) alongside establishment (male) voices. As is clear from *Feminine Singular*, the archivists were highly attuned to questions about class, work, and who has the right to create and curate an archive. Nevertheless, middle-class voices dominate the early sections of the archive, particularly those relating to the 1960s and 1970s, before the National Council for Carers and Their Elderly Dependants (NCCED) merged with the Association of Carers. Elizabeth Reid, a long-term carer and one of the chief providers of grassroots support for carers in Scotland in the late twentieth century, commented on the NCCED and Association of Carers as having "socio-economic backgrounds [that] were poles apart"—differences that caused some tensions when the two merged in 1988.³¹

Feminine Singular begins with Seear's introduction, which acknowledges and actively engages with these challenges, and invites readers to consider class, privilege, and questions of who has the right to speak, to write, and to create an archive. The anthology itself draws on a variety of forms to critique literary and cultural stereotypes of carers and single women. In addition to extracts from novels, plays, and poems, the book also features quotations from "The Schools Inquiry Commission's Report, 1968," *Punch* magazine's caricatures of academia (and specifically Oxford's exclusion of women from the position of senior wrangler), a wide range of letters (public and private), extracts from suffragist speeches, newspaper criticisms of recipients of care, and extracts from speeches to Parliament. The anthology closes with part of a speech by William Hamling, MP, proposing an amendment to the 1971 Finance Bill regarding the position of women with care responsibilities:

They have a right to work. They have a right to be independent. They have a right, for example, to pursue their careers. I can think of many school teachers, nurses and social workers, who have to care for elderly parents. These professional people should be able to follow their jobs. If we make it easier for them to do so, the taxpayer will benefit, because their incomes will provide revenue to the Treasury.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Elizabeth Reid, "Getting 'In Touch' with Carers," in *Scotland's Carers* (Edinburgh: Carers National Association Scotland, April 1998), 5.

[. . .]

Moreover, it is an unjust discrimination to accord tax relief where there are children, who might no longer be physically dependant, and to deny it where dependants are old or infirm. This is a claim in equity, as well as a claim on our sympathies and humanities.

[. . .]

I often think that it is because they are women that their needs are not met.³²

As with much of *Feminine Singular*, this extract demonstrates a focus on work, women's rights, and social injustice. It frames the case in economic terms: in terms of a right to financial independence for the individual and the contribution that carers can make as paid workers in other professions, though Hamling does not explicitly acknowledge the huge value that care as a form of unpaid labor has for the economy. This argument is overlaid with an appeal to a sense of shared human vulnerability, as a trigger for "sympathies and humanities," but also a specific, growing awareness of gender inequality.

The final contribution to the volume is also extracted from a speech retained in the Carers UK archive. Another political extract, from Baroness Summerskill ("A Woman's World, 1967: Ruby Mary Webster, 1923–1969") it draws on material from the folder of obituaries for founder Mary Webster. Summerskill writes:

This is a women's book and I will end it by describing two more women's questions on which I have campaigned and on which much still needs to be done.

[. . .]

I strolled along the Committee Room corridors one day in November to a meeting convened by Rev. Mary Webster, a Congregational Minister, to launch an organization called the "National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants." [. . .] With the bad weather outside the House and the male preponderance inside, I reflected that Miss Webster would be lucky if twenty turned up to the meeting . . . I lost no time, and on arrival found the Grand Committee Room full, with women standing three deep at the back. Miss Webster, a short, rosy-cheeked, middle-aged woman with twinkling eyes and the unmistakable energy of the good organizer, flanked by a few Members of Parliament [. . .] gave a brisk, witty, informative address. She said that the problem concerns the last unmarried daughter living at home, caring for elderly and handicapped relatives. Often she has to give up job, friends and pension to stay at home. After years of strain when she is no longer well enough or even qualified to take another job, her dependant dies and she is alone.

[. . .]

As I looked at this packed gathering of middle aged single women I was struck by the general shabbiness undoubtedly stemming from a life of self-denial. [. . .] These selfless women are often the butt of cruel music hall jokes; they are called "old maids" because while women outnumber men, marriage cannot be the lot of everybody; the presumption is that sexual attraction is the most important criterion by which the human personality should be judged.³³

³² William Hamling, "Putting an Amendment at the Committee Stage of the 1971 Finance Bill, May 26, 1971," in Chandler and Arnold, *Feminine Singular*, 187–88.

³³ Baroness Summerskill, "A Woman's World, 1967: Ruby Mary Webster, 1923–1969," in Chandler and Arnold, *Feminine Singular*, 106–8 (106–7).

Like Hambling, Summerskill acknowledges the financial hardship associated with the life of carers; she documents her immediate impression of the “the general shabbiness” of the assembled women, but also recognizes the long-term implications of being underqualified or forced to give up a pension. She also highlights the ways in which debates about specific policies in relation to carers raise broader, fundamental questions about shared human experience, empathy, and competing conceptions of value that are distinctly gendered: “the criterion by which the human personality should be judged.” For Summerskill, cultural representations such as the “jokes in the music hall” reflect but also perpetuate cycles of discrimination; superficial caricatures and stereotypes feed into material experiences of inequality in everyday life. The choice to close the anthology with these accounts of the launch of the NCSWD highlights the importance of the founding of the charity, and acts as a call to advocacy for the reader. In these ways, *Feminine Singular* historicizes the political fight against the discrimination faced by single women. Like the archive itself, the anthology maintains a strong focus on the work involved in conducting that fight: the speechmaking, the letter-writing, and the importance of turning up for meetings. It also underlines the need for individual agency to build a sense of collective power in cultural conditions that belittle, judge, and humiliate women as carers.

Cumulatively, then, the Carers UK archive charts the sustained work of championing carers’ rights, while also acknowledging and demonstrating the significance and influence of cultural productions in shaping public perception of care work and carers, and the importance of preserving such material. Arnold and Chandler’s decision to draw repeatedly on extracts from within the nascent Carers UK archive in compiling the volume is also a political statement about the power of self-representation in minority narratives. In 2019, the ethical imperative for archivists to retain and preserve the narratives of people excluded from the cultural and political mainstream is uncontroversial, although as Lae’l Hughes-Watkins argues in “Moving Toward a Reparative Archive,” many mainstream archives still remain “steeped in a tradition that makes decisions about the existence, preservation, and availability of archives, documents, and records in our society on the basis of the distribution of wealth and power.”³⁴ Summerskill’s account, however, recalls an event that took place in 1965, and planning, fundraising, and editing for creating an anthology drawing on the organization’s archive began in 1972. So both *Feminine Singular* and the origins of the Carers UK archive are roughly contemporaneous with Howard Zinn’s critique of the mainstream archival practices of the 1970s. During his keynote address at the 1970 meeting of the Society of American Archivists Zinn discussed the social role of archives and called upon archivists and scholars to “take the trouble to compile a whole new world of documentary material, about the lives, desires, needs, of ordinary people,” so that “the population know what the government is doing, and that the condition, the grievances, the will of the underclasses become a force in the nation.”³⁵ In contrast to mainstream archival practices of the time, and prefiguring Zinn’s proposals on the social justice function of archives, the foundation of the Carers UK archives in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates a pattern of participatory research before any such shift in the field, and a self-conscious use of its holdings as an active, dynamic resource in ongoing campaigns. Throughout, it foregrounds carers’ perspectives—and particularly those of working-class women.

³⁴ Lae’l Hughes-Watkins, “Moving toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5 (2018): 2.

³⁵ Howard Zinn, “Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest,” *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 14–26 (25).

“Professional and Caring”: Self-Representation and Image, 1980–2000s

By the turn of the millennium, the Carers UK archive played a central role in the charity’s self-representation and advertising of itself to the wider world. Rather than being a privately retained body of material for posterity, the archive became an overt statement of confidence in the longevity of the charity and the importance of carers’ everyday narratives, and a resource that was used by the charity in an increasingly active way. Where in the 1960s and 1970s first-person narratives of care had been carefully retained in the charity’s archive, the 1980s and 1990s holdings illustrate a drive toward historicization, evident both in relation to various publications by Carers UK and in the continued preservation of first-person narratives. This development is demonstrated in the production of a range of short histories of Carers UK (and its composite organizations), and in the use of historical archival materials to justify directions for future campaigns. The February 1985 newsletter, on the twenty-first anniversary of the council (now the National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants), explicitly historicizes the charity, looking “back to 1965” to “see a very different picture,” and publishing photographs and extracts from the archive as part of a timeline of the previous twenty-one years.

This self-conscious historicization is accompanied by an increased focus on professionalization, both in terms of the positioning of care as work, and in the presentation and form of the publications of the council. One member wrote “that she was glad our newsletter was becoming ‘much more professional while retaining a caring attitude,’” and new director Jill Pitkeathley concluded that “‘professional **and** caring’ is a pretty good motto for an organisation such as ours.”³⁶ Alongside this drive toward higher production values and changing image, there remained a strong commitment to preserving and valuing autobiographies and creative writing by carers. The NCCED newsletter in December 1986, for example, explicitly invited first-person narratives of care from members, and Pitkeathley wrote that the council was “overwhelmed by the response, both by the number of letters and by the heart-rending distress in them.”³⁷ Pitkeathley went on to state that “some of the letters are twenty pages long. Almost all tell of the courage and endurance of carers in appallingly difficult circumstances, and every one ends with a phrase of gratitude that **someone** is interested in their stories.”³⁸ This resonates with Nancy Mairs’s comments on patterns in late twentieth-century life-writing about disability and illness:

Despite general similarities, the situations revealed in these works were far from uniform. Many entailed loss, for example, but this might be of a parent, child, spouse, limb, or mind. Ages varied widely, although, not surprisingly, socioeconomic level did not. The narrator might be afflicted herself or might be caring for another. I use the generic feminine here, but [. . .] more women than men write, and write more intimately, about physical and emotional distress.

Some writers stated explicit purposes for their undertakings, but most did not; in fact, they often seemed unaware that they were producing a “book” and not merely a log or daybook. Nevertheless, they were obviously people who relied heavily on language. [. . .] Some underlying motives might be to anesthetize pain, memorialize the beloved, rage against fate or the system (these two are

³⁶ Jill Pitkeathley, “Director’s Introduction,” *National Council for Carers and their Elderly Dependants Newsletter* (June 1986): 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

often conflated), [. . .] or merely hold hands with an imagined reader in distress.³⁹

The stories preserved in the Carers UK archive are important examples of a wider cultural trend toward reading and writing first-person narratives of care, illness, and disability that took hold more widely later in the twentieth century. For both Mairs and Pitkeathley, the dialogic form of these texts, the implied presence of a reader or a listener, is a defining and highly significant feature of this genre. It illustrates that Carers UK's prioritization of neglected voices through the archive is important because diverse voices are preserved, but also because they enable a form of dialogue for individuals who are isolated. Throughout, the Carers UK archive demonstrates the fundamental importance of a public acknowledgment of and a response to individual carers' narratives—from the informal 1960s and 1970s pen pal initiatives, to the professionally produced and developed Carers UK online forums in the 2000s, and the creative writing competitions and social media campaigns of the 2010s.

The millennial sections of the archive demonstrate a focus on the retention of a wider body of creative work, and the creative possibilities of new digital forms. In addition to letters and autobiographical accounts of care, there is evidence of strategic engagement with digital media more broadly (film, television, blogs, and online forums), and an ongoing commitment to preserving and representing the stories of carers in as many different forms as possible. A significant portion of the VHS and cassette tapes retained in the Carers UK archive stem from the Association of Carers' early engagement with television and radio. The NCSWD and NCCED aired appeals on both television and radio, but the Association of Carers made short programs dedicated entirely to their work and carers' rights, typically prioritizing the narratives of carers and recipients of care and including interviews with Sandra Leventon, among others. In part, this shift reflects the growing dominance of television as a communication medium, but it is also telling that the Association of Carers retained copies of these programs in the archive, as part of wider narratives about care, whereas the NCSWD/NCCED seldom retained copies, although the times and dates that the appeals were due to air are reported in committee minutes. It is only after the merger of the Association of Carers and the NCCED and Sandra Leventon's appointment as publicity editor that there was a concerted effort to engage with popular visual culture and media in the archival holdings. Given that Leventon contributed to a wide range of television and radio programs about care in the 1980s and 1990s, it seems likely that this engagement with a broader range of media followed Leventon's editorial role within Carers UK.⁴⁰

“It changed my life”: Digitization, Online Communities, and the Carers UK Archive in the Twenty-First Century

A greater focus on visual media is also strongly visible in the digital sections of the Carers UK archives in the twenty-first century—including an increased engagement with photography, both in Carers UK magazines and newsletters and in the organization's first websites. The challenges associated with archiving digital material are discussed in the archival holdings as early as 1994. In an article entitled “Information On-Line,” one annual report to members detailed how “in order to provide a more comprehensive service to carers

³⁹ Nancy Mairs, “Foreword,” in *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life-Writing*, by G. Thomas Couser (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), i–xiv (xi).

⁴⁰ *A Certain Age* (London: BBC Education, 1989), featuring Sandra Leventon and Annie Leventon; *Brass Tacks: Who Cares for the Carers?* (London: BBC Production, 1987), featuring Sandra Leventon; *Caring on the Cheap* (London: Channel 4, 1985), featuring Sandra Leventon.

and professionals who contact us daily, we made the decision to computerise our library. We have over 1200 books and reports on the system which will enable us to produce booklists from the library and retrieve titles more quickly.”⁴¹ Even in this early reference to digitization, responding to the needs and narratives of individual carers remains a clear focus for the charity and archivists. Similarly, the material about the launch of the first version of Carers UK’s website (<http://www.carersonline.org.uk>), and the subsequent development of their current site (<https://www.carersuk.org/>), illustrates a drive to ensure full access for a readership who are potentially both isolated and digitally illiterate. In the early 2000s the Carers UK magazine, *Caring*, ran a series of first-person articles about carers using the Internet and carers forums, with accompanying images, how-to training sessions, and safety advice.⁴² Significantly, the first wave of these articles included an explicit statement about the possibilities of digital forms of communication for advocacy and campaigning, alongside discussion of the potential to build employability skills by increasing digital literacy while caring. In an article in *Caring*, Penny Standing recounts how learning to use a computer and the Internet “changed my life.”⁴³ Steading writes that she “found a new voice and enhanced confidence,” and, using her computer, she “wrote to Social Services, SCOPE, The Secretary of State for Health and even the Prime Minister” as part of a campaign for quality provision and support for day care and social centers for young adults with complex disabilities.⁴⁴ The article is coauthored (though Standing is listed on the byline); direct quotations from Standing’s account are interspersed with paraphrased material, presumably provided by the editors of *Caring* magazine. Standing’s coauthored narrative links back to the letter-writing campaigns preserved earlier in the archive but also suggests the possibility for new ways of reporting and recording the experiences of carers and using their words directly as part of the charity’s advocacy work in the twenty-first century.

This drive to engage with the potential of digital media in innovative but collaborative ways is also evident in the online sections of the archive. In the present day, the creative campaigning and advocacy work of Carers UK and its archive are frequently digital. For example, two of the key creative outputs of Carers UK in the last decade are the annual creative writing and photography competitions, and the connected publications. The creative writing competition, which began in 2013, appeals for carers to submit short stories or poems about their experiences of care and responses to those experiences. These submissions are judged by a panel of carers, staff at Carers UK, and professional writers. The top-rated entries are then published; the prize-winning entries form part of the online archive at <http://www.carersuk.org.uk>, and they and the “highly commended” entries are published in an annual anthology of short stories, poetry, and life writing centered on care. Wendy Orr, whose poem “Callipered” was highly commended in the 2015 competition, wrote that “it’s a great support for carers to have a competition reflecting so many perspectives”⁴⁵—an

⁴¹ Carers National Association, “Information On-Line,” in *CNA Annual Report 1994–1995: Working for a Fair Deal for Carers* (London: Carers National Association, 1995), 5.

⁴² Michelle Minniss, “We Have the Technology,” *Caring Magazine*, September–October 2000, 23; June Mills, “Back to Work,” *ibid.*; Barbara MacArthur, “Filling a Gap,” *ibid.*; Penny Standing, “It Changed My Life,” *ibid.*; Peter Findlay, “Going Online,” *Caring Magazine*, May–June 2002, 14.

⁴³ Standing, “It Changed My Life,” 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Wendy Orr, “About the Creative Writing Competition,” Carers UK, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.carersuk.org/how-you-can-help/creative-writing/about-competition>. See also Wendy Orr, “Callipered,” in *No One Should Have to Care Alone: An Anthology of Poems and Stories* (London: Carers UK, 2015), 2:43.

observation that echoes earlier carers' praise for *Feminine Singular*.⁴⁶ In 1975 carers wrote to celebrate the fact that "our local public library stocks [*Feminine Singular*]⁴⁷—as I hope all members' libraries do—and [. . .] I am delighted to say that it is on constant loan!"⁴⁷ In 2019, the deliberate choice to publish key poems and short stories online reflects a concerted effort by Carers UK to widen the potential readership of these creative depictions of care. Furthermore, the creative writing competition is advertised by respected organizations with international reach, such as the Poetry Society, the Reading Agency, the Poetry Library, the Poetry School, Poetry London, and the Society of Authors. This is part of an initiative on the part of Carers UK, dating back to *Feminine Singular*, in which narratives of care by carers are recognized and endorsed by professional bodies and made available to wider audiences. The connection between creative writing and advocacy is also demonstrated in the archival practices used to record information about the competition. During Carers Week in 2018 (an institution started by Carers UK in 1970, but now widely adopted and acknowledged across the UK),⁴⁸ Carers UK created two digital archives of the 2017 competition. In addition to the online repository of winning entries,⁴⁹ Carers UK staff created a second, interactive digital archive to accompany the anthology, drawing on performance as well as written poetry and prose. On June 16, 2018, Carers UK ran a "Carers' Week Poem-a-thon" in London: fifty people reading and performing creative work on care, for 6.5 minutes each, to represent the 6.5 million carers in the UK at that time.⁵⁰ Readers and performers ranged from carers featured in the 2017 anthology to staff members of Carers UK and the Reading Agency, and celebrity supporters. The event was live-tweeted from the @CarersUK Twitter account. The ensuing thread both opened the event to a wider audience, again with carers' voices and creative work at the forefront, and created additional strands for Carers UK's digital archive and advocacy work. The poem-a-thon allowed a range of voices to be heard, and created a space online for debate and discussion around care and creativity. In these ways, the charity is using technology to extend its commitment to treating the archive as a record of living, embodied experience, and demonstrating an ongoing focus on participatory, dialogic communication and performance alongside more static texts.

Conclusion

The early stages of the Carers UK archive and, to a lesser extent, the contemporary publications from Carers UK, both record and seek to challenge a systematic pattern of the marginalization of care and carers within UK society. The archivists' determination to record and publish otherwise neglected carers' voices, as a form of creative activism, is clear throughout. The Carers UK archive, as a relatively unexplored body of work on care, by carers, is an important resource for scholars of the history of care, medicine, and women's work, but the archive also holds broader significance for understanding archiving and advocacy in the twenty-first century. The variety of material held in the Carers UK archive is

⁴⁶ Olive Chandler, "On *Feminine Singular*," *National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants Newsletter* (April 1975): 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Originally "National Dependants Week" in 1970; renamed "Carers Week" in 1995. See National Council for the Single Woman and her Dependants, "Minutes Thurs 16th July 1970: National Dependants Week—12th to 18th July, 1970," in *Minute Book 2*, 138.

⁴⁹ "Creative Writing and Photography Competition 2018," Carers UK, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.carersuk.org/how-you-can-help/creative-writing/2018-competition>.

⁵⁰ Carers UK, "50 people are reading poems for 6.5 minutes each over 6.5 hours as part of our #CarersWeek Poem-a-thon today highlighting the 6.5 million unpaid #carers in the UK! We'll be live tweeting on #Poem-a-thon. Justgiving.com/campaigns," Twitter, @CarersUK, 9:55am GMT, June 16, 2018.

a consequence of the origins of the charity and the founders' interest in creative practices, including the development of its digital archiving. It also illustrates a sustained commitment to diversity of voices, and the deliberate use of the archive as a tool in Carers UK's self-conscious historicization of care and the charity's development. The archive is both forward- and backward-looking. In 2005, the editors of *Caring* magazine asked readers to email and write to them with ideas of what it would (or should) mean to be a carer in 2020. Rosey Foster recounts carers' responses:

The year is 2020. Anybody taking on a caring role for the first time feels that right from the start they will get the right to backup, including a regular break and a decent income. Stories in newspapers and on TV no longer misuse the term "carer" to describe a professional, as so often happens today. When a person says they are a carer, everyone will know what they mean and understand the value of what they do. Every GP, nurse and consultant have been trained to ask if a patient is a carer or has someone who looks after them and can tell carers how to get help and support services.

[. . .]

We recently asked our members what their vision was for the year 2020 and these were just a few of the things they said. In other words, nothing less than a revolution in how carers are recognised by society. So is it an unrealistic pipedream? We don't think so. Undoubtedly, this will require a massive change in society's understanding of caring, but Carers UK is up for this challenge.⁵¹

Foster's summary of her readers' responses is of twofold significance: firstly, it makes it clear that carers' voices remain at the forefront of the work of Carers UK, in their everyday communications as well as in highly publicized campaigns, advocacy work, and writing competitions. Alongside this is a sustained and abiding commitment to compiling carers' perceptions of what it means to be a carer and how carers can themselves be active in shaping cultural and social definitions.

The Carers UK archive is a dynamic and early illustration of the role of participatory research. It is particularly striking to note, given the participatory origins of the archive, that Manchester Central Library, where the physical archive is held, has in the last few years started a popular program to encourage public engagement with its holdings and the history of the city, including training a team of approximately fifty volunteer citizen archivists. They are successfully developing participatory research strategies fifty years after Carers UK started their archive using similarly inclusive practices.

⁵¹ Rosey Foster, "Chair's Welcome," *Caring Magazine*, Spring 2005, 2.

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